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Bringing Interactional Identities into the Study of Classroom Interaction in ELT Education[1]

Trayendo Identidades Interactivas al Estudio de la Interacción en el Aula en la Educación de ELT

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Abstract

This paper of a literature review presents the construct of interactional identities as part of the study of classroom interaction in English language teaching education. The paper defines interactional identities in the field of English language teaching. By listing studies on the matter, the relationship of this construct with classroom interaction is presented from global and local perspectives. Three reasons for studying interactional identities in the ELT field are discussed in the final part of the paper whose conclusions invite to incorporate this construct into the study of what teachers are and do for language learning and use in classroom interaction in English language teaching education.

Key words: interactional identities; classroom interaction; English language teaching; language teaching education; language research.

Resumen

Este artículo de revisión teórica presenta el concepto de las identidades interaccionales como parte del estudio sobre la interacción del salón de clase en la educación de la enseñanza del inglés. El escrito define las identidades interaccionales en el campo de la enseñanza del inglés. Con una lista de estudios en la materia, la relación de este concepto con la interacción del salón de clase se presenta desde las perspectivas global y local. Tres razones para estudiar las identidades interaccionales en el campo de la enseñanza del inglés se discuten al final del escrito, cuyas conclusiones invitan a incorporar este concepto en el estudio de lo que los profesores son y hacen para el aprendizaje y uso del inglés en la interacción del salón de clase.

Palabras clave: identidades interaccionales; interacción del salón de clase; enseñanza del inglés; educación de la enseñanza del lenguaje; investigación del lenguaje.

Resumo

Este artigo de revisão teórica apresenta o conceito das identidades interacionais como parte do estudo sobre a interação da sala de aula na educação do ensino de inglês. O escrito define as identidades interacionais na área do ensino de inglês. Com uma lista de estudos na matéria, a relação deste conceito com a interação da sala de aula se apresenta desde as perspectivas global e local. Três razões para estudar as identidades interacionais na área do ensino de inglês se discutem no final do escrito, cujas conclusões convidam a incorporar este conceito no estudo do que os professores são e fazem para a aprendizagem e uso do inglês na interação da sala de aula.

Palavras chave: identidades interacionais; interação da sala de aula; ensino do inglês; educação do ensino da linguagem; pesquisa da linguagem.

Introduction

This paper introduces the construct of interactional identities as part of the study of classroom interaction in the context of English language teaching (ELT) education[3]. In broader terms, interactional identities in ELT refer to those multiple interactional roles that teachers and students may take on and enact in distinctive manners in close relation to the way interaction occurs in classroom. Studying this issue becomes relevant in the inquiries about how classroom interaction happens in ELT education, the scenario where its participants are expected to apply and learn how to be interactants[4] in this language, both for the classroom (teaching, learning, or assessing it) and for everyday talk (using it communicatively and socially).

This theoretical review is composed of three parts. The first presents the construct of interactional identities in close relationship with ELT education. The second part addresses a literature review on the study of interactional identities within classroom interaction in ELT education: a global and local review is presented. The third part explains the reasons to incorporate interactional identities into the study of classroom interaction in this context.

In line with Heritage (2005), Seedhouse (2004), and Walsh (2011, 2013), the study of classroom interaction should have origin in the particularities of the context of interaction, of which the conversational situation, its participants, content, setting, and organization are part. This article then presents its participants' interactional identities in ELT education from the interactional organization of talk in this context. Based on this, the purpose of this article is not to present a review of the construction of teachers' identities in interaction (for the elaboration of other levels of teacher identities see for example Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Clarke, 2008; Tracy & Robles, 2013; Varghese et al., 2005; Barkhuizen, 2017) but to present a review of the way teachers' multiple interactional roles have been studied in the context of ELT education. Although the construction of other levels of teacher identity (as gender, ethnic, professional, national, or self) can also take place in classroom interaction, the focus of this paper is predominantly on presenting a review of interactional identities as part of the study of classroom interaction in ELT education.

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[3] In Colombia, ELT education refer to the undergraduate and professional development programs that prepare people to be teachers of English as a foreign language (González-Moncada, 2007; 2010).

