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Autonomy, Agency, and Identity in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Introduction

In the past decade, autonomy has become one hot topic in teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Research on autonomy aptly reflect the great challenges presented to language educators. Research in recent times has an unprecedented scope, covering aspects of language learning ranging from autonomy to agency and identity.

Challenges to theory and practice in any field emerge from change. In the field of EFL education, the most important change witnessed over the past decade has been the growing importance of understanding autonomy from the perspective of identity and agency. On the same note, the extent to which the changing landscape of EFL teaching and learning has prepared teachers for a wider acceptance of the idea of autonomy, agency, and identity has been acknowledged. Within this changing landscape, new conceptualizations of what it means to be “an EFL learner” or “an EFL teacher” and how to promote learners to foster change in EFL learning, along with teachers’ growing concerns about their own roles in EFL teaching, have become increasingly significant. The chapter organization of this book is to determine the challenges that these three aspects pose to EFL teaching and learning.

In recent years, the rise of globalization ideologies, the information age, and the knowledge-based economy have changed language educators’ views. At the same time, educational authorities have become much more receptive to issues related to autonomy, agency, and identity than they once were. In relation to this, the successful learner is conceptualized less as a person who is better at accumulating knowledge and skills in responding to instruction but more as a person who understands what a learner should do for enhanced learning. Concomitantly, learners’ agentive behaviors of communicating and collaborating with others in language learning tasks and responding creatively to new communities are also more highly valued as outcomes of educational processes than they once were. Therefore, the theory and practice of autonomy, agency, and identity receive more attention, including how these notions are related to and can be understood within a broader capacity for EFL teaching and learning.

This book could be described as an attempt to understand autonomy, agency, and identity based on theoretical understandings and research findings. Research

and practice are highly contextualized in nature; however, theory and practice are not regarded as a settled matter. In fact, the chapters provide a narrative of the process of research and practice. This book does not aim to provide clear-cut answers to clear-cut questions. Rather, debate encompassed in this book may lead to new contexts of engagement and deeper levels of knowledge. Hence, rather than offering solutions to the challenges that are currently faced in the field of EFL teaching and learning, this book's eight chapters synthesize theoretical conceptualizations of autonomy, agency, and identity, and present implications in the form of frameworks and warnings. The framework for connecting autonomy, agency, and identity can lead to a better understanding of challenges in EFL teaching and learning, while the warnings can provide guidance to overcome potential pitfalls encountered during the processes of research and practice.

Chapter 1, "Learner Autonomy: An Educational Goal of Teaching English as a Foreign Language," conceptualizes the importance of learner autonomy from different perspectives, including political development, social development, sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, metacognition, and motivation. Through presenting support and criticism of learner autonomy, one emphasis in EFL teaching is on the long-term development of autonomy through experiences accumulated in and beyond the classroom. This chapter concludes with reflections on autonomy, which may be conceptualized as an attribute of social individuals, existing not only in learners' capacity but also their context of interactions with others.

Chapter 2, "Teacher Autonomy: A Buzzword in Teaching English as a Foreign Language," conceptualizes teacher autonomy in the field of EFL teaching and highlights the value of supporting EFL teachers while raising their awareness of teacher autonomy. Increased interest in fostering autonomous learning and new forms of language support in out-of-class settings stimulate the change in emphasis on learner autonomy to a focus on teacher autonomy in foreign language education. However, teachers encounter constraints either due to their lack of personal experiences in developing teacher autonomy or from policy. This chapter is an attempt to respond to the limited discussions around the pressing need for fostering teacher autonomy.

Chapter 3, "Learner Identity in Foreign Language Education: Issues and Implications," conceptualizes what it means to be an EFL learner during the language learning process. This chapter presents the importance of learner identity in EFL learning and discusses how a positive identity motivates learners to facilitate learning effectiveness. However, as expected, learners fashion negative identities while learning English as a foreign language, which has an impact on their EFL learning behaviors. Development of EFL learners' identities is a complex process, influenced by at least five factors: asymmetric power relationship between teachers and students; cognitive awareness (awareness of a cognitive framework concerning goals, beliefs); learners' situated institution system and "hidden" conventional practices; learners' internal emerging sense of professional agency; and learners' willingness to invest in language learning.

Chapter 4, “Teacher Identity in Foreign Language Education: From the Perspective of Teacher Autonomy, Communities of Practice, and Affordances,” reviews teacher identity in EFL teaching in relation to key constructs of teacher autonomy, communities of practice, and affordances. This chapter also attempts to map out a possible interrelationship between teacher autonomy, teacher identity, communities of practice, and affordance. The interrelatedness between all four notions is complex, iterative, dynamic, interactive, and nonlinear. The development of teacher identity is a process of negotiation between individual and contextual factors. During this process of negotiation, teachers often encounter struggles that prevent the enactment of an ideal professional identity. This chapter poses the need to explore the ongoing process of teacher identity enactment, along with the individual and contextual factors related to teacher identity.

