

## **Emily Is an Egg: An Example of a Narrative Analysis Approach to Identifying the Antecedents of Critical Language Teacher Cognition**

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**Priscila Leal**

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, USA

<p.leal@hawaii.edu>

### **Abstract**

This article presents a theoretically grounded methodological approach to investigate the interplay between language teacher cognition and critical language teacher identity development. To answer the question as to what social, cultural, historical, and political aspects lead teachers to position themselves as language teachers for social justice, positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997) is used to identify the antecedents of a critical language teacher’s cognition in discourses vis-a-vis their development of critical consciousness. Positioning analysis can help us better understand critical language teacher cognition, their processes of becoming critical language teachers, and their development of critical language teacher identity and social positionings because it comprises not only the analysis of the content of a narrative, but also the interaction, as well as the social, cultural, political, and economic context in which such a narrative is constructed. To account for the long-term aspects of critical language teacher cognition, the analysis focuses on the narratives from the period before formal teacher training and how teachers position themselves and others within the story world, the storytelling world, and amidst dominant discourses. Followed by its report, I address a key pedagogical implication for the development of critical language teachers.

*Keywords:* narrative, narrative analysis, identity analysis, positioning, positioning analysis, critical pedagogy, critical language teacher, critical cognition

*“I inhabited this weird liminal space. I was called (and probably even felt myself to be) an “egg”—white on the outside, yellow on the inside.” (Emily)*

Notwithstanding the important contributions of language teacher cognition research to our understanding of teachers’ pedagogical choices, critical language teacher cognition is still underdeveloped (Crookes, 2015). To expand the scope of this field and our knowledge of the reciprocal relationship between cognition and instructional practice, this article opens a methodological door to a crucial question of how to investigate the interplay between language teacher cognition and the development of critical language teacher identity. This study further

identifies a theoretically grounded methodological approach researchers can use to advance this important matter.

Critical language teachers, or social justice language teachers, are those who have (at least some level of) *conscientização*—the ability to perceive unjust social power structures and act to change them (Freire, 1970). They recognize their social positionings and how their social positionings influence how they see the world (e.g., society and education) and participate in it. A critical language teacher is one whose critical view of society and education is informed by a moral or political perspective. Accordingly, if critical language teachers’ cognition—i.e., sets of beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge as well as attitudes, emotions, and identities (Borg, 2012)—is informed by a moral or political perspective, then, to echo Crookes (2015), “Where did they get these critical language teacher cognitions?” (p. 492).

In this paper, I propose a narrative analysis approach to identifying the antecedents of critical language teacher cognitions with a focus on their development of *conscientização* and the social, cultural, historical, and political aspects that lead them to position themselves as critical language teachers. I start with a discussion of this key concept which is *conscientização*. To answer the question above, the data in this article include the autobiographical narrative of a critical language teacher, Emily, as she made sense of her experiences as a student, her “personal values, and broader life experiences and reflections” (Crookes, 2015, p. 486). This narrative, which is constructed in an interview, focuses on the period before her formal teacher training to account for the long-term aspect of critical language teachers’ cognition. Subsequently, I briefly discuss how the field of applied linguistics has used autobiographical narratives in studies of language teacher cognition.

I then argue for positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997) as an analytical approach that can help us better understand critical language teacher cognition, their processes of becoming critical language teachers, and their development of a critical language teacher identity and social positionings. A positioning analysis comprises not only the analysis of the content of a narrative, but also the contexts of the interview setting and interaction as well as the social, cultural, political, and economic context in which such a narrative is constructed. Followed by the report on the data analysis and findings, I close by addressing a key pedagogical implication for the development of critical language teachers.

## **Conscientização, Narrative, and Positioning**

### **Cognition and Conscientização**

As several articles in this special issue have pointed out, language teacher cognition refers to aspects of language teacher beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge (Borg, 2003). More recently, scholarship on teacher cognition has included other important aspects of teachers’ mental lives such as attitudes, emotions, and identities (Borg, 2012).[1] Often when investigated these aspects are disconnected from the broader social, cultural, political, and economic context in which teachers exist. However, one aspect of teachers’ mental lives that explicitly connects cognition to the broader social, cultural, political, and economic context is *conscientização*.

*Conscientização* is a process individuals experience as they increase their ability to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions” and take action “against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 35). The Brazilian Portuguese word *conscientização* comes from the Latin root *con* (“with”) + *scientia* (“knowledge”) + *actiō* (the process of doing/making).

From this etymological perspective, it could be said that *conscientização* is the process of doing with knowledge. The word has been translated into English as *conscientization*, *consciousness raising*, and *critical consciousness* (Cruz, 2013). While *conscientization* is a neologism, *consciousness raising* was a concept and practice already in use by the Women's Liberation Movement and other feminist-activist groups in the US in the late 1960s. *Critical consciousness*, when used in a Freirean sense and related to liberatory pedagogy, has been the English term most used.[2] However, there is a challenge in using this term. While the Portuguese suffix *-ação* relates to *process* (literally, *action*), the English translation loses this aspect of action or process. To restore its full meaning in English, the word *development* is often attached to its translation, as in the *development* of critical consciousness.