[4] This concept of interactant refers to an individual who interacts in conversational exchanges (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 2; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 587; Cashman, 2005, p. 303; Hua, Seedhouse, Wei, & Cook, 2007, p. 11; Tracy & Robles, 2013, p. 42). Being an interactant implies being competent to interact with the others in a determined context.

By presenting this theoretical review of interactional identities in the mentioned field, the intention is not either to show a categorization of these type of interactional roles (as possibly shown by Brown, 2007; Johnson, 1995; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Ur, 1996, Watkins, 2005; Wright, 1991), but to bring the construct of interactional identities to understand what teachers are and do as interactants into the study of classroom interaction in the ELT field.

The Construct of Interactional Identities in Classroom Interaction

In social approaches of interaction, interactional identities refer to those specific interactional roles that people assume in a communicative context in regard to other specific people and the manner in which the interaction occurs (Holt-Reynolds, 2000; Sharplin, 2011; Tracy & Robles, 2013; Zimmerman, 1998). This type of identities are seen either from the individual's sense of self as an interactant (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Hall, Johnson, Juzwik, Wortham, & Mosley, 2010; Johnstone, 1996; Morgan, 2004; Tracy & Robles, 2013) or from the roles that individuals are supposed to take in different types of interactions such as telephone conversations, doctor's appointments, family conversations, and trial courts (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Holt-Reynolds, 2000; Zimmerman, 1998).

In the ELT field, interactional identities are related to the interactional roles that teachers and students assume in classroom interaction according to pedagogical or instructional purposes, or mediated through socio-cultural traditions and dominant discourses about what language teachers and students should do within classroom interaction (see further elaboration on this below). This discourse of interactional roles with pedagogical purposes and from socio-cultural traditions has helped configure ELT education to a great extent. According to Benwell and Stokoe (2002), Clarke (2008), Rymes (2009), and Walsh (2011), English language teachers may have subconsciously adopted those established (interactional) roles in the social context of classroom interaction.

Classroom interaction is the set of communicative events that teachers and students co-construct to promote the learning and use of languages and contents, conversation engagement, and knowledge (Ellis, 1994; Johnson, 1995; Kurhila, 2006; Lucero & Rouse, 2017; Rymes 2009; Walsh, 2011). In the exchanges for this promotion, classroom interaction is composed of varied interaction patterns, types of turns, social events, and membership categorizations (Cazden, 2001; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1988; 2007; Searle, Kiefer, & Bierwish, 1980; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Pursuant to Walsh (2011, p. 2), everything that occurs in the classroom requires the use of language.

It is through the use of language in interaction that people gain access to all related knowledge and alternatively construct processes of identification of themselves and the others (Long 1996; Walsh, 2011).

The relationship between interactional identities and ELT education

English language classrooms are social contexts; all its participants jointly bring and construct discourse, communication, culture, social and academic relationships, and individual characteristics as members of this setting (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Breen, 2001; Clarke, 2008; Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002, Rymes, 2009; Walsh, 2011). In ELT education, English is the means of instruction and practicum; the occurring interaction in this context opens spaces for learning and practicing how to teach and assess English (Lucero & Rouse, 2017). Preservice teachers are to observe and learn not only how to teach and assess English but also how to interact with other learners or speakers in this language, all of this from the activities developed in each course. It is in those practices and activities, as Chappell (2014) and Walsh (2013) indicate, that English language teachers and students (the future teachers) then learn to assume their roles as interactants in the language classroom.

Consequently, language teachers are direct participants in co-constructing this context in frequent interaction with students. While doing so, teachers constantly take on or are assigned roles in accordance with the manner in which the interaction of the classroom flows. Those roles in interaction are the constituents of their interactional identities, enacted and oriented to the accomplishments of classroom interaction (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Tracy & Robles, 2013; Zimmerman, 1998).