Chapter 5, “The Complexities of Learner Agency and Teacher Agency in Foreign Language Education,” is an attempt to understand learner and teacher agency following the continuous call for the enhancement of learners’ autonomous learning and teachers’ capacity for taking control of their teaching. The complex components related to learner and teacher agency pose challenges to language educators in helping teachers and students to become more effective in English language teaching and learning. Fostering agency involves several important factors: rehearsals over time, dissonance to the point of frustration, observations and approximations in field experiences, interactional spaces for critical reflection, and a forward-looking teacher belief.

Chapter 6, “Interrelationship of (Teacher) Autonomy, (Teacher) Identity, and (Teacher) Agency in Foreign Language Education,” specifically focuses on interrelationships between autonomy, agency, and identity. This chapter also presents a possible connection between teacher autonomy, teacher agency, and teacher identity. There is a need for a detailed conceptualization of how EFL teachers negotiate their professional identities, adopt their agentic behaviors for teaching, and respond to the constraints on autonomy in teaching.

Chapter 7, “To Be or Not to Be An ‘Old English Lecturer’: A Social Identity Theory Perspective,” explores identity development through the voices of six university EFL lecturers. This chapter points out the importance of emphasizing the identity development of lecturers, who play a pivotal part in the development of teaching, research, and teacher education. Lecturers discussed in this chapter are defined as holding an academic rank below associate professor. The emphasis of this chapter is on EFL lecturers who have taught English in universities for a long time but have not been promoted to associate professor due to fierce competition in the academic promotion system. This chapter is a response to a lack of systematic research into how university English lecturers engage in various aspects of their professional development, including teaching, research, and academic service. This chapter contributes to this field through synthesizing findings and understanding what challenges the longtime-service EFL lecturers may encounter, how they navigate challenges to enhance their teaching and research work, and how they respond to constraints in fostering changes to their work.

Chapter 8, “How EFL Students Learn English: From the Perspective of Identity Continuity and Identity Change,” is an attempt to understand three learners’ identity continuity and change during the process of EFL learning. The three cases, although similar in some respects, present different learning trajectories and negotiation processes of identity development. The findings highlight that EFL learners display identity continuity and change in the process of EFL learning, and their identity continuity and change positively and negatively impact their English learning and vice versa.

The three notions of autonomy, agency, and identity have not previously been developed in any sustained and critical way, as most related research focused primarily on autonomy. However, development of autonomy is related to individuals’ agency to initiate innovative pedagogies and the nature of the language learning experiences and how their identities as autonomous learners mature. The issues explored in this book are, therefore, considered to be of primary concern and in need of in-depth focus. The present publication is unique in that it further explores the three concepts and, where appropriate, focuses on the relationships between the three. The resultant contributions therefore represent a wide-ranging spectrum of perspectives, some learner-focused, some teacher-focused, and some strongly asserting that it is impossible to consider the one without the other. Chapters are based on a wealth of contexts, including classrooms, out-of-school settings, and a community of in-service university English lecturers. In addition, chapters are rooted in a range of diverse paradigms. This book approaches the three notions through theoretical frameworks and research findings. Throughout this book, what shines the most, however, are the experiences and voices of teachers and learners from the EFL context. The outcome is a rich and illuminating source of empirical data, and analysis of and theorizing on the issues, with a spotlight on EFL learning and teaching experiences. Although this book may not fully cover all aspects of autonomy, agency, and identity, it provides valuable theoretical and empirical insights into EFL teaching and learning. This book delivers interesting and stimulating reading and provokes further research, discussion, and reflection within our profession.

Chapter 1

Learner Autonomy: An Educational Goal of Teaching English as a Foreign Language



Abstract The last three decades have witnessed a substantial increase in the amount of attention and interest given to learner autonomy (LA) in foreign language education. LA has become the focus of a growing number of researchers, teachers and classroom practitioners. Likewise, changes in society have influenced the goals of English language education throughout the world. Concurrently, new insights into learning English related to language use and learning styles have greatly increased current interpretations of what the English-learning process involves. In addition, in the face of growing dissatisfaction with long-established examination-oriented education, the education system has begun to emphasize learner-centered methods and autonomous learning in recent years. This chapter critically summarizes various aspects of learner autonomy involved in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). However, the concept of learner autonomy developed in the field of language learning is complex and multifaceted. For EFL learners to be actively involved in the learning process, a teacher's responsibility is not to patiently wait for them to become active learners, but to show them how to become autonomous learners, and encourage them to be prepared to learn on their own.

Keywords Learner autonomy • Educational goal • English as a foreign language • Autonomous learners

Introduction

An increasing attention on learner autonomy (LA) in foreign language education has occurred over the past thirty years. A growing number of researchers, teachers and classroom practitioners have begun concentrating on LA. Likewise, changes in society at large have influenced foreign language education goals around the world. On the same note, language use, learning styles and other new insights into learning a foreign language have increased the demand for LA considerably. However, language learning takes a relatively long time, and a learner may not want to, or be

able to control his/her learning in a learning program for such a long duration. Likewise, for institutions, it means learning can take place without having a teacher/tutor/facilitator physically present in all instances of learning. Hence, certain concerns have been expressed by classroom practitioners toward whether individuals have the potential to take responsibilities for learning a foreign language.