Cornish (2014), a community psychologist scholar who has published extensively on the role of grassroots mobilization in improving public health using Freire's concept of *conscientização* to examine power relations, argues that the term *development* invokes ideas of developmental stage theories and provides an attractive shorthand for *conscientização* and its complexity. Developmental stage theories conceptualize development from a deterministic perspective in which all individuals must move through a step-by-step process to reach a certain (often more "advanced" or "developed") stage. Although Freire's early writings reflect this perspective, ten years later he remarked that he did not intend for it to be "a progression through a finite series of steps with a fixed set of attitudes and behaviors to be achieved" (Roberts, 2000, p. 145). Rather, he intended *conscientização* to be an ever-developing process in which there are no hard delineations between stages, "no rigidly defined frontiers between the historical moments which produce qualitative change in [individuals'] awareness" (Freire, 1988, p. 65). An individual may have developed *conscientização* regarding issues of gender while at the same time still being ignorant of other social justice issues (i.e., race, class, religion). It is for these reasons that I use the term *development* (for lack of a better word) to mean the *unfolding of*, the *coming to know*, or the *building of* critical consciousness.

In addition, an emphasis on stages can be susceptible to an oversimplification of the process of *conscientização* (Berger, 1974) and overemphasizing it as a measurable and operationalized concept (Roberts, 1996). There have been many attempts to test, explore, measure, and extend Freire's concept of *conscientização*. Smith (1976), the earliest to operationalize it, proposed *conscientização* to have three different aspects: *naming*, *reflecting*, and *acting*. *Naming* refers to one's ability to identify the social, political, and economic contradictions in their contexts, *reflecting* relates to one's ability to cogitate on the causes of such contradictions, and *acting* corresponds to one's intention and action to change these contradictions and unjust social power structures. These three aspects albeit under different terms (awareness, reflection, and action, respectively) continue to be used today and are the starting points for many studies of *conscientização* (e.g., Diemer et al., 2014; Watts et al., 2011).

This emphasis and oversimplification can lead to the erroneous assumption that these three aspects have causal relationships and that they lead to upward movement across stages. For example, it has been suggested that if one is aware of social injustices, they will reflect on it and, as they engage in this process of reflection, they will inevitably feel compelled to act and will make changes to reflect a more socially just society. However, being aware of discrimination against others does not necessarily lead one to question it, to reflect if and how their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior maintain or perpetuate discrimination, nor to enact changes to the larger, socioeconomic power structures. Teacher education programs that make this

assumption—awareness leads to reflection which leads to action—tend to offer coursework with the goal of raising awareness of students, particularly those who are part of dominant groups, about social injustices and expect these students to leave the program as teachers and advocates of social change. Studies have shown that these stand-alone courses do little to change pre-service teachers' perceptions, let alone action for social change.

However, when coursework is combined with self-reflective practices, it increases its chances of moving teachers toward critical cognition because it may help teachers make sense of and attribute significance to certain experiences, motivate them to evaluate their current practices, envision alternatives, and decide whether and how they will address social issues in the classroom (Hodson, 1999). According to Gorski and Dalton (2020) in a review of reflection assignments from social justice teacher education courses in the US, for self-reflective practices to achieve these goals, however, they must (a) be structured and purposeful; (b) go beyond superficial notions of multiculturalism; (c) provoke “deep reflection about power and oppression, especially around forms of injustice associated with their privileged identities” (p. 366); (d) push teachers “to examine their preparedness to be agents of change for educational justice” (p. 365); (e) encourage teachers “to examine their participation in, and role in eliminating, injustice” (p. 365); and, (f) drive teachers “to connect school justice concerns to bigger societal justice concerns” (p. 365).

### **Autobiographical Narrative in Language Teacher Cognition Research**

Self-reflection has been one of the main objects in the study of teacher cognition. Because of its potential in helping pre-service teachers make sense of their experiences, self-reflective practices in teacher education programs have historically taken the shape of narratives (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2013, Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Savvidou, 2010). Narrative research began to develop in psychology as Polkinghorne (1988) and other psychologists (e.g., Bruner, 1986) took the narrative turn. The fundamental philosophical assumption behind narrative research is that the act of narrating has the power to “Transform a mere succession of actions and events into a coherent whole in which these happenings gain meaning as contributors to a common purpose... [and bring] an order and meaningfulness that was not necessarily apparent in the event as it happened” (Polkinghorne, 1997, pp. 13- 15). In other words, the act of narrating has the potential to help us make sense of experiences and organize how these experiences are understood.