In agreement with Kumpulainen and Wray (2002), since the beginning, English language teachers should manage teaching, learning, and classroom interaction by following established principles, procedures, and roles. These all usually come from language teaching methods, approaches, and curricula (Chappell, 2014; Graves, 2009; Richards, 2001; Ur, 1996). Therefore, ELT curriculum principles, components, and procedures largely mediate teachers' interactional practices and roles in the classroom. The realization of all these interactional practices and roles, in unison, help construct the interactional organization of the ELT classroom (Seedhouse, 2004; Walsh, 2013). In this organization, teachers may assume, be assigned, and enact varied multi-faceted interactional roles (Clarke, 2008; Heritage, 2005; Rymes, 2009). Hence, the merging of ELT curricula, teaching practices, and the organization of classroom interaction help construct teachers' interactional identities, too. Rymes (2009) sees English teaching classroom composed of three dimensions. 1) The social context contains all the social factors, and their origins, outside the current interaction and their effects in what its

participants say. 2) The interactional context is organized by the patterns of talk and the appropriacy of language-use choices. 3) The individual agency refers to the influence of patterns and language use in the construction of teachers and students' identities.

Apart from pedagogical and instructional purposes, teaching practices have foundation on teachers' teaching experiences (Clarke & Pittaway, 2014; Goodyear, 1991; Richards, 2011). These experiences encompass different types of knowledge such as teaching knowledge, disciplinary and pedagogical content knowledge, classroom knowledge, and others as experiential, context, empirical and critical knowledge (see Castañeda-Londoño, 2019, for a complete elaboration of these knowledges in the Colombian ELT field). Each type of knowledge operates through explicit representations in teaching practices, such as communicating the subject matter, facilitating learning, and doing teaching in context. These representations require the use of language in interaction. Thus, it is within the use of language in interaction that teachers share these knowledges, and by doing so, they also enact different interactional roles.

All these forms of the realizations of teachers' interactional identities occur in the happenstance of context-situated ELT classroom interaction. Gee (1996), Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Raymond and Heritage (2006), and Barkhuizen (2017), suggest that (language) teacher identities should be seen constituted and negotiated through language and discourse in (social) contexts. Consequently, being the classroom a social context in nature (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Clarke, 2008; Rymes, 2009), English language teachers' interactional identities need to be studied in the occurring interaction of context-situated ELT classrooms (Hall et al., 2010; Morgan, 2004). The study of the continuous realizations of teachers' interactional roles in the ongoing co-construction of situated classroom interaction can contribute to the understanding of the manner in which ELT education actually happens in context.

The Study of Interactional Identities within Classroom Interaction in ELT Education

In classroom interaction, its participants jointly bring and construct discourse, communication, social and academic relationships, knowledges, culture, and individual characteristics in different manners (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Breen, 2001; Clarke, 2008; Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002; Rymes, 2009; Walsh, 2011). While doing so, they take on, enact, and challenge a great variety of oscillated roles in accordance with the manners in which the interaction flows. Those roles in interaction are the constituents of interactional identities (Tracy & Robles, 2013; Zimmerman, 1998). Those roles are unlikely to be static or single, they are consequently multiple, movable, over-lapping, multifaceted, context-sensitive, and never completed (see Zimmerman,

1998; Wenger, 1998; Thornborrow, 1999; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Appiah, 2007, Tracy & Robles, 2013).

Global perspectives. Studies on interactional identities in the English language classroom around the world examine how interactional identities happen in the sequential organization of talk; this means, what roles teachers and students assume during classroom interactions (see for example Duff, 2002; Martinez, Durán, & Hikida, 2017; Rampton & Charalambous, 2016; Rymes & Anderson, 2004; Thomas, 2013; Vetter & Schieble, 2015). These authors generally present teacher roles in interaction as learning assistants, classroom participants, counselors, fellow-conversationalist, and classroom speakers.

Teacher roles in interaction are also specified in English language teaching methods, approaches, or curricula (see for example Brown, 2007; Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002; Oxford et al., 1998; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). English language teachers can for instance have the interactional roles of facilitators (interaction encouragement), orchestrators (organization of interaction), evaluators (of conversation and use of language), conversationalist models, topic givers, and participation promoters, among others (for more roles, see Benson, 2013; Brown, 2007; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2008; Oxford et al., 1998; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Ur, 1996; Watkins, 2005; Wright, 1991).