Definitions of Learner Autonomy

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the theory and practice of autonomy has evolved considerably in response to the changing landscapes of foreign language education. In as much as the “language as a tool” viewpoint has gained recognition among linguistics, educators, and philosophers, the learner-centered approach has often been chosen as an alternative to conventional teacher-led classroom instructions. The concept of autonomy has a political and philosophical origin. Traced back to ancient Greece, the word “autonomy” consists of two parts: *autos* (self) and *nomos* (rule or law), which indicates a state that is self-ruled or self-governed (Boud, 1981). The idea of autonomy in learning is deeply rooted in both Western and Eastern thought, as evidenced in the following quotations:

You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself. (Galileo, 1564–1642)

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. (Lao Zi, 571 B.C.–471 B.C.)

Based on the above quotes, an autonomous learner seems to be a learner who pursues knowledge out of curiosity and needs. However, teachers gradually become the authority that learners go to as formal schooling becomes common. Teacher-centered language teaching and learning has become the established focus.

In the 1930s, colleagues John Dewey and William Kilpatrick launched a progressive movement in education. They proposed the need to heighten the opportunity for each student to transform their learning setting into one of sharing and caring. This movement paved the way for enhancing learner autonomy when learning a foreign language. However, the theoretical discussion of LA is far from consistent, coherent and systematic. Various terms concerning LA used by researchers include “self-instruction” (Hughes, 1997), “self-regulation” (Bown, 2009), “independent learning” (White, 2008), “self-access learning” (Reinders, 2000), and “self-directed learning” (Holec, 1996). It seems that learner autonomy is an elusive construct and difficult to delineate. As proposed by Little (1990), autonomy is “not a single, easily describable behavior” or a “steady state” (p. 7).

Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. He also listed the elements of learner autonomy as “determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques, monitoring the procedure of acquisitions, and evaluating what has been

acquired” (p. 3). His description appeared to center on the mechanics of day-to-day learning management. So far, this is the most widely cited definition.

Gathercole (1990) described autonomy as “when the learner is willing to and capable of taking charge of his own learning” (p. 16). ‘Independence’ plays an important role, which meant learners should have been able to choose their own goals as well as materials, resources, methods and tasks. Therefore, according to Gathercole, learner autonomy relates to the exploration of why, what and how learners are able to learn independently.

Little (1991) delineated learner autonomy as “having the capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action” (p. 4). Little (1994) further added “relatedness” to the concept of LA and stated that learner autonomy is “the product of interdependence rather than independence” (p. 435). Little (2009) also described LA as the ability of learners to “set their own agenda and follow it through, to feel competent in what they do and to be assured of their relatedness to other people” (p. 223).

Some definitions may be used interchangeably. For example, according to Hughes (1997), “self-instruction” involves an individual telling himself or herself to do something and then doing it. It focused on giving the learner the responsibility for instruction rather than relying upon a teacher or facilitator; thus, the responsibility for the instruction moved from the facilitator to the learner (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1999). White (2008) defined “independent learning” as “independence from the mediating presence of an instructor during the course of learning” (p. 4). This definition was comparable to the definition of “self-instruction” proposed by Hughes (1997). Furthermore, Holec (1996) stated that “learner autonomy” and “self-directed learning” were quite similar because in both cases, it was the learner who assumed responsibilities for his/her own learning. Although a variety of definitions have been proposed, one thing they have in common is the importance of learners’ active participation in learning. Put succinctly, learners are expected to take partial or total ownership of their learning processes (e.g., deciding on learning objectives, selecting learning methods and evaluating progress), which are traditionally assumed to be the role of the teacher (Littlewood, 1999). Therefore, an autonomous learner takes charge of self-planning, self-management, self-reflection and self-evaluation. However, Holec (1988) proposed that the autonomous learner was not automatically obliged to self-direct his learning either totally or even partially. The learner will make use of his ability to do this only if he wishes to and is permitted to do so by the social and psychological constraints to which he is subjected. Hence, three main components that determine autonomous learning can be identified as ability, desire and freedom. Ability refers to a learner’s skills and knowledge in two broad domains: Study and language. Desire refers to the intensity of a learner’s intention to learn a language or carry out a particular learning task initiated with a particular purpose. Freedom refers to the extent to which learners are allowed to control their learning, either by specific agents in the learning process or, more generally, by the learning situations in which they identify themselves.

