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## Novice Teachers' Discursive Construction of Their Identity: Insights from Foreign Language Classrooms

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### ABSTRACT

Language teacher identity has received considerable attention in the past decade for its crucial roles in improving effective pedagogy and enhancing teacher learning. While a large number of studies have been conducted to investigate the multidimensional nature and complexities of in-service teacher identity, there is still insufficient knowledge regarding novice teachers who stayed in the profession for less than three years. In particular, although much research has argued the significant relationship between discourse and identity, few studies have investigated teacher identity through the lens of classroom discourse. This article addresses these gaps by drawing on applied conversation analysis to investigate the identity construction of seven teachers in the context of Chinese secondary English classes. Classroom recordings were made for detailed moment-by-moment analysis to explore the complexity of being a novice teacher in classroom practice. Findings revealed that identity construction - manifested through interactive work with students - is by and large about developing personal practical knowledge and engaging in language-related practices. The article discusses the implications of researching teacher identity for effective pedagogy and teacher education.

**Keywords:** teacher identity; novice-teachers; conversation analysis; practical pedagogical knowledge; language-related identity

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## Introduction

Teacher identity, or 'teacher-self' or subjectivity and individuality, has been a recurring theme in contemporary teacher education research, and research evidence suggests that teachers theorise identity as multiple, shifting and conflicted, and that this is closely related to the social, cultural and political context (Varghese et al., 2005). However, despite the flourishing research in teacher identity, very little is known about how novice teachers construct their professional identities at work. On the one hand, we already know that novice teachers struggle during the launch stage of their career as they are constantly trying out methods and tasks with their students and establishing their professional images (Farrell, 2003; Li, 2012; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013; Sabar, 2004). The struggles and negotiation contribute to the development of their personal practical knowledge. On the other hand, novice teachers bring knowledge to the existing community, and they engage in re-negotiation between their prior learning experience and the immediate context. This re-negotiation will further contribute to the development of the community. From two different directions, then, it became clear that understanding novice teachers' identity formation is an important step in improving teaching and learning. Against this background, this paper addresses the identity construction of novice teachers. In particular, I examine how language teachers position themselves in the moment-by-moment talk with the class in achieving their pedagogical goals. In so doing, I look at the multiple and fluid identities that teachers construct in the classroom setting through the lens of classroom discourse.

The purpose of this research is two-fold. First and foremost, this research will shed light on key aspects of identity construction of novice language teachers in classroom practice, focusing on the multiple and fluid nature of the concept. Traditionally, the teacher-learner relationship is somewhat static, with the teacher being the knowledge authority and the learner being the knowledge receiver. However, the research evidence also suggests that teachers display multiple fluid identities in their professional contexts (e.g. Ellwood, 2008; Gary & Morton, 2019; Li, 2020). Secondly, the majority of research into professional identity has taken up a narrative approach or ethnography; this research, however, aims to make a methodological breakthrough and advance the social and dialogic nature of teacher identity. To this end, the paper examines the moment-by-moment positioning of novice teachers in their classroom practice and seeks to illuminate how they use interactional resources and strategies to construct professional and social images. The research contributes to the emerging literature on language teacher identity and has implications for teacher learning and development and effective pedagogy.

## Language Teacher Identity and Discourse

Identity can be generally defined as 'how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future' (Norton, 2013, p. 45). However, in the field of teacher education, Barkhuizen (2017) pointed out that a diverse range of definitions and theoretical frameworks were put forward, although socioculturally informed perspectives seem predominant. Barkhuizen then offered a comprehensive understanding of the concept of identity, claiming teachers are 'in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, other teachers, administrators, and the broader community, and material interaction with spaces, places, and objects in classrooms and institutions' (p. 659). This definition covers a range of dimensions of teachers' inner and outer worlds and lives, including the cognitive, emotional, social, ideological and historical aspects. In this respect, Li (2020) reinforces this idea, arguing there is a close and intertwined relationship between teacher identity, emotion and cognition (Li, 2020).

In the field of applied linguistics, there is a strong interest in identity research, given that language is perceived as one of the resources that individuals draw upon in the interactional work they do

with the environment around them. In this process, the individual displays *who they are* and *what they want to be*. It is only natural for researchers in second language education to be interested in teacher identity in their professional context, given that, as Block (2015, p. 13) points out:

*[Language teachers have] an occupational identity, and specifically a language teaching identity. Such an identity may be defined in terms of how individuals, who both self-position and are positioned by others as teachers, affiliate to different aspects of teaching in their lives. Thus identity is related to factors such as one's ongoing contacts with fellow teachers and students as well as the tasks that one engages in, which can be said to constitute teaching.*

Empirically, there has been a growing interest in second language teacher identity (Block, 2005; 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Gray & Morton, 2019; Norton, 2013; Pavlenko, 2003). The study of teacher identity lies in three critical aspects: student learning, teacher development and pedagogy. First of all, for students, teachers are valuable resources and significant influences in the process of learning, given the close link between teachers' mental lives and students' learning outcomes. In this respect, Mercer (2018) claims there is 'a strong connection between teacher and learner psychologies'; that is, 'teacher psychology can influence the psychology of the learners in the class - both as individuals and as a collective group' (p. 508). This claim can be extended to teacher identity: how teachers position themselves will heavily influence how students are positioned, and affect what is to be learnt and how well students learn. Secondly, there is an intricate relationship between teacher identity construction and teacher learning. Varghese et al (2005) claimed that the teacher is not a neutral player in the classroom, because how teachers position themselves in relation to the learners, and to the broader context, is critical in teaching and learning. Researching teacher identity, thus, is vital to teacher development (Kanno & Stuart, 2011), and, in particular, identity can be utilised as an analytic frame to highlight the holistic, dynamic and situated nature of teacher development (Cheung et al., 2015; Li, 2020; Olsen, 2008; Tsui, 2007). Finally, teacher identity is critical to classroom practice (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997), and this can further impact second language teaching (Varghese et al., 2016). More importantly, from a discourse analytical point of view, the identity shifts and negotiation work co-constructed between the teacher and learners will significantly decide how learning is facilitated and managed, and how learning opportunities are hindered or created.