In teacher cognition research, narratives have become one of the primary means by which researchers have examined and come to understand teachers' development (e.g., Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Savvidou, 2010). Barkhuizen (2013) argues that it is through narratives that teachers “make sense of an experience” (p. 4). In language teacher cognition research, while most studies have focused on pre-service language teachers' experience, a few have focused on in-service language teachers. If we add the qualifier *critical*, far fewer studies have focused on in-service critical language teachers (see Leal & Crookes, 2018; Vandrick, 2009, 2013). To date, only a handful of reports have used in-service language teachers' narratives in the investigation of critical language teacher development. Vandrick (2009), in her academic autobiography, examined the connections between her childhood and her career as a feminist, ESL educator. Drawing from her experiences as a “missionary kid,” she shines a light on how the childhoods, identities, and personal and social contexts of teachers influence their work. Thus, she encourages scholars to view teachers “as ‘whole persons’ who are shaped by, and whose scholarship and pedagogy

are shaped by, their various identities” (Vandrick, 2013, p. 37). More recently, Leal and Crookes (2018) examined Jackson’s narratives to understand their development as critical language teachers. As an in-service queer language teacher, not only were Jackson’s identities intrinsically connected to their social justice-oriented pedagogy, but they used their identity as a pedagogical resource to confront dominant ideologies.

When working with narratives as the object of study, applied linguists have cautioned against an analysis that amounts to an “uncritical reliance on what is said... and lack of insight as to why certain things are said in certain ways” (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 322). When we tell stories, we do so in relation to several aspects including how we present ourselves and others, the spatiotemporal setting in which the story is being told, and the wider dominant discourses that operate in society. (I return to the topic of discourses in the next section.) It is for these reasons that scholars have encouraged researchers to employ a systematic analytical approach that accounts for both the broader ideological and historical conditions in which the narratives are constructed (i.e., macro context) as well as the local setting and interaction in which the narrative is constructed (i.e., micro context, e.g., Barkhuizen, 2011; Menard-Warwick, 2011; Pavlenko, 2007). Next, I present one such approach and its underlying theories.

### **Positionality and Positioning Analysis**

Positionality refers to “the recognition that where you stand in relation to others in society shapes what you can see and understand about the world” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 30). Because critical language teachers recognize their social positionality and how it affects how they see the world and participate in it, a methodological framework with conceptual groundings that include both what stories teachers tell as well as the relational aspects (where, when, why, how) in which these are told is desirable. Positioning analysis, which is informed by positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), is perhaps one of the most developed analytical approaches to account for all these relational aspects. In the next paragraphs, I briefly review the conceptual framework of positioning theory, the relationship between positioning theory and discourse, and how positioning analysis makes discourses visible in interaction.

Positioning theory is a social constructionist approach that originated in the field of social psychology in the 1980s (Davies & Harré, 1990). It proposes that “people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others” (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010, p. 2)—i.e., people use language to invoke a particular type of person or identity. This act of locating, or positioning, is the process by which “an individual emerges through... social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate” (Davies & Haré, 2001, p. 263). It determines how interlocutors are positioned or position themselves and establishes what they can say or do (Van Langenhove, 2017). The meaning of what is said depends on the positioning of the interlocutors.[3] One’s positioning can be assigned by others in interaction or assumed by the self within the interactive spaces. While the former ascribes a deterministic force by which an individual is positioned, the latter attributes a more agentic aspect to the individual. It is this agentic aspect of positioning that I would like to consider next.

When we tell stories, we “construct a sense of self, of the other, and the world, with us, the speakers or narrators, as agents who are agentially (and responsibly) involved in this construction process” (Bamberg, 2014, p. 133). These constructions or stories are informed by concepts and beliefs and when these are shared widely and recognizable in our social contexts

(or in our interactive setting), they gain “the status of normative or dominant storylines (also called culturally available narratives (Antaki, 1994), canonical narratives (Bruner, 1987, 1991), dominant discourses (Gergen, 1995; Gee, 1992, both cited in Talbot, Bibace, Bokhour, & Bamberg, 1996), and master narratives (Mishler, 1995), amongst other” (Jones, 2002, p. 125).

Informed by positioning theory, positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997) is perhaps one of the most developed analytical approaches to account for not only what stories teachers tell but also the relational aspects (where, when, why, how) in which these are told. Positioning analysis was proposed by Bamberg (1997) over 25 years ago and has since been applied and operationalized by numerous applied linguists (e.g., Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina & King, 2011; Kayi-Aydar, 2021; Leal, 2016; Miller, 2011; Watson, 2007). To make both macro and micro levels visible, positioning analysis is operationalized into three, different positioning levels (see table 1; Bamberg, 1997). Level 1, the content, examines how the narrator (as a character) positions themselves in relation to other characters in the **story world** as well as how the narrator as character positions other characters in relation to one another. Level 2 explores the micro level and how the narrator positions themselves in relation to their interlocutors in the **story-telling world** (i.e., the interactive context, research setting). Level 3 addresses the macro level and how the narrator positions a sense of self/identity in relation to the broader social, cultural, economic, historical, and political **discourses** of which the narrative is part.