In agreement with Holec's (1981) definition of autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), Benson (2011) stated that autonomy can be best defined as the "capacity to control one's own learning" (p. 58). This conception of autonomy has proved remarkably stable over the years (Benson, 2013). The difference between the two definitions lies in the use of the term "capacity" rather than "ability", and using "control", rather than "take charge". "Control" indicates the power to make choices and decisions and act on them. Benson (2011) proposed that the three dimensions of control over learning were learning management, cognitive processes and learning content. Learning management refers to day-to-day practices that make up language learning. Learning management includes control over where, when and how they learn a language. In this regard, having an adequate study plan is a relatively straightforward example of control over learning management. Although some students do not plan their study, they may manage their learning in other ways. For example, they may incorporate language study into their daily routines or regularly put themselves in situations where they need to use the target language. These are typical examples of learners controlling how, when and where they learn a language. Cognitive processing, to some extent, is probably the least-well-understood dimension of autonomy in language learning. Cognitive processing refers to control over how a language is learned, but in a cognitive, rather than behavioral, sense. Learning content covers what and how much of a language is learned. This aspect is connected to the "why" of language learning. As a foreign language is not a pre-defined or fixed body of knowledge, learners need to make decisions about what to learn. Therefore, control over learning content indicates a connection between what is learned and the learners' purposes.

According to Huang and Benson (2013), control was preferred largely because it linked the concept of autonomy to other areas of language learning theory that dealt with control. From a more traditional perspective, abilities related to planning, monitoring, and evaluating language learning were identified as being especially salient to autonomy (Holec, 1981). The term "capacity" is preferred because it specifies what a person has the potential to do, rather than a set of learning behaviors (Benson, 2011). A capacity to control learning also implies that a learner needs to make learning personally relevant. For example, learners will adjust their learning to bring it into line with needs and purposes that they have individually identified or have voluntarily agreed to identify with. The components of desire and freedom directly relate to learning something that has personal relevance. Moreover, control of learning management, cognitive processing and learning content are regarded as various ways of aligning the processes of learning a foreign language with personal needs and purposes. This alignment can be described as personal relevance which is linked to autonomy. Huang (2006) observed that, autonomy was "concerned with the expression and exploration of learners' own meanings and purposes, facilitated by a process of negotiation and mediation in an atmosphere of genuine dialogue and collegiality" (p. 39). This implies that personal relevance is linked to learner agenda and affordances. Learner agenda refers to "learners' goal-setting and action-planning to manage their own learning"

(Huang, 2006, p. 100). Littlewood (1999) argued that an individual's ability to establish personal agendas for learning was regarded as a characteristic of an autonomous learner. Learners who want to follow their own agendas rather than their teacher's must identify personal relevance when executing their own agendas. The capacity to establish a personal learning agenda is related to the idea of proactive autonomy, but not reactive autonomy (Littlewood, 1999). Proactive autonomy means learners can determine their learning objectives, select appropriate learning methods and techniques, and evaluate what they have learned. Reactive autonomy refers to learners that do not create their own directions. However, learners may be able to organize their resources autonomously for realizing their goals once a direction has been initiated. Affordances are "possibilities for action within an environment as perceived by the observer" (Gibson, 1979, as cited in Huang & Benson, 2013, p. 10). Learners who are able to establish personal agendas for learning are more likely to perceive affordances in their learning contexts. Different learners may perceive different possibilities for learning within a particular learning environment, and may find various opportunities to personalize their learning, set their own learning goals, deploy strategies, and seek various needed forms of support (Murray, 2011).

In conclusion, autonomy takes numerous forms and manifests itself through very different approaches (Little, 1991). In addition, autonomy is "complex, multidimensional, and variably manifested" (Benson, 2013, p. 840). Likewise, different definitions of autonomy may result in different descriptions of autonomy, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, where limited access to English language resources has traditionally been viewed as a hindrance for developing LA. The implications of the theory and practice of autonomy have yet to be fully examined, although in recent work, there has been a clear shift of emphasis away from encouraging learners to spend more time learning languages outside the classroom towards trying to understand the complexity of the world of autonomous language learning beyond the classroom (Benson & Reinders, 2011). As the understanding that this world is not strictly divided between *self-instruction* and *naturalistic learning* grows, understanding of the pedagogical processes involved in autonomous out-of-school language learning may also come to be revised. Learners' other attributes, including sociability, self-initiative, and an ability to create learning opportunities, are also factors in autonomous learning. In addition, there is a complex interplay between teachers' beliefs, institutional constraints, and classroom implementation, and this affects the development of LA and the provision of self-access facilities through which institutions have tried to foster autonomy (Wichayathian & Reinders, 2017). Based on the differing definitions and understandings of autonomy, Oxford (2003) claimed that the theoretical framework of learner autonomy in language learning was still far from coherent. However, taking a more positive position, key researchers in the field tended to agree on many important issues concerning learner autonomy, which are summarized as follows:

- Autonomy should be viewed from multiple perspectives, for example, technical, psychological, socio-cultural and political-critical perspectives (Benson, 1997; Oxford, 2003).
- Autonomy requires permission, knowledge, skills, and power to choose goals in life towards which autonomy can be meaningfully exercised (Winch, 2002).
- Autonomy occurs at a multidimensional capacity, which can take dissimilar forms for different persons, and in different contexts or at different times even for one individual (Benson, 2001, 2007; Little, 1991).
- Autonomy is a right belonging to learners and teachers (Benson, 2000).
- All truly educated people are autonomous. Autonomy is regarded as the second-order capacity of persons to reflect critically upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in the light of higher-order preferences and values (Morgan, 1996).
- Degrees of autonomy exist (Nunan, 1996; Sinclair, 2000).
- The development of autonomy implies collaboration and interdependence, rather than working in isolation (Little, 1996, 2000; Littlewood, 1999, 2002).
- The concept of autonomy can accommodate different interpretations and is universally appropriate (Benson, 2001; Little, 1999; Sinclair, 2000).
- Learner autonomy involves a learning environment in which students learn how to set priorities, decide when and where to study, and determine how to pace their learning (Teng & He, 2015).

Political Development and Autonomy

As previously noted, the concept of autonomy has a political origin and can be traced back to ancient Greece. As stated above, the word “autonomy” consists of two parts: “autos” (self) and “nomos” (rule or law). In this regard, autonomy indicates a state that is self-ruled or self-governed (Boud, 1981).

Autonomy plays a key role in political development in the twentieth century. After the Second World War, numerous minority rights movements (e.g., ethnic, feminist) came into existence. Education was used as an empowering tool to instill this awareness of freedom in people. This was reflected in Holec’s (1981) proposal that adult education should be an instrument which can be used for arousing an increasing sense of awareness and liberation, and, in some cases, for changing the environment itself. Some ideas related to political development were then changed. For example, man should no longer be the ‘product of his society’, but a ‘producer of his society’. An individual should be responsible for shaping his or her own life and that of others as a consequence. Therefore, education plays a key role in preparing learners for these responsibilities, which involves teaching them the skills essential to take control over their learning processes and content of learning. The ultimate purpose of education is “the betterment of society, and that critical

awareness and social action to promote emancipation are desirable results of any educational intervention” (Collins & Hammond, 1991, p. 13).

A later development of this thinking was the Language Awareness Movement (LAM). In the 1970s, Eric Hawkins, a modern linguist, presented the notion of Language Awareness (LA) in the UK school curriculum. It was regarded as a solution to certain problems in UK schools at that time. These problems included functional illiteracy in English, difficulty in learning foreign languages, and prejudices in the increasingly multicultural society. This movement was called the Language Awareness Movement. LAM began in the 70s and culminated in the 80s. At first, LAM was stifled because the national curriculum in 1988 did not specifically allow for LA to be formally taught. However, this did not mean that the LAM failed. Instead, LA has further developed since 1988, and the LAM has now grown beyond Europe into a global endeavor.

The resolution of this movement resulted from five components proposed by Donmall (1985). These included the work of some noted academics such as Carter, Doughty, Halliday, Hawkins, Perera, Sinclair, and Tinkel; the report of the Bullock Committee; the existence of the National Council for Language in Education (NCLE), which acted as a facilitating body; the existence of government funding for the NCLE; and finally, the willingness of teachers and academics to commit their time and energies. Sigleton (1992) reported on the LAM in Ireland and suggested that LA may one day become an important part of the Irish school curriculum. White, Maylath, Adams, and Couzijn (2000) proposed that the LAM has significantly influenced the teaching of languages in many countries, e.g., South Africa, Poland, Germany, the USA, Canada, and Greece. Overall, the LAM has had a considerable influence on the concept of learner autonomy.

Social Development and Autonomy

The demand for learning foreign languages sharply increases in tandem with the development of society. International trade, international collaboration, international political developments, and migratory movements all contribute to an increase in the teaching of foreign and second languages. In addition, in a globalized world characterized by international links and intercultural connections, linguistic skills are crucial for employment and careers. The knowledge of foreign languages increases job opportunities in many situations. Knowing a second language appears to be a real asset. These developments cause communicative skills to become a focus of teaching foreign languages. To be competitive on a global scale and to work in a culturally diverse environment, individuals need to possess strong communicative skills.

On the other hand, it is difficult to teach every student what he or she wants to know in a fast-changing society. Individuals need to learn specific skills to adapt to quickly-changing circumstances. A fixed body of knowledge, in this regard, should

not be continually transmitted onto students. As Crabbe (1993) proposed, one economic argument was that “society does not have the resources to provide the level of personal instruction needed by all its members in every area of learning. Therefore, individuals must be able to provide for their own learning needs ... if they are to acquire the knowledge and skill they want” (p. 443). In addition, students need to know how to learn in response to changes in society, and education today must provide relevant skills essential to this process. This view stimulated research into the training of LA (Holec, 1994).

Sociolinguistics and Autonomy

Sociolinguistics is connected to all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context as far as language is used and the effects of language use on society. Sociolinguistics provides a powerful instrument for interpreting the social networks in which language is embedded. A social network is another way of describing a particular speech community in terms of relations between individual members in the community. A network could be loose or tight depending on how members interact with each other (Wardhaugh, 2006).