Teacher identity can be approached from different theoretical frameworks. Postmodernist and poststructuralist views reconceptualise the teacher self as 'a form of working *subjectivity*' (original italic), which is 'a polysemic product of experience, a product of practices that constitute this self in response to multiple meanings that need not converge upon a stable, unified identity' (Zembylas, 2003a, p. 107). In a poststructuralist approach to identity, identity is a dynamic process of intersubjective discourses, experiences and emotions: all of these change over time as discourses change, constantly providing new configurations, and therefore 'identity is constantly contested and under transforming shifts' (Zembylas, 2003b, p. 221). Narrative research, such as narrative inquiry, thus explores teacher self as articulated being 'through talk, social interaction, and self presentation' through biographies, and such an approach highlights the situatedness of self in situations and practices (Zembylas, 2003b, p. 215).

From a sociocultural perspective, self-representation is socially negotiated and the identity work by individuals in their environment 'happens in and through interaction between perceptions, participation and actions' and this ongoing process is embedded within the macro and micro environments (Li, 2020, p. 243). Recent work in teacher identity has highlighted that identities are performed and negotiated through language; that is, identities are emergent, locally situated and 'constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak' (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). In any particular context or interaction, people use interactional resources and strategies to align or disalign with the identity categories available to them. In this process of constructing self in

relation to others, one negotiates towards or moves away from particular identities. The dynamic process is enabled by the nature of interaction that one has with one's interlocutors.

Different perspectives have added their layer of assumptions and complexities in unravelling the notion of identity, and the multidimensional and abstract nature of identity makes it difficult to research. However, what seems clear is that the nature of identity is shifting and multiple, and it has a close connection to discourse. In conceptualising the complex interplay between identity and discourse, this paper adopts a position that identity is seen from the perspective of its interactional construction. Therefore, novice teacher identity is examined through applied conversation analysis, given that 'social, cultural, and institutional discourses set the "conditions of possibility" (Foucault, 1979) for who and what a teacher might be' (Zembley, 2003b, p. 215)

There is a growing interest in exploring the dynamic nature of identity construction and its relationship to discourse in professional contexts where teachers carry out their work, notably the classroom as a community. Barkhuizen (2017) highlighted the nature of identity as 'enacted, dynamic and multifaceted' rather than an object existing in teachers. Gray and Morton (2019) echoed this view by claiming that teacher identity, especially for novice teachers, is ascribed, rejected, negotiated, claimed and inhabited, and that this is displayed in teaching. To argue the close connection between discourse and teacher identity, Li (2020) writes, 'the language they (the teachers) use and how it is used in instruction could be a window into their professional identities and possible selves' (p. 248). So, the interactional work that teachers engage in classroom practice displays their thinking, their positioning, and their individual and collective images of being teachers. The importance of the social and dialogic nature of identity highlights the need to focus on not only 'identity-in-practice' but also 'identity-in-discourse' (Varghese et al., 2005).

## Research Methodology

Membership Categorisation Analysis (e.g. Sacks, 1995) has been widely used in analysing identity, exploring how membership of particular categories is made relevant in talk using Membership Categorisation Devices (MCDs). However, such an approach is not prominently featured in classroom discourse since the membership categories in the classroom setting are less negotiated. In this paper, applied conversation analysis is adopted to analyse 'how oriented-to identities provide both the proximal context (the turn-by-turn orientation to developing sequences of action at the interactional level)' (Zimmerman, 1998, p. 88). In particular, Zimmerman proposes a critical aspect of identity that is relevant to the analysis of interaction, namely discourse identity, which is 'integral to the moment-by-moment organisation of the interaction' (p. 90).

### *Conversation analysis*

Conversation Analysis (CA) treats 'grammar and lexical choices as sets of resources which participants deploy, monitor, interpret and manipulate' in order to perform their social acts (Schegloff et al., 2002, p. 15). In principle, CA considers talk as an action rather than a channel to action. Thus, in conversation, participants do and perform identities and their being is constituted in talk-in-interaction. CA focuses on how sequences of action are generated and how participants' turns display their interpretation of each other's utterances and the social actions they represent (Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008, p. 14). In this sense, the conversation also 'performs a social display of the interactants' cognitive, emotional and attitudinal states' (Li, 2017, p. 57).

By adopting CA principles in researching teacher identity, it is possible to focus on the nature of identity being socially negotiated and constructed. Because a conversation is constructed based on the participants' understanding, identity shifts according to the participants' stance. Data, therefore, are not approached with a predetermined set of features but are treated in a more open manner. As a methodology, CA follows principles and assumptions, as summarised by Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008, p. 20):

- Talk-in-interaction is systematically organised and deeply ordered.
- The production of talk-in-interaction is methodic.
- The analysis of talk-in-interaction should be based on naturally occurring data.
- Analysis should not initially be constrained by prior theoretical assumptions.