While the three levels are interrelated, by analyzing each positioning level separately, the researcher can make visible the linguistic, communicative, and interactional ways (Deppermann, 2013) in which the narrator positions themselves and others on the level of the story (level 1), how the narrator position themselves in relation to their interlocutors on the level of interaction (level 2), and how the narrator position themselves amidst dominant discourses or master narratives (level 3; Bamberg, 1997; see Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

In this study, I argue for the use of positioning analysis as a methodological approach to identifying the long-term aspects of critical language teacher cognition. I use this approach to shed light on how Emily (pseudonym) makes sense of her experiences through the content of her narratives (level 1), how she co-constructs her identity as a critical language teacher in the interactional level of the interview (level 2), and how she reflects on, reproduces, and rejects dominant ideologies (level 3).

**Table 1. Positioning levels based on Bamberg (1997)**

Positioning Levels		Guiding Questions	
Level 1	The story world	Narrator's positioning on the level of the story.	How does the narrator as a character position themselves in relation to other characters?  How does the narrator as character position other characters in relation to one another?
Level 2	The story-telling world	Narrator's positioning on the level of the interactive event.	How does the narrator position themselves in relation to their interlocutors?
Level 3	Societal Discourses and master narratives	Narrator's positioning on the level of the broader social, cultural, economic, historical, and political contexts.	How does the narrator position a sense of self/identity in relation to dominant ideologies?

## Research Context

The data analyzed and results presented here are part of a larger multi-year, multinational, mixed methods study exploring how English language teachers develop conscientização (see Leal, 2018). The quantitative method included the creation of a new instrument (TADLES; see Leal, 2021) to examine the nature of in-service English language teachers' conscientização and to guide the purposeful sampling of participants for the qualitative methods. The qualitative data explored the factors and experiences through which English language teachers come to understand their potential role in fostering social justice. Participants of the qualitative methods included a representative sample of 29 English language teachers of diverse backgrounds, genders, races, classes, first languages, years of experience, and student populations.

Emily was intentionally selected to participate in the qualitative method based on her TADLES score and consent to being contacted. In technical terms, she was selected as part of a unique sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and maximum variation sampling (Seidman, 2006). Emily's narratives, like all 210 narratives in the study, were analyzed following Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's (2008) five-step procedure. In the first step, which directly relates to positioning level 1, I examined the participants' positionings in relation to the other characters within the story world. The second, third, and fourth steps refer to the storytelling world or the interactive event of narrating (positioning level 2). These steps were guided by a close analysis of (a) the interactive accomplishment of narrating; (b) how the participant is positioned and positions themselves within the research setting (i.e., what is asked, how it is answered, what can be concluded); and (c) how the interaction between participant and researcher is managed. The fifth and final step examined how each participant constructed themselves and, in doing so, established a sense of self amidst local as well as broader societal discourses (positioning level 3).

The interview guide as a self-reflective practice was designed to include the components as listed by Gorski and Dalton (2020). In addition, it elicited narratives that sought to capture Emily's perspective of the experiences, processes, and emotions she accredited to have led her to position herself as a critical language teacher. The narrative that gets analyzed below was part of our initial correspondence and is constructed in writing, via e-mail. To account for the long-term aspect of critical language teachers' cognition, the narrative presented here focuses on one of her experiences prior to formal teacher training.

### **Data and Analysis: Emily is an Egg**

Emily's narrative reflects many of those told by other participants who were also members of dominant groups. Emily self-identified as a White cisgender woman and, at the time of the interview, she was in her mid-40s and had been a high school English language teacher for about five years. When asked about what led her to choose the language teaching profession, she described having had "a pretty long and circuitous career path" and attributed her decision to a set of incidents she experienced during her primary and secondary schooling years. It is her story of one of these incidents that make up the data for this article.