Several points relate to autonomy can be surmised from the discipline of sociolinguistics. First, language is a tool for communication, and this takes place in a social context. Individuals use language to share, maintain, or change a certain social reality which they must first acknowledge. In order to do so, they need to acknowledge this social reality. Second, an individual’s uniqueness is emphasized because the social reality is allowed to be a part of classroom teaching and learning. Third, as social reality rapidly changes, teachers should not be expected to teach everything available about a language. Finally, learners become more important members of a classroom through language. Learners’ background should be considered when promoting and stimulating a meaningful learning environment.

Cognitive Psychology and Autonomy

Autonomy is closely related to cognitive psychology, which emphasizes learners’ mental processes (Wenden, 1997). The development of LA gains support from the notion that knowing and thinking develop through experiences. Cognitive approaches to communicative language teaching are based on the view that learning a language is an individual psychological act. From this perspective, language learners construct a mental mode toward a language system. This mental mode is not based on habit formation but innate cognitive knowledge that interacts with comprehensible, meaningful language. To accomplish this, an individual should be

given a central place in his or her own development. The theory of constructivism has a great influence on this development. It differs from positivist views, which see knowledge as an accurate reflection of objective reality that can be discovered and taught. Constructivism sees knowledge “as a reorganization and restructuring of experience that cannot be taught, because it is unique for every individual” (Reinders, 2000, p. 8). Huttunen (1986) proposed,

The teacher’s task is to guide the student in this development of the logical, psychological and ethical aspects of personal progress towards autonomy, to find ways of enriching, balancing and clarifying the student’s experience, to guide him to seek new experiences to structure and simplify experiences when needed, and to find ways of connecting the student’s experiences with the diverse ways of life in his culture, including its heritage. (p. 19)

It is argued that, when learning is not perceived as meaningful by the learners, it is less likely to be incorporated into their internal schemes. Although knowledge can be learned and memorized, it may not automatically become part of the learners’ internal representation of the world. In this regard, Marton, Hounsell, and Entwistle (1997) made a distinction between “school knowledge” and “action knowledge” in that the latter became more internalized and could therefore also be applied outside school. This type of learning is linked to autonomous learning and possibly where the essence of autonomy lies. Learners need to compare new information with their existing knowledge, locate similarities and differences, and restructure a new knowledge system. Knowles (1975) also made a distinction between reactive and proactive learners. Proactive learners were likely to take charge of their learning processes. Reactive learners, on the other hand, would rather wait for external stimuli and assistance. Within this context, Dickinson (1992) stated there was convincing evidence that people who took the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learned more and learned better than people who sat at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). Proactive learners entered into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation.

Cognitive psychology has also provided insight into field-dependent learners and field-independent learners. According to Witkin, Moore, Goodenough, and Cox (1977), field-dependent learners are more effective in context, holistically and intuitively. They are especially sensitive to human relationships and interactions, seeing the forest more so than the trees, metaphorically. Field-independent learners are more effective when progressing step by step, sequentially beginning with analyzing facts and proceeding to ideas, and seeing the trees instead of the forests. The main characteristics of these two kinds of learners are presented in Table 1.1.

Distinctions between reactive or proactive and field dependent or independent learners portray examples of different learner styles. Learner styles are the manners in which learners gather, process, analyze and store information (Skehan, 1998). Consequently, different learners often learn in different ways. In this regard, an expert learner may employ different methods to gain achievement in their learning and therefore show a range of behaviors.

Table 1.1 Differences between field-dependent learners and field-independent learners

Field-dependent learners	Field-independent learners
Rely on surrounding perceptual field or context for information	Prefer to work independently
Experience a global environment by conforming to the prevailing context	Like to try new tasks without the teacher's help
Accept others' views before making a judgement	Display interest in concepts for their own sake
Seek approaches from authority figures through practice	Self-structure situations
Display a strong interest in people	Use hypothesis-testing approach to attain concepts
Perform better on essay and open-ended tests	Perform better in multiple choice and cloze tests

Attempts have also been made to locate strategies that expert learners apply. Learner strategy, according to Wenden's (1991) definition, referred to "mental steps or operations that learners use to learn a new language and to regulate their efforts to do so" (p. 19). Expert learners appeared to be aware of the strategies they used and why (Green & Oxford, 1995; Tragant & Victori, 2012). However, they were not able to effectively deploy many strategies (Ellis, 1994).