It is important to clarify the position of classroom discourse as 'conversation' at the outset. Seedhouse (1996) proposed two conditions as necessary for a language lesson to become 'identical to conversation': the teacher and learners are 'fellow conversationalists' who are of 'identical status', and the teacher should not 'direct the discourse in any way at all' (p.18). That is, despite the pedagogical goals and agenda, the conversation in a classroom develops naturally, and the exchanges between participants can develop in any direction by any of the participants. Obviously, institutional talk is usually not equally distributed, and it has a focused agenda and goals, but such talk is critical in understanding teachers' professional identity; as Richards (2006) argues, identity research without considering classroom discourse 'obscured important interactional possibilities' (p. 59).

### *Participants*

The data reported in this paper is derived from a large study of teacher learning. The original project was designed to investigate how teachers developed their beliefs, understanding and knowledge in their professional context, involving secondary school English language teachers from different schools in China. The data examined in this study include seven EFL teachers and their students. The students were aged 15-16 and averaged 7 years of English study. The teachers varied in their background, most noticeably in teaching qualification and education experience (see Table below). However, they could all claim many years of language learning experience, ranging from 13 to 17 years. These teachers were recruited through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling strategies. Information about the project was offered to the teachers and consent was sought from all participants. They were specifically reminded the right to withdraw from the study and how their data would be stored, used and destroyed. Participants were named under pseudonyms of their choice.

Table 1  
*Participants' Profile*

Teacher	Age/gender	Year of teaching	Qualifications	(overseas) study experience
Mei	26/female	3 years	BA in English	No
Xi	25/female	2 years and 11 months	BA in English language teaching; MA in TESOL	She studied in an English speaking country for the MA degree
Zhang	26/male	2 year	BA in business English; Masters in English literature	Exchange student in an English speaking country
Lian	25/female	1 year	BA in business management; MA in TESOL	She studied in an English speaking country for the MA degree
Qiang	24/male	1 year	BA in management; MA in TESOL	He studied in an English speaking country for the MA degree
Tai	23/female	1 year	BA in English	No
Wang	23/female	2 years	BA in English language teaching	No

Identifying novice teachers is problematic as there is not a unified and reliable way of defining them, and previous research has adopted different criteria. Work experience has been frequently referred to in distinguishing novice from expert. For example, Gatbonton (2008) suggests that novice teachers 'are those who are still undergoing training, who have just completed their training, or who have just commenced teaching and still have very little (e.g. less than two years) experience behind them' (*ibid.*, p. 162). Tsui (2003) used a combination of criteria, which included experience, reputation, recommendation and classroom observation. In this research, years of work experience and self-evaluation were used to identify the novice teachers: anyone with less than 3 years' work experience and who self-assessed as a novice was invited to participate in the study. Seven novice teachers were included in the final selection, depending on their commitment to classroom observation participation and follow-up interviews.

#### *Data*

Video-recordings of classroom teaching were made, using three video cameras: one at the front of the classroom and one at the back to record the whole class activities, with the third video camera employed to focus on the teacher, capturing the interactional practice. The data consists of 584 minutes of teaching from the participating novice teachers. The recordings were watched several times before they were transcribed. Detailed transcriptions of verbal and non-verbal behaviours were made and subjected to fine-grained analysis, following the CA convention developed by Jefferson (see Appendix for transcription conventions). The pauses, gestures and intonation revealed in the transcripts were subjected to detailed micro-analysis. In this way the focus was placed on how the teachers position themselves in doing interactional work with students, and their stance-taking of the moment. It should be noted that CA principles are adopted in uncovering teacher identity, more precisely 'applied' CA, which uses 'CA concepts and methods for accomplishing a particular agenda' (ten Have, 2007, p. 56).

## Findings

Teaching is a 'series of interactional events' (Ellis, 1998, p. 145). Any understanding of these 'events', therefore, should focus on the turn-taking and exchange structures in operation and pay attention to the meaning-construction between teacher and students. In a classroom, a simple view of the identity of participants is teacher versus student, knowledge provider versus knowledge recipient, expert versus novice or adult versus child. In addition, an important pedagogical assumption led the teachers in my study to foreground identity as an issue of importance. When teachers conceptualise and conduct their professional work, they construct multiple identities which constantly shift across both space and time (Beijaard et al., 2004; Miller, 2009); that is, pedagogical tasks and interaction in the classroom will shape the 'being' and 'becoming' of a teacher.

In the following section, I discuss extracts from the data that illustrate professional identity construction of novice teachers through the lens of classroom interaction, with two prevailing themes: developing practical knowledge and constructing language-related identity.

### *Developing practical pedagogical knowledge*

Teaching itself, as Britzman (2003) argues, 'is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become' (p. 31). For novice teachers, constructing professional images also involves developing practical knowledge, given that identity is an 'organising principle in teachers' jobs and lives' (MacLure, 1993, p. 311). In other words, identity and practical pedagogical knowledge development have a symbiotic relationship - in the process of negotiating 'who I am' (Clarke, 2008), teachers are developing a set of personal practical pedagogical knowledge, and the pedagogical principles developed and held by teachers are the reflection of who they are.