My initial communication and interview [4] with Emily occurred via e-mail followed by a telephone interview six months later (the latter is not part of the data presented here). In the message, I described the study as examining "how English language teachers become educators with a critical perspective or a social justice orientation (aka critical pedagogy)" and wrote that I was "interested in [her] narratives about what people, experiences, and emotions played a role in shaping [her] as an English Language Teacher." I asked Emily to tell me about herself and if she had any memories that would represent how she grew up or stories that would represent what her family was like. I also asked her about her decision to become an English language teacher and if she could recall any specific moments or memories that had influenced it. This was Emily's reply:

*I was lucky to grow up in a very affluent suburb of Los Angeles [County, California]. My parents were married the whole time I was growing up, in contrast to many of my friends. (In fact, their marriage ended only with my mother's death and my father has never remarried.) I was a rather bookish child who generally preferred reading to interacting with most other humans...*

*The town where I grew up underwent significant demographic change during my formative years. When I started kindergarten in [the early 1980s], my class was all white except for two Asian students, who were both Japanese. When I graduated from high school in [the early 1990s], my school district was approximately half white and half Asian (of those, mostly affluent immigrant Taiwanese). You may be aware of the "language panic" in Monterey Park, California during the mid-80s; town legislation was passed to require signage in English rather than in all Chinese characters. That nativist negative reaction was emblematic of my own hometown.*

*The influx of immigrants put me in a bit of a bind. My parents definitely valued knowledge and education. These cultural values lined up with those of my Taiwanese immigrant friends, who pushed them to bring home all As [the highest grade] on their report cards. In my family too, an A-minus was an occasion to explain myself. So I naturally became friends with the Asian kids who inhabited my honors classes.*



*However, as you can imagine, a sense of racial polarization quickly arose. The white kids were supposed to be outgoing jocks or cheerleaders. That was definitely not me. I became regarded as a “race traitor” and got called a “rice lover,” among other nasty slurs. I inhabited this weird liminal space. I was called (and probably even felt myself to be) an “egg” - white on the outside, yellow on the inside.*

*My friendship and identification with my immigrant peers and rejection by “my kind” reinforced in my mind who was a more agreeable population, and let me tell you it wasn't the white kids. I remember watching my friends struggle with acculturation and I remember at some young age - 6 or 7? - resolving to do whatever I could to help foreigners adjust to living in the U.S. This probably played a role in my decision to start teaching English professionally.*

In the following sections, I report on my use of positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997) as a narrative analysis approach to identifying the antecedents of critical language teacher cognition. It is noteworthy that I do not present the positioning levels sequentially. This is because I believe that, to appreciate Emily's positioning work in the story world (positioning level 1), it is helpful to first understand the positionings taking place in the storytelling world, the interactional level (positioning level 2). And so, I begin the next section with the analysis of the storytelling world (positioning level 2) followed by the analysis of the story world (positioning level 1), and finally of the broader societal discourses that she invokes (positioning level 3).

### **Positioning Level 2: How Emily Positions Herself (and is Positioned) Within the Storytelling World**

Since positioning analysis level 2 seeks to answer the question of how the narrative gets told in the interaction, it makes sense to begin by examining first how both Emily and I co-construct the narrative above. Emily is aware of the nature of the questions and, by participating in this study and consenting to be interviewed, she positions herself as a critical language teacher. (While the data presented here does not explicitly represent how strongly committed Emily is to social justice teaching, additional data from the study illustrate her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that characterize her as a critical language teacher.) Evidently, she tells stories because I ask her questions about the antecedents of her becoming a critical language teacher. In our interactional world as *researcher* and *participant*, I get to ask questions, Emily gets to answer them, I get to listen/read and ask more questions, she gets to answer and I, again, get to listen/read. Positioning herself as someone who meets the criteria to participate in this study, she positions herself (and is positioned by me) as someone who can contribute and add value to the research. And so, as Emily tells/writes her story, there is the underlying assumption that not only am I genuinely interested in her stories because we share a similar philosophy of teaching, but I also support her endeavor.

Emily opens her story by positioning herself as a member of a “very affluent suburb of Los Angeles.” Suburbs are often associated as the idyllic alternative to the busy, high-density, high-crime rates cities with lower density, better schools, greater safety, large homes with manicured yards, and a white, homogenous group. Emily positions herself as part of this homogenous group. As evidence of the “significant demographic change,” she contrasts her experience as a kindergartener whose class “was all white except for two Asian students” and as a high schooler whose “school district was approximately half white and half Asian.” She further orients her

interlocutor with a parenthetical note “(of those, mostly affluent immigrant Taiwanese)” to emphasize that the demographic changes she is referring to are less related to socioeconomic status/class than to race, culture, nationality/country of origin, or language. Emily further orients the interlocutor to the undesirable consequences of such demographic change, i.e., “a sense of racial polarization quickly arose.” To demonstrate such undesirable consequences, Emily signals the event that is about to unfold by depicting it as something that should be expected and unsurprising to me, the interlocutor, when she says, “*as you can imagine*, a sense of racial polarization quickly arose” (italics added).

Emily also orients the story to the interlocutor—me. At this point in the e-mail exchange, Emily is aware that I grew up in Brazil but does not know much about my experiences in the US or how much background knowledge I have about historical racial conflicts in the US. I believe this is why she marks her narrative with descriptive language, to orient the interlocutor to the social, cultural, and political contexts in which her narrative takes place (De Fina, 2003). I believe this is also why she makes the historical reference to “the “language panic” in Monterey Park, California during the mid-80s,” to verify the veracity of the event.