Armed with the above knowledge, it may be difficult for learners to identify one learning style or strategy that works better than others. This situation could be an argument for a greater role of learner-centeredness in language learning and also lends support to the importance of motivation in language learning. Motivation is defined as a constellation of effort to learn a language, desire to achieve a goal, and the positive attitude created from learning the language (Gardner, 2001). Motivation can be divided into two different theories known as intrinsic motivation (internal) and extrinsic motivation (external) (Dörnyei, Henry, & Muir, 2016). Intrinsic motivation is the desire to seek out new things and new challenges, to analyze one's capacity, and to observe and gain knowledge arises within a person (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This desire is driven by an interest in or enjoyment of the task itself and exists within the individual rather than relying on external pressures or a desire for reward. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is that a person performs an activity in order to attain a desired outcome (e.g., passing an examination) and is the opposite of intrinsic motivation (Bui, Teng, & Man, in press; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation comes from influences outside of the individual. Although intrinsic motivation is not necessarily better than extrinsic motivation, in many circumstances this is the case. An active learner relates learning content to their personal goals. Because active participation is a characteristic of learner autonomy, autonomous language learning is therefore linked to motivation. As proposed by Ushioda (1996), autonomous language learners were defined as motivated learners. Self-motivation implied taking charge of the affective dimension in that learning experience.

Therefore, the development of learner autonomy is determined to be linked to different strands of research in cognitive psychology. Consequently, focus needs to be directed toward many of these theories that have been directly applied to classroom practices.

Metacognition and Autonomy

Flavell (1970) was the first researcher to define the term “metacognition” and referred to it as awareness of the learning process. Later, Flavell (1979) described four metacognitive occurrences: Metacognitive knowledge, experiences, goals, and actions. Metacognitive knowledge refers to beliefs about one’s self as a learner. Metacognitive experiences consist of thoughts and feelings that coincide with cognitive tasks. Metacognitive goals cover the global and specific objectives of cognitive tasks. Finally, metacognitive actions are strategies utilized to achieve specified goals. Hacker, Dunlosky, and Graesser (1998) further conceptualized metacognition as comprising three aspects: thinking about what one knows (metacognitive knowledge), thinking about what one is currently doing (metacognitive skill) and thinking about one’s current cognitive or affective state (metacognitive experience).

One important observation is that beliefs and perceptions involved in metacognition are related to the extent of LA presents. This is because learners are required to make informed decisions about their learning. An autonomous learner may be more effective at taking charge of his or her own learning, and may be able to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. When attempting to perform these actions, they need to be metacognitively aware of this process. Therefore, measuring an individual’s metacognitive awareness potentially conveys how autonomous a learner is.

Nevertheless, different levels of metacognitive processing prevail. Hacker et al. (1998) described two kinds of metacognitive processing: Executive monitoring processes and executive regulation processes. Executive monitoring processes target the acquisition of information about the person’s thinking processes. During this process, individuals need to make decisions that help identify the task, check current progress of the learning, evaluate the progress and predict what the outcome will be. Executive regulation processes aim to regulate the course of one’s own thinking. During this process, an individual may make decisions that help allocate personal resources to the current task, determine the order of steps to be taken to complete the task, and set the intensity or the speed at which one should work at the task.

A relationship between metacognitive awareness and learning gains has likewise been observed. Students’ metacognitive awareness has also been well documented as significantly related to academic development (Goh & Taib, 2006; Rubin & McCoy, 2008; Teng, 2016; Veenman, Elshout, & Meijer, 1997). In addition, metacognitive awareness is essential to the development of learner autonomy

(Nguyen & Gu, 2013; Rubin, Chamot, Harris, & Anderson, 2007; Teng, 2018; Wenden, 1999). Regarding this relationship, Little (1997) specified,

Clearly, the development of explicit metalinguistic awareness is fundamental to our capacity for autonomy as language users. (p. 37)

Motivation and Autonomy

Motivation and autonomy are two closely and mutually related elements (Silva, 2002). Autonomous learners are often motivated learners and autonomy often leads to better, more effective work (Dickinson, 1995). According to previous research (Ushioda, 1996), an autonomous learner possesses a capacity for effective self-management of motivation, and often introduces a degree of motivation to the learning situation because without motivation there is no autonomy.

Gardner and Lambert's (1972) integrative and instrumental framework lay the foundation for the research of motivation. Since this, language teachers and researchers have acknowledged the importance of motivation in learning a foreign language. They proposed two types of motivation: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Integrative motivation signifies the learner's desire to identify with the target language, target culture and the people who speak that language. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, refers to the need to fulfill practical objectives, such as passing an exam, getting into college, fulfilling a language requirement, or gaining a reward in the form of a pleasant work assignment. Integrative motivation has been demonstrated as a strong impetus to successful foreign language education. However, these two kinds of motivations do not completely encompass the complex nature of motivation. In addition, student motivation does not remain constant over time and across contexts (Man, Bui, & Teng, 2018). For example, motivation often changes throughout the process of learning a foreign language. Learners who begin their study of a language with an instrumental motivation may, over time, develop a more integrative motivation. The opposite is also possible.