### *Making an interactive pedagogical decision*

Extract 1 is an illustrative extract of a novice teacher developing and negotiating effective pedagogy in managing a listening task. In this teaching episode, Mei, the teacher, asked the students to preview question items before they did the listening comprehension task.

#### Extract 1

1	T	Ok?(.) so have you got answers for everything?= 2
	SS	=yeah/no/no= 3
	T	=I asked you to >preview the questions< before(.) 4
		let's try ((1.4 eye gaze with a student)) 5
	S1	um (.) um (4.6) den- *wo mei ting jian* I didn't catch it 6
	T	OK! (.) 7
		anyone? (0.4) anybody can answer this one? 8
		(5.0) 9
		is it difficult?= 10
	SS	=yes/yeah/yes= 11
	T	=right! (.) do you want to listen to it again?= 12
	SS	=yes::= 13
	T	=ok (.) but maybe before that (.) 14
		preview the the questions 15
		open your book (.) three minus Ok? 16
		((20.0 walking around the classroom)) 17
		actually(.) let's go through the questions and some 18
		vocabulary together(.)ok?

As can be seen in line 1, Mei starts the sequence by using an opener *ok* with a rising tone, which can be seen as a 'pre-announcement' to draw students' attention (Terasaki, 2005). Then she checks with the students regarding the task completion (line 1). Clearly, this is not an easy task for the majority of the students, as many responded very quickly with a negative answer, despite one confirmative response in a soft and low voice (line 2). The negative response here is perceived as a 'trouble source' by Mei, who immediately takes the cue and engages in 'telling' (line 3), indicating her dissatisfaction with the students' learning behaviour. This dissatisfaction is further evidenced by the emphasis on preview and a rather rushed speed. For Mei, although the students failed to complete the task she had assigned them, she still wants to try to carry on with her pedagogical plan, as, in line 4, she moves the lesson on by inviting a student by eye gaze. S1 is nominated by the teacher and he starts with hesitation, as indicated by the discourse marker *um* and a brief pause, which is followed by another hesitancy discourse marker and a rather long pause (4.6 seconds). Then he makes a false start before claiming insufficient knowledge with a rather low voice *wo mei ting jian*. The claim of insufficient knowledge is a 'dispreferred' response (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 64), to which the teacher offers less positive feedback as the sequence-closing third (SCT) (line 6). However, after a brief pause, the teacher invites further responses (line 7). After a rather long pause without any self-selection being made (line 8), the teacher initiates a different first-pair part, this time asking students to evaluate the task. With a confirmed response from various students (line 10), we can see the teacher acknowledge the problem and then propose a solution *do you want to listen to it again?* (line 11). Again, this proposal is positively confirmed by students in unison (line 12). At this point, Mei offers the students a second chance but again suggests they preview the questions (lines 13-14). To Mei, previewing questions before listening to the material is an effective way to complete the listening comprehension task. After assigning the task and time to complete the preview, Mei walks around to monitor the students and then she changes her strategy, inviting them to go through the questions with her and learn vocabulary.

In this short extract, we can clearly see Mei is very sensitive to a possible problem in the unfolding discussion, and as soon as she identifies the trouble source, she engages with the students using different strategies, such as inviting further responses (line 7), re-assessing the difficulty level of the task with students (line 9), suggesting a possible solution (line 11), giving detailed instruction on how to improve listening skill (lines 13-14), and finally proposing a whole-class activity to preview the questions and learn vocabulary (lines 17-18). Through these strategies, we can see Mei position herself as an engaging teacher who offers advice and guidance to the students, even though she is dissatisfied with their responses (line 3). Effective pedagogy for Mei is guiding students through the task process and providing help and leadership if necessary (lines 17-18).

From this analysis, we can observe different identities for Mei. When she received dispreferred responses, she resumed teacher authority by displaying her dissatisfaction (line 3) and following the planned teaching agenda (line 4). After attempts, she realises that it is a difficult task, then she switches her position. At that point, her identity shifts too. She displays a degree of flexibility as she asks the students for feedback and offers them a second chance (line 11). This is evidence that Mei is establishing her practical knowledge based on interaction with the students and local knowledge. However, Mei also demonstrates her authority in learning, as she requires the students to do the 'preview' activity before listening to the material again, monitors their progress, and changes her plan again to get the whole class to do the preview activity together. By abandoning the individual preview task, Mei is displaying her pedagogical principle of learning effectiveness. Clearly, the extract suggests that previewing the items is important for Mei, but she is flexible in terms of ways of carrying out the previewing activity. Overall, in the pedagogical decision that is revealed to us in this extract, she positions herself as an expert in guiding the students through the task, as well as an authority, and a teacher with a strong agenda to fulfil the learning objectives. Nevertheless, she shows her way of collaboratively working with students to explore the appropriate pedagogy in the local context.



*Focus on student participation*

The following extract is another example of a novice teacher, Xi, demonstrating pedagogical beliefs about student participation. This is a typical example of how novice teachers usually start their lesson/activity and it is very common for novice teachers to attempt to align with 'a good language teacher' identity – that is, offering opportunities for students to participate in the interactional work. In Extract 2, the teacher is eliciting information from the students about festivals. Clearly, for Xi, co-constructing knowledge is an effective way to engage and motivate students.