Apart from English language teaching methods, approaches, or curricula, interactional identities in the ELT field are also mediated through socio-cultural traditions and dominant discourses about what language teachers and students should do within classroom interaction (see an elaboration of these traditions and discourses in Barkhuizen, 2017; and Varghese et al., 2005). For instance, other teachers' roles in classroom interaction under these perspectives may be as presenters, knowledge sharers, and models in developing, enriching, or even coaching students' target language use, thinking, cultural sensitiveness, professional learning, and systems of ideas and beliefs (for more of these roles, see Du, Yu, & Li, 2014; Holt-Reynolds, 2000; Izadinia, 2012; O'Dwyer & Atli, 2015; Sharplin, 2011).

Cohen (1985) and Olshtain and Kupfergerg (1998) explain that English language teachers are the main actors in the classroom. They have to find pedagogical and interactional manners of accounting for students' language and communication needs. Carbone (2012), Johnson and Johnson (2008), Pritchard (2009), Smiley and Antón (2012), and Yoon and Kyeung-Kim (2012) state that language teachers should align interaction according to the roles that teaching approaches indicate for them.

Interactional identities in ELT education are finally presented by following interaction models and patterns. For instance, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Searle, Kiefer and Bierwish (1980), Cazden (2001), Sacks (1992), and Schegloff (1988; 2006; 2007) give evidence that interaction in language classrooms is organized in particular

patterns, types of turns, social events, and membership categorizations. In the construction of interaction in the language classroom, each participant puts together their utterances turn-by-turn, exchanges turns at speaking, signals the beginning and end of exchanges, and goes through different periods of time in their exchanges. Hence, language teachers' actions as interactants are identified into the sequence and patterns of classroom interaction.

As outlined thus far, teachers' interactional roles are generally established from ideal manners of how they should interact for the purpose of language teaching and learning. This situation has possibly exerted pressure on English language teachers to interact usually in the manner in which each role indicates. In my point of view, this perspective seems to normalize the (interactional) roles that teachers should adopt in classroom interaction. Therefore, the idea that there are pre-established manners to interact in the language classroom may entail that interactional identities are likely more operative than context-situated and that language teaching and learning interactional actions are more procedural than environmental. Little has been explored about how those interactional roles actually happen, operate, or are enacted in varied contexts, throughout time, and from teachers' own understanding and practices of their interactions with students in the classroom.

Local perspectives. Research on interactional identities in ELT education from a classroom-interaction perspective has had slight interest in Colombia. Local studies with an interactional approach mainly concentrate on teachers' interactional actions at different educational levels. At school level, for example, research indicates that English language teachers do and control most of classroom talk in which they explain information, give directions, and ask questions by following patterned combinations (Balcárcel-Zambrano, 2003; Bohórquez-Suárez, Gómez-Sará, & Medina-Mosquera, 2011; Fajardo, 2008; González-Humanez & Arias, 2009; Herazo-Rivera, 2010; Herazo-Rivera & Sagre-Barboza, 2016; Muñoz & Mora, 2006; Rosado-Mendinueta, 2012). At the university level, the study of the interactional practices normally point to the way students increase oral language participation and involvement in language-building activities, all by means of more language elaborations and variations in interaction (Montenegro, 2012; Serna-Dimas & Ruíz-Castellanos, 2014). In this context, English language teachers then seem to practice a more managerial approach in classroom interaction although patterned interactional sequences also dominate language teaching practices (Lucero, 2011, 2012, 2015; Viáfara, 2011).

Few studies have observed English language teachers' interaction in Colombian ELT undergraduate programs specifically. These studies show that teachers tend to develop classroom interaction by following instructional sequences (Álvarez, 2008), drills to develop language skills (Castrillón-Ramírez, 2010), a variety of communication strategies (Castro-Garcés & López-Olivera, 2013), and interactional arrangements

(Lucero & Rouse, 2017). Lucero and Scalante (2018) also found that the interactions produced in this context are probably the result of teachers' interactional styles.

Findings in the cited studies reveal that Colombian ELT education seems to be composed of interactional sequences that teachers mainly organize while students little by little learn how to deal with them. It is under these conditions that teachers constantly enact their interactional identities as they develop classroom interaction to promote English language learning and use. In my point of view, this perspective cultivates the belief that classroom interaction may be susceptible of being scripted or pre-planned. If this is the case, scripting how to interact in the classroom may restrict and regulate the emergence of interactional dynamics or roles in it.