After positioning herself as identifying with “the Asian kids” in a racially divided community during her childhood, she reorients the narrative to the topic of the interview—her becoming an English language teacher (“This probably played a role in my decision to start teaching English professionally”). This phenomenon of orienting a story in an interview to the goals or the topic of the research is not unusual. Bamberg (2006) suggests that participants tend to “give an account of a few though important events that lead up to what needs to be accounted for” (p. 73).

### **Positioning Level 1: How Emily Positions Herself in Relation to the Other Characters Within the Story World**

Positioning level 1 answers the question “what is this story about?” by looking at how the events, or the content of the narrative, and the characters are depicted and positioned in relation to the narrator as a character in the story and in relation to one another. The characters in Emily’s story are Emily, her parents, her “Taiwanese immigrant friends,” and “the white kids” at school. Emily is the main character and, right from the start, she positions herself as someone “lucky” to have grown up in a position of socioeconomic privilege. In addition to growing up in a “very affluent suburb of Los Angeles [County, California],” she grew up in a home positioned as the ideal traditional family (a point to which I will return in the analysis of level 3) consisting of a mother and a father whose relationship was stable (“My parents were married the whole time I was growing up”). To emphasize this point, Emily uses again a parenthetical note, “(In fact, their marriage ended only with my mother's death and my father has never remarried.)” Later in the story, Emily repositions herself as being discriminated against because of her preferred friendship with students of another race and national origin and offers evidence of this by sharing the names and “nasty slurs” she gets called.

Emily positions her parents as people who “valued knowledge and education.” I learned in subsequent interviews that Emily’s mother used to be “at different points in her career, a second-grade teacher, a textbook editor, and later a librarian” and that her grandmother regarded “a correct way (her way) and everyone else’s way of speaking/writing.” I also learned that her “mother, grandmother, and older sister all took pride in and gained respect for their meticulous and precise knowledge of English.” This additional ethnographic data further

illustrates how Emily positions herself in relation to her family as someone who is expected to do well academically.

Throughout her story, Emily positions both the “Asian kids” and the “white kids” collectively, rather than individually. There are no names or differentiating characteristics within those groups. While both groups are economically privileged, they are positioned in polarized ways, first racially and then morally. This is also the first time Emily explicitly positions herself vis-à-vis a racial identity—up until this moment, her racial identity had not been explicitly addressed. Yet she immediately distances herself from it, “The white kids were supposed to be outgoing jocks or cheerleaders. That was definitely not me.” (As she stated earlier, Emily was quite the opposite— not “outgoing” but a “rather bookish child who generally preferred reading to interacting with most other humans.”) Emily positions the “Asian kids” as high academic achievers and, implicitly and by contrast, the “white kids” as less interested in academics and more interested in the social aspect of school. These conflicting values are implied as the main reason for Emily feeling different from her own “kind” and not fitting in since she shares the values of and identifies with her “immigrant peers.” Later, Emily further positions the “Asian kids” as “the more agreeable population” and the “white kids” as intolerant and discriminating against the former.

As we examine how Emily depicts the characters (herself included) and positions them in relation to the story and in relation to one another, we can now answer the question, “what is this story about?” I previously stated that at the end of the story Emily reorients the narrative to the topic of the interview and its “role in [her] decision to start teaching English professionally.” However, this is not just what her narrative is about. While the story gets told as a response to my prompt, on a deeper level, the story is about aligning with the minoritized and marginalized group and being discriminated against. I return to this point in the analysis of positioning level 3.

### **Positioning Level 3: How Emily Positions Herself Amidst Dominant Discourses**

Positioning level 3 examines the sense of self/identity of the narrator in relation to broader societal ideologies. It considers the social, cultural, economic, historical, and political contexts of which the narrative is part. Emily, implicitly yet quite strongly, positions herself as a particular kind of person (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) in relation to several dominant discourses.

**“Lucky.”** Emily opens her narrative with the line “I was lucky to grow up in a very affluent suburb of Los Angeles [County, California].” Being “lucky” draws on the larger discourse that privilege and poverty are attributed to luck and frames the poor as innocent victims. While most white Americans adopt either individualistic or structural explanations of poverty, few suggest that poverty—and by the same token privilege—is a matter of luck (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Those that do often take a fatalistic view (Kawecka Nenga, 2011) which exonerates them from culpability. To further illustrate her privilege, Emily contrasts her heteronormative two-parent family with her friends’ implicit one-parent families. This refers to yet another dominant discourse, that of one-parent families being less than desirable. I say “one-parent families,” but the dominant discourse often refers specifically to single mothers—whether they are teenagers, those who leave a relationship, or are left, widowed, or unwed. Single mothers have been stigmatized by the media and by the US government at least since the mid-1960s. Moynihan (1965), a white American sociologist serving as Assistant Secretary of Labor under

US President Lyndon B. Johnson, published a report in which he, controversially, claimed that the root of African American poverty was not related to racism but to single-parent families. Reports such as this have framed single mothers as responsible for the emotional, psychological, and behavioral challenges experienced by their child(ren), and have neglected structural causes such as low wages, lack of access to adequate childcare, etc. (see Atkinson et al., 1998; Bullock et al., 2001; Manning-Miller, 1994).