## Extract 2

1	T	Last class we have learnt many festivals (.) right?= =ye[s
2	SS	
3	T	[so, do you remember the NAME of the festivals?= =yes/yes/yes= =such as::
4	SS	
5	T	
6	SS	(.) spring festival/Chinese new year= =spring festival::= =hollowen/[mid-autumn day] [mid-autumn day] and?= =dragon boat day/hollwen= =yeah (.) dragon boat racing day (.) and (0.1) there is one festival that is very special for lovers (.) for LOVERS (0.4) do you know the name of the festival? (0.1) Valentine/Valentine day Va:len::[tine's DAY]= [tine's day] =yeah (.) valentine's day
7	T	
8	SS	
9	T	
10	SS	
11	T	
12		
13		
14		
15		
16	SS	
17	T	
18	SS	
19	T	

In this extract, we can see that Xi is directing students to an information-recall activity where they are asked to provide answers to the question posed by the teacher. This starts with a 'pre-announcement' that reminds the students of the content they learnt in the previous lesson (line 1) and a memory check (line 3), to which the students provide preferred responses (lines 2 and 4) in unison. In line 5, the teacher then requests information regarding the names of the festivals – the stretched sound in line 5 indicates an invitation for answers. The students, in this case, take the cue to provide some relevant answers. Here, the students and the teacher are doing interactional work together to display assigned identities as students and teacher through 'acts of classroom alignment' (Ellwood, 2008), which are institutionally desired. This is when the teacher asks the questions and directs the flow of the conversation (lines 1, 3, 5, 9 and 14), students give responses, preferred in this case (lines 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 16 and 18), and the teacher offers feedback (lines 7, 9, 11, 17 and 19). As the data show, the feedback strategies adopted by the teacher are the repetition of students' contributions (lines 7, 9 and 17), embedded correction (line 11) and positive evaluation (lines 11 and 19). Effective pedagogy, from this teacher's position, is when students are legitimately involved in the discussion, which leads to the fulfilment of her pedagogical goal – in this case, the introduction of the topic of Valentine's Day.

Unlike the first extract, where an unexpected event is observed, this extract suggests that frequently the teacher and students attempt to align with a 'good student and teacher' identity, where the teacher assumes the position of directing and controlling the development of exchanges and the students are allocated turns where appropriate.

*Language-related identity*

Pennington and Richards (2016) claim that a language teacher identity is closely related to their 'language background and language proficiency', as teaching itself requires both the target language knowledge, and interactional skills to communicate 'effectively with students who have limited proficiency in that language' (p. 11). Attributing to the nature of the subject and their learning experience of a foreign language, bilingual teachers possess strong language-related identity (Li, 2020), such as non-native speaker and translanguaging practice. In the literature, the work on non-native speakerness is dominant, which has been critically problematized in the literature as it has portrayed a negative view of the language teacher being deficient in the target language. Nevertheless, there is ongoing work on multilingual identities and translanguaging practice. As evidenced in the data, L2 teachers can use their L1 as one of 'most formidable cognitive resources' in facilitating L2 acquisition (Swain & Lapkin, 2005, pp. 264-265).

*Translanguaging practice*

## Extract 3

- 1 T Ok now(.) debate and speech(.) debate  
 2 do you know debate? [debate em?  
 3 SS [((3.0 unintelligible))  
 4 T louder(.)  
 5 S1 bian lun((Chinese translation of 'debate'))=  
 6 =ok (.) how about speech?=  
 7 SS =yan jiang ((Chinese translation of 'speech'))=  
 8 T =ok (.) do you think he gave a speech or a debate?=  
 9 SS =a speech=  
 10 T =a speech (.)a speech  
 11 (2.0)  
 12 ok (.)could you make a sentence by debate?  
 13 (2.2)  
 14 ((hand gesture inviting a student)) you?  
 15 S2 (0.5) um we debated for a long time um the  
 16 the ways to jianshao pollution=  
*reduce*  
 17 T Ejianshaof (.) who can help?=  
 18 S3 =\*get rid of?\*=  
 19 T =ah (.) get rid of? um shi shenme ya?  
*what does it mean?*  
 20 (5.3)  
 21 shi qudiao (.) wanan meiyou \*le\*  
*It means gone (.) completely*  
 22 ok reduce (.)zhe shi ge xin ci er (.)a  
*This is a new word*  
 23 (3.2)  
 24 we debated for a long time  
 25 on different ways to reduce pollution (.) ok

In Extract 3, the teacher, Lian, is checking student comprehension on a piece of listening material. First, she introduces two words, 'debate' and 'speech, for comparison and then checks the meaning of 'debate' (line 2). Instead of self-selection, the students overlap the teacher's second part of the question, discussing (line 3). Seeing that the students are engaged, the teacher demands an individual response, a clear and loud one (line 4). Then, after a micro pause, a student makes a self-selection to provide a Chinese translation for this word (line 5). The teacher acknowledges the response briefly and then asks a related question, this time checking the understanding of