Certainly, the findings in the cited studies have contributed to start understanding teachers' interactional roles in Colombian ELT classroom interaction. However, more contextual factors and knowledge should be accounted for when using them as research foundations if Colombian classroom interaction analysts want to develop novel understandings about the happenstance of local ELT classroom interaction and its interactants. Without saying that these should not be considered, more critical stances are necessary since Colombian ELT academic community may end up perpetuating discourses that becloud own contextual situations, creations, knowledge, and discoveries.[5]

Reasons for studying Interactional Identities in the ELT Field

The study of English language teachers' interactional identities in classroom interaction becomes of relevance in ELT education because of three reasons. Firstly, it is in this context where teachers teach, share, and experience English language knowledge and use, and where preservice teachers learn how to interact for the language classroom and the outside world (Johnson, 1995; Cazden, 2001; Rymes, 2009; Walsh, 2011, Lucero, 2015). To know more about how all this happens in context, studies should also focus on both teachers and students' realization of multiple selves as interactants in the wide variety of interactional practices and experiences in the classroom.

[5] See for example the discussion that González-Moncada (2007, 2010), Usma-Wilches (2009), or Castañeda-Londoño (2018, 2019) raise on varied aspects of Colombian policy and research about ELT education. In unison, they explain how mainstream discourses in these areas may have dimmed our own knowledge and academic needs on ELT.

As interactional identities are not only roles with pre-established characteristics and responsibilities that teachers need to carry out, as a second reason, studies should also concentrate on teachers' interactional identities in which analyses involve what they are, do, and become as English language interactants in ELT education. Listening to their own understandings and reasons of seeing themselves being, doing, and becoming interactants in classroom interaction can help extend knowledge about their own perspectives of what it is to be a language teacher in context.

These insights may then contribute, as a third reason, to reveal that the conceptualization of interactional roles is rather a matter of identity work (starting as being interactants) than a matter of doing pre-established actions indicated in language curricula. Studying this may help understand English language teachers' interactional identities from the contextualized interactional happenings of classrooms. In turn, it may help create awareness in English language teachers of the manners in which and the reasons why they interact in specific ways in their classes, meaning, the organization they (co-) construct of classroom interaction regarding the type of teacher-interactants they assume to be.

Conclusions

The construct of interactional identities becomes a novel alternative for the study of what teachers are and do for language learning and use in classroom interaction in ELT education. As these type of identities are related to the roles that teachers assume in classroom interaction, these should be studied in their realization within this context. Keeping observing teachers' interactional identities (or roles) under a perspective of pre-established actions and a configured organization of classroom interaction may nullify, disapprove, or annihilate situated and divergent classroom interactional practices and identities. This is also a claim to contest the manner in which ELT methods, approaches, curricula, and socio-cultural traditions have been constructing English language teachers' interactional actions; undoubtedly, a practice that perpetuates hegemonic language teaching and learning discourses.

Ample context-situated research on this matter is necessary. It can help elucidate how English language teachers -and students- are, do, and become interactants in classroom interaction. As everything that these participants do in the classroom happens through language in interaction, and interaction is a socio-cultural practice, studies on the matter may also help determine how ELT education happens in context, and how teachers teach the target language and students progressively learn it in the classroom. According to literature on this matter, it is through the fluidity of classroom interaction that ELT occurs and its participants construct and enact multiple interactional identities. Equally, it is through the construction or enactment

of multiple interactional identities that numerous realizations of ELT education and classroom interaction can happen too.

This paper of a literature review may open the door to an understanding of English language teachers, and students from the angle of classroom interaction. Teachers and students are regularly constructed also from all the meaningful experiences that they live inside the English language classroom. Despite the insights presented in the listed studies, doing research on their interactional roles should not only concentrate on the analysis of how teaching methodologies are put into practice or how teaching and learning outcomes are reached. In order to understand more largely what English language teachers and students are in Colombia, studies should also perceive other different dimensions of classroom interaction, such as interactional roles and practices.

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