**“Bookish child.”** Emily’s description of “the white kids [who] were supposed to be outgoing jocks or cheerleaders” brought me back to my high school years in Brazil when I would watch white American-made movies depicting these groups as the popular kids and the standard to which one should aspire. Emily reports that, although she is white, “outgoing jocks or cheerleaders” were not the types of people she was. Rather, she was a “bookish child” whose parents “valued knowledge and education,” like many of “the Asian kids”’ parents. By attributing these values in a generalized form to “the Asian kids”’ parents’, she evokes at least two dominant discourses: first, the “tiger mom” (e.g., Chua, 2011; Kim, 2013) and second, the “model minority” (E. D. Wu, 2014; F. H. Wu, 2002). Emily evokes the tiger mom discourse by referring to the parents of her Taiwanese friends “who pushed them to bring home all As on their report cards.” The tiger mom discourse is commonly attributed to Asian mothers (often Chinese) who pressure their children to attain high levels of academic achievement (e.g., Chua, 2011; Kim, 2013) and it stereotypes Asian mothers as authoritarian and controlling (Kim et al., 2013). When these parents “push” their children to be academically successful and the children perform above average in school, this leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy that further reinforces and perpetuates the stereotype that Asian parents are controlling, that Asian children are obedient, intelligent above average, and the model minority. The model minority refers to a social group (e.g., race, class, nationality) that is perceived to achieve a higher degree of success (e.g., socioeconomic status, education) than the average population. The current discourse on the model minority in the US portrays “the Asian kids” as studious, unquestionably obedient, and law-abiding citizens (E. D. Wu, 2014; F. H. Wu, 2002). It is by evoking this discourse that Emily justifies her “identification with [her] immigrant peers” and legitimizes her experience of being a victim of “rejection by [her] kind.”

**“Egg.”** Why do “the white kids” resent Emily for befriending “the Asian kids”? Why do they call her a “rice lover, among other nasty slurs?” Although Emily provides some background (“the “language panic” in Monterey Park”), this anti-Chinese discourse can be traced back to the mid-1800s when, during the Gold Rush, Chinese immigrants arrived in the US and were blamed for driving down pay and taking away white workers’ jobs. Escalating anti-Chinese racism through the decades resulted in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which restricted new immigration from China. Fast forward to the period of World War II, to reinforce their alliance with China against Japan, the US government started a campaign to change this perception and in 1943 repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act (E. D. Wu, 2014). For Emily’s hometown, this meant that the number of Asian immigrants went from 15% of the population in 1970 to 40% in 1985 (Arax, 1985). Despite the government’s efforts to change the perception toward Asian immigrants, many white Americans continued to have racist attitudes. These were often manifested in the form of English-only policies, as illustrated by Emily with the example of Monterey Park, California where the City Council led efforts to make English the city’s official language. The English-only attitude in Monterey Park in the 1980s is still prevalent today in that area—in 2013 the City Council proposed an ordinance where “modern Latin lettering” in addition to Chinese characters would be required on storefront signs (Shyong, 2013). This is

the context in which Emily's story develops and the dominant discourse that helps explain "the white kids" hostility towards "the Asian kids" and, consequently, towards her. Emily describes "inhabit[ing] this weird liminal space," yet another common discourse among immigrants where an individual does not feel like they belong either *here* (the country or culture of residence) or *there* (the country or culture of origin). Is it through the telling of her experiences, those that mirror her Asian friends' (i.e., being called names, feeling rejected, and inhabiting liminal spaces), that Emily legitimizes her empathy and resolution "to do whatever [she] could to help foreigners adjust to living in the U.S."

**Altruist.** Emily's resolution conforms to the common Western discourse of redemption (McAdams, 2005). The discourse of redemption refers to those narratives where negative past experiences are resolved in some positive manner. McAdams (2005) describes,

The protagonist encounters many setbacks and experiences a great deal of pain in life, but over time these negative scenes lead to especially positive outcomes, outcomes that might not have occurred had the suffering never happened in the first place. (p. 8)