'speech' (line 6), to which students provide a relevant and preferred response in unison (line 7). Again, after a brief acknowledgement (line 8), the teacher follows up with a further question, asking the students to guess what the listening material is (line 9). Again, the students provide a preferred answer in unison (line 9), to which the teacher provides positive confirmation by repeating the students' contribution twice (line 10). After a longish pause (line 11), the teacher initiates another turn, this time extending the task to ask the students to make a sentence using the word 'debate'. There is a slightly longish pause, with no self-selection. At this point, the teacher nominates a student by gesture and verbal invitation (line 14). A second student now takes the turn after a pause, producing a relevant and preferred response with L1 vocabulary *jianshao* to replace 'reduce'. In line 17, the teacher first repeats the L1 word with a smiley voice and then asks for volunteers to help. A third student self-selects and offers an answer in a very low voice, showing uncertainty (line 18). The teacher immediately takes the turn, firstly repeating the student's contribution with a question, showing disapproval, and then asking a related question about the meaning of the phrase 'get rid of'. A relevant response would be a translation but there is no response from the students, as indicated by the long silence in line 20. The teacher offers an explanation in L1 in line 21. She then offers the correct equivalence of '*jianshao*' in line 22, and also helps students to notice this word by pointing out that it is a new word. After another longish pause (line 23), she completes the student's sentence, with embedded corrective feedback (lines 24-25).

It is clear in this extract that the teacher displays a bilingual identity and engages in translanguaging practice, which is demonstrated in different ways. First, this teacher designs a task involving L1 in facilitating the target language acquisition and engages in translanguaging practice in facilitating learning. As such, L1 is considered a pedagogical resource and a cognitive tool in vocabulary learning when the teacher asks the students to provide the Chinese translation for the new words (lines 2 and 6). Subsequently, when a language problem emerges in line 16, when the student uses L1 to support his contribution, the teacher first repeats the contribution to question the accuracy, then she asks the students a further question in Chinese for clarification of the meaning of the phrase proposed by a third student (line 19). This time, the teacher is using their L1 to engage the learners and perhaps also reduce the difficulty level of the task. She also offers the answer and further explanation in Chinese in line 21, and raises awareness in line 22 by offering an explanation. The teacher displays in this extract her identity both as a bilingual speaker and as a teacher who engages in translanguaging practice, which allows her to reduce the level of difficulty and enhance clarity, thereby fulfilling the pedagogical task. Similar evidence is widely observed in the database, with the teacher occasionally demonstrating multilingual competence and multicultural awareness.

#### *Multilingual and emerged situated identity*

Seedhouse and Supakorn (2015) introduced two conceptualisations of topic that are relevant in classroom discourse: topic-in-script, when a topic is announced in advance, usually referring to the focus of a lesson or learning task, and topic-in-action, which refers to 'how topic is developed or talked into being during the course of the interaction' (p. 399). It is when teachers manage topic-in-action that multiple identities are revealed. In the following extract, for example, when a young male teacher, Zhang, followed up a topic suggested by students, science fiction, we see how multiple identities are revealed in topic-in-action.

## Extract 4

1 T if I ask you to go back to review (1.3)  
 2 ((he clears his throat))  
 3 what sci,ence fiction have you read? Luyu  
 4 (2.0)  
 5 name some science fiction or science fiction writer  
 6 (3.0)  
 7 L [journey::=  
 8 [(students are talking to each other))  
 9 T =ssssh[hhhh  
 10 L [journey to the centre of the earth=  
 11 T =journey to the centre of the earth(.)  
 12 ((turning to the class)) have you read this?=  
 13 SS =no=  
 14 T =(gaze with Luyu))tell them the Chinese version=  
 15 S =di xin you ji ((Chinese translation))=  
 16 T =di xin you ji(.) Who wrote this?=  
 17 L =ahhhmm::  
 18 T ((writing on the blackboard 'Jules Verne')) (.)  
 19 actually he is French(.)  
 20 so in French it is called (.)/'ʒu:ɛlz vɜ:n/ (.)  
 21 /'ʒu:ɛlz vɜ:n/ (.) Ok (.)right (.) it's French

In this extract, Zhang is asking students to provide some examples of science fiction that they have read. This is clearly an interactive decision that Zhang made, as the concept of science fiction was brought up by a student previously. In this extract, he starts with an unrelated request, but after a longish pause (line 1), he clears his throat (line 2) and starts a new first pair part, requesting students to provide relevant information on science fiction (line 3). He then selects a student and, after a long pause (2.0s), he elaborates on the request by asking for information about relevant works or authors. Again, there is a long pause and no selection is made (line 6). Then Zhang nominates a student to take the cue to make a start while the other students are discussing with each other. At this point, Zhang makes a noise to ask the students to be quiet and then a relevant second pair part is offered by the student (line 10). In line 11, Zhang repeats the answer and then asks the class a follow-up question, to which he receives a negative response. Even though it is not directly relevant to this lesson, Zhang carries on the conversation with Luyu, asking her to provide the class with the Chinese translation, and so she does (line 15). Again, Zhang repeats her answer as a confirmation and follows on with a different question, this time requesting the name of the writer. The student hesitates (line 17), then Zhang offers the name by writing it on the board. He goes on to offer more information regarding the author as well as the pronunciation of the name (lines 19-21).

In this exchange, we can see how Zhang demonstrates flexibility in his teaching by taking up a topic offered by a student and pursuing it. He shows a strong interest in the students' contributions by engaging in a lengthy conversation and displays multiple identities. First, he shows a strong interest in literature, as he requests some information regarding science fiction (lines 3 and 5) and asks multiple follow-on questions (lines 12, 14 and 16). He also demonstrates his knowledge of literature, as he offers the name and nationality of the writer of the novel mentioned by the student (lines 18-21). In this conversation he displays a multilingual identity – someone who is able to offer linguistic resources to the students. For example, he asks the student, Luyu, to offer the Chinese translation of the book (line 14), which he confirms (line 16). Again, he offers the pronunciation of the name of the French writer (lines 20-21). A moment-by-moment analysis also suggests that he displays his professional identity as an effective teacher

when he takes up the student contribution to create a learning opportunity for the students, adopts various interactional strategies to enhance learner participation (lines 3, 5, 12, 14 and 16) and manages the classroom order (line 9).

## Discussion

The findings of this study reveal two major themes of teacher identity regarding novice teachers: developing practical pedagogical knowledge and engaging language-related practice. It is also evident that a number of 'situated identities' emerged as a result of the classroom conversation, such as that of multilingual speaker and that of literature lover (Zimmerman, 1998). The latter, a culturally- and socially-oriented identity in language classrooms has been rarely discussed. As the data suggest, these themes are inseparable and interwoven in novice teacher identity construction in classroom practice (e.g. Extract 4). In what follows, I will discuss these aspects separately.

Research in professional identity highlights the relational and fluid nature of the development of professional identity, which can be characterised as an ongoing process in which teachers engage in self-interpretation of who they are and become recognised as a particular type of person (Farrell, 2011; Gee, 2001; Leung, 2009). For novice teachers, constructing professional identity can be interpreted as a journey of developing pedagogical knowledge in their contexts. In recent identity research, there is strong evidence to indicate that knowledge can be seen as a matter of identity; as Beijaard et al. (2004) argued, identity formation is 'a process of practical knowledge-building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant to teaching' (p. 123). The findings of this study strongly resonate the earlier research, highlighting the significance of personal practical pedagogical knowledge negotiation and development in novice teachers' identity work.

In this study, all the teachers focused on getting students involved and engaged through interactive tasks. Learning is viewed by the teachers as the active use of the language, which advocates learner participation, engagement and the co-construction of knowledge. In the literature, beginning teachers are often compared with immigrants who enter a new environment and culture, indicating the potential challenges and conflicts in beliefs and self-understanding (Sabar, 2004). However, in this study, we can see that novice teachers also demonstrate flexibility in taking control of the class and creating learning opportunities when unexpected events emerge (e.g. Extract 1 and 4). This flexibility is one of the features of expertise (Li, 2017), suggesting that novice teachers can confidently improvise according to their teaching principles, very often unconsciously. Such an identity cannot be easily observed outside the classroom, endorsing the significance of researching teacher identity through classroom discourse.

Concerning language-related identity, teachers are coming under increasing pressure to use English in many EFL contexts, which perhaps explains the negative attitudes towards using L1 and non-native speakerness as a deficit. Nevertheless, Motha et al. (2012) argued that we should pay more attention to 'translinguistic identity', particularly examining a broader range of linguistic concepts and experiential interpretive frames that bilingual teachers use in enhancing learning. The findings of this study echo this view, highlighting the significance of L1 in facilitating learning, as L1 can be a valuable resource to create pedagogical space in homogenous contexts where both teachers and students share the same L1 and the target language. In addition, the engagement in translanguaging practice and multilingual practice evidenced in the extracts suggests that language teachers have 'moved away from a view of language as separate, bounded entities to a view of communication in which language users employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best they can' (Blackledge & Creese,

2015, p. 21). In this study, the teachers are able to use translanguaging practice to enable and facilitate learning for their students, focusing not only on linguistic but also cultural knowledge, and to develop flexibility in using their entire linguistic repertoire (García & Li Wei, 2014). Here, I would argue that teachers should be encouraged to utilise translanguaging practices as a pedagogical scaffolding tool, a method for encouraging student participation and interaction, a mediational tool and a way to improve learning strategy. As such, teachers can 'engage students in a social and creative learning environment' and 'aid learners to gain a resourceful mediational tool to develop higher mental understandings' (Li, 2020, p. 292).

The findings also suggest that a number of situated identity roles emerged in the classroom interaction, which can be considered as additional resources that teachers can utilise in engaging and motivating learners, as well as facilitating learning. Situated identity has strong social characteristics, particularly emphasising the individuals' awareness of the possession of characteristics of different roles they perform apart from their professor identity. In this data, we see the male teacher Zhang displaying different social identities other than that of an English language teacher, for example, a multilingual speaker and a literature lover. Social identity has been given little attention in teacher identity work, yet it is a significant part of social and cultural presence in the classroom. The social roles that teachers display in teaching help to define who they are beyond their subject knowledge, and contribute to the multidimensional relationship they have with their students. For example, when Zhang positions himself as a literature lover, he sees his students as more than just students who are learning English to pass the exam or achieve high linguistic and communication skills. It could be said the more varied identities a teacher possesses, the more possibilities they create for the classroom dynamics.

This study also suggests there is an important relationship between classroom talk and teacher identity, a relationship which needs to be understood by both researchers and teachers in order to maximise opportunities for enhancing effective pedagogy and creating learning opportunities. As we understand it, how teachers position themselves influences the pedagogical decisions they make in teaching, as well as the degree of student participation and the learners' positioning. Equally important is that understanding teacher identity work means space is created to study teacher cognition, emotion and motivation in their professional contexts; thus, further learning opportunities can be created by teachers themselves and others to enable them to become more powerful in their work. Moreover, the interaction between the teacher and students suggests that this together with the classroom context are critical for teachers to develop their understanding of who they are and what counts as effective pedagogy.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has sought to explore how novice EFL teachers are positioned in the interactional work they do in teaching. As we can see from the findings, identity construction is not a matter of selecting appropriate social roles from a wide range of choices; rather, it is a process of building personal practical knowledge, utilising linguistic resources and performing social roles. The multidimensional identity construction discussed earlier suggests that there is a close relationship between teacher knowledge, linguistic competence and social roles and identity. The study revealed significant implications for improving effective pedagogy and enhancing teacher learning.