Redemption stories, which reflect American values such as individualism, grit, and determination, have been prominent throughout US history (e.g., in historical documents, movies, and novels), gaining status as a cultural master narrative. Cultural master narratives "dictate the kinds of stories that are valued and deemed appropriate for members of a particular culture to tell" (McLean et al. 2020, p. 2). Ultimately, these stories not only illustrate negative experiences that are resolved in some positive manner but further suggest that teachers have a desirable personality trait—altruism. It is common among teachers to explain their career choice as the result of their resolution to provide a better educational experience to marginalized students. Often these explanations come in the form of redemption stories. These can include stories about the teacher's own experiences of being marginalized during their schooling years—either by peers, teachers, or administration—or stories where, although they are not necessarily the primary victims of contradictions or injustices themselves, they witness others (usually already minoritized and marginalized students) being treated unfairly by those who are supposed to protect them. What these teacher redemption stories have in common is the teacher's resolution to ensure that those who are marginalized do not go through similar experiences. In Emily's case, her redemption narrative centers around the discourse of education as a means for transformation. It is through the rejection by her "kind," being called names, and witnessing the mistreatment of her Asian friends (negative experiences) that she resolves "to do whatever [she] could to help foreigners adjust to living in the U.S." (positive outcome), thus, ultimately becoming a critical language teacher.

## Concluding Thoughts

My goal was to present a theoretically grounded methodological approach with which to investigate the interplay between language teacher cognition and the development of critical language teacher identity. Considering that most teachers join formal teacher training already with such a perspective, understanding how and to which experiences critical language teachers assign meaning has the potential to better prepare teacher educators to support the ever-developing process which is conscientização.

One of the most prominent data sources for examining the meaning-making of experiences is autobiographical narratives. However, I emphasize that my role as a researcher is not to determine whether the narratives told are "true" or "false" or if they are an exact representation

of what happened (Talmy, 2010). Rather, narratives should be understood as a process through which we make sense of and attribute significance to certain experiences. Autobiographic narratives are told in relation to several aspects including how we present ourselves, the spatiotemporal setting, and the dominant discourses that operate in society. When we tell stories, we present ourselves a certain way (Mishler, 1999) in relation to the other characters in the story as we construct but one answer to what the story is about. We also present ourselves in relation to the here-and-now interactive aspect of the space and time in which the story is being told and the interlocutor or audience to whom the story is being told. Finally, we present ourselves in relation to broader dominant discourses.

Positioning analysis is an analytical approach that considers all the above-mentioned relational aspects. In the data used here, Emily presented herself as someone who recognized her social positionings (white and from an affluent hometown) and how these social positionings influenced both how she saw the world (e.g., society and education) and how she participated in it (story world). She further positioned the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts of her narrative to establish herself as someone aware of social injustices from a young age and resolved to act against them, thus aligning with the participant criteria and positioning herself as a critical language teacher. In the storytelling world, Emily told her story not because it was just a *good* story or a story worth telling, but to legitimize her becoming a critical language teacher in the time and space of the interview. Knowing that I am a Brazilian cisgender woman who immigrated to the US, the topic of my research, and that I too position myself as a critical language teacher and researcher, I have no doubt that these influenced both what and how she told this story as an early, catalyst experience. In the third level, Emily embedded her individual experience in the collective social representations and discourses that operate in our society about privilege and desirable traits.

I agree with scholars like Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) who recognize the pedagogical implication and the great potential narratives have for practical purposes in teacher development. To become a certain type of teacher, teachers first need to be aware of what type of teacher it is that they want to become (or be perceived as). Let's say, for example, a teacher would like to be (or be remembered as) someone who has the ability to perceive unjust social power structures and act to change them (Freire, 1970). In the act of narrating autobiographical events, the teacher will attribute meaning to particular life events as catalysts to this desire and, I hope, embrace and act in ways that align with teaching for social justice.

## **About the Author**

**Priscila Leal** is a lecturer and field supervisor at the College of Education, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, USA, where she teaches multicultural education and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. Her work examines how teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners become and act as educators for social justice. Dr. Leal is also the founder and CEO of A'o Language Education Consulting, LLC, a consulting organization specializing in professional development for schools, teacher education programs, and stakeholders that benefit culturally and linguistically diverse learners. ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2555-4347

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## Footnotes

[1] It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a review of conceptual orientations to teacher cognition research. The reader is encouraged to consult Borg (2019) and Burns, et al. (2015) for an extensive discussion.

[2] Nevertheless, Freire (1974) expressed a preference for the use of the word “in its Brazilian form, conscientização, and spelled that way” (p. 24). He believed that the word should be adopted unchanged into English. (I concur with Freire and therefore use the Brazilian term conscientização throughout this article.)

[3] Gee’s (2002) narrative about his experience with a doctoral student from South Korea who had been dropped by her advisor is a great example. The student had asked another professor to be her advisor and, when the professor showed reservations, the student said, “It is your job to help me, I need to learn” (pp. 167–168).

[4] Like other critical applied linguistics, I see interviews as social, co-constructed events (see Talmy, 2010) and sites of data generation (i.e., topic) and construction rather than data collection (i.e., resource) (Byrne, 2012).

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