Pedagogy is about how teachers teach and 'it is very personal and contextualised and closely related to the teacher's learning and teaching experience' (Li, 2017, p. 109). Research evidence shows that a strong identity is connected to a sense of efficacy in the classroom (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). For novice teachers, self-representation is not purely about establishing and negotiating professional images; it is a process of searching for appropriate pedagogical

knowledge and developing expertise through constructing and deconstructing their understanding of pedagogy, teaching environment, students and the professional community. The social, cultural and educational context exerts a strong influence on what it means to be a good language teacher. The appropriate pedagogy derived from their learning and teaching experience, therefore, shapes what they value in their professional practice, namely, the classroom practice and interactions with students and peer teachers. What is crucial, therefore, is to enable teachers to take charge of the development of their pedagogy in the local context.

Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) revealed in her study that two teachers who had the same teacher education presented different identities, suggesting that teacher education is not merely a question of introducing new ideas and concepts but enabling the deconstruction and reconstruction of lay theories in teaching. I would echo this view here: that the purpose of studying teacher identity and belief is to empower teachers to realise what they are and what they would like to be and to enable them to critically and actively engage in understanding the self in the process of change. Therefore, for any teacher education programme, it is important to build teachers' awareness of identity and beliefs, by encouraging students to reflect on their learning experience and contextualising what they have learnt in their imagined community. For in-service teachers, a useful way forward may be to encourage them to engage in action research and collaborative dialogue (Li, 2017), where they can take personal and collective responsibility and ownership of developing knowledge of professional value. Many also recommend a mentoring scheme to give teachers support (Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2011), which might serve as catalyst for teachers to transform or reposition themselves, and to take agentic action. However, a warning should be made here regarding the degree to which a mentoring scheme can enable the development of an agentic (cf. Polkingthorne, 1996) professional identity (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Indeed, when there is a belief clash between the novice and expert or lack of mutual understanding of the purpose of the mentoring, it could have a negative impact on novice teachers, such as developing a potential identity crisis or, in some cases, demoralising the teacher (Li, 2017). Admittedly, there is no perfect solution, and it is essentially the teachers' responsibly to engage in an ongoing negotiation to reposition themselves. Thus, enhancing teachers' realisation of individuality and differences is equally important as raising their awareness of their beliefs and understanding. When teachers feel ready to face the challenges and difficulties, the process of negotiation and repositioning will empower them to be confident with their actions.

With regard to the social and cultural aspects, Johnson (2006) argues the importance of social activities in the development of higher cognitive entities and human learning, claiming 'one must look at the social activities that the individual engages in and see how they reappear as mental activities in the individual' (p. 237). Considering these findings, I concur with this view and would argue that the complexity of teacher identity needs to be considered and studied in a social activity in their professional context, particularly from a discursive perspective which makes teachers' identity visible. Future research could aim for a wider coverage of social interaction, for example, team lesson planning or peer talk.

To conclude, the present study cast some light on teacher identity through applied conversation analysis. The implications discussed above suggests that researching classroom interaction is a valid method to enable teachers to develop. When it comes to teacher growth, years of experience do not naturally lead to expertise but that it requires 'deliberate practice' by teachers (Li, 2017). Therefore, raising teachers' awareness of their linguistic identity and the potentials of multilingual competence is critical in helping teachers to develop towards expertise and achieving effective pedagogy.

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**Appendix A****Transcription conventions**

Adapted from Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008)

(1.8)	Numbers enclosed in parentheses indicate a pause. The number represents the number of seconds of duration of the pause, to one decimal place.
(.)	A pause of less than 0.2 seconds.
=	An equal sign is used to show that there is no time lapse between the portions connected by the equal signs. This is used where a second speaker begins their utterance just at the moment when the first speaker finishes.
[]	Brackets around portions of utterances show that those portions overlap with a portion of another speaker's utterance.
((looking))	a description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity.
an-	A dash indicates an abrupt cut off, where the speaker stopped speaking suddenly.
sou::nd	A colon after a vowel or a word is used to show that the sound is extended. The number of colons shows the length of the extension.
?	A question mark indicates a rising intonation.
yes/yes	Multiple speakers speak at the same time
CAPS	Capital letters indicate that the speaker spoke the capitalised portion of the utterance at a higher volume than the speakers' normal volume.
↑↓	Up or down arrows are used to indicate that there is sharply rising or falling intonation. The arrow is placed just before the syllable in which the change in intonation occurs.
>word<	'less than' sign indicate that the talk was noticeably faster than the surrounding talk
<u>Under</u>	Underlines indicate speaker emphasis on the underlined portion of the word.
°would°	This indicates an utterance that is much softer than the normal speech of the speaker. This symbol will appear at the beginning and at the end of the utterance in question.
<i>Work</i>	translation
£Cmon£	Sterling signs are used to indicate a smiley or jokey voice.
/wɜ:k/	phonetic transcription

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