Dickinson (1995) suggested implementing cognitive motivation as a supplement to Gardner and Lambert's (1972) integrative and instrumental framework. In an attempt to encourage learners to take control of their learning, Dickinson proposed two theories: self-determination theory and attribution theory. Self-determination theory is based on a distinction between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. As stated above, intrinsic motivation signifies learners' interests in learning tasks and outcomes for their own sake while extrinsic motivation refers to learners' interests in completing tasks for rewards. According to this theory, the intrinsic motivation to engage in a behavior arises from within the individual because it is intrinsically rewarding. Extrinsic motivation causes learners to engage in a behavior to earn external rewards or avoid punishments. Previous research has shown that learners who are intrinsically motivated are better at discerning the goal of their learning and taking responsibility for the outcome (Brown, 2007; Griggs, 2010).

Attribution theory is linked to the concept of motivation. Attribution theory explains how people interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behavior (Weiner, 1986). Attribution theory assumes that individuals attempt to understand why people do what they do. An individual who attempts to understand why another person does something may attribute one or more causes to that behavior. Attribution includes a three-stage process: (1) behavior is observed, (2) behavior is determined to be intentionally performed, and (3) behavior is attributed to internal or external causes. Weiner identified several factors that may affect attributions for achievement, for example, ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Attributions are classified into three dimensions: locus of control, stability, and controllability. The locus of control dimension has two poles: internal versus external locus of control. The stability dimension indicates whether causes have changed over time or not (e.g., ability is classified as a stable, internal cause while effort is defined as an unstable and internal cause). Controllability distinguishes causes one can control (e.g., skill or efficacy) from causes one cannot control (e.g., aptitude, disposition, mood, others' actions, and luck). For learners with higher ratings of self-esteem and with higher school performance, success is attributed to internal, stable, and uncontrollable factors (e.g., ability). Failure, on the other hand, is attributed to internal, unstable, controllable factors (e.g., effort), or external, uncontrollable factors (e.g., task difficulty). For example, students who experience difficulties in reading perceive themselves as lacking in reading ability (a stable, uncontrollable factor) in reading. This self-perception of reading ability reflects learners' reasoning for success or failure of reading (He & Teng, 2015).

Attribution theory has also been adopted to explain the differences in motivation between high and low achievers. For example, high achievers will approach rather than avoid tasks because they regard success as one aspect related to ability that they are confident about. If they succeed, it will help build their pride and confidence. Even if they fail, they will not believe they are less competent or that the failure was their fault. Failure, they believe, is due to bad luck or a poor exam. Due to this understanding, failure will not affect their confidence and self-esteem. However, low achievers avoid relevant success-related chores because they are more likely to doubt their ability. They attribute success to luck or other factors beyond their control. Even if they succeed, they will not take responsibility for this, and it will not increase their pride and confidence.

Motivation and autonomy have been established to be directly and mutually related (*ibid.*). According to Usuki (2003), learner autonomy was defined as "learners' internal attitudes for self-motivation" (p. 11). Hence, the key to foster learner autonomy was found to be connected to the learners' internalization of their beliefs and attitudes toward taking control of their own learning. Therefore, a link between motivation and learner autonomy has been recognized. As noted by Ushioda (1996), in the age of learner-centeredness in education and learner autonomy, the focus of educators no longer seemed to be how to motivate learners, but how to help learners to motivate themselves. Therefore, motivation was regarded as playing a significant role in fostering successful autonomous learning.

Advocates of Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy has been perceived as learners' ability to make reflective, rational, conscious and worthwhile decisions in their learning process, and has been considered as a desired education goal by many researchers (Jacobs, Renandya, & Power, 2016; Morgan, 1996; Tatzl, 2016; Winch, 2002). Dearden (1972) described autonomy as the degree to which an individual is able to reflect upon his or her desires, wishes, and thoughts, make decisions on their own and take responsibility for oneself.

There is overwhelming consensus among researchers on the benefits of learner autonomy when learning a foreign language. Numerous studies have been conducted to explore autonomy in Asian contexts and several of them explored the potential of autonomy for language teaching in Hong Kong (Chan, Spratt, & Humphreys, 2002), Japan (Aoki & Smith, 1999; Ogawa, 2012), Mainland China (Gao, 2010; Huang, 2013; Teng & He, 2015), Thailand (Rungwaraphong, 2012), or Vietnam (Nguyen, 2009). Even though different types of autonomy were demonstrated in these studies, the role of autonomy in developing learner-oriented outcomes remains an indispensable goal in various educational settings.

Criticism of Learner Autonomy

While strong support for LA has continued, criticisms have emerged. Some educational philosophers valued autonomy but argued against some of its aspects. Some researchers argued that autonomy is of limited value and that other elements, e.g., wants, feelings, emotions, and interdependence, should be included (Cuypers, 1992; Norman, 1994; Stone, 1990).

In addition, Hand (2006) strongly argued against the role of autonomy in education. In contrast to Dearden's (1972) account of autonomy that a person is autonomous to the extent that he reasons about what he thinks and does, Hand (2006) proposed that autonomy should be a required feature of personhood. Therefore, autonomy should not be an educational goal. He referred to an autonomous person as an individual who is "free to determine her own actions" (p. 573). This is because the declaration of an autonomous person is not psychological but political. In this context, autonomy was defined in connection to others rather than in relation to an individual's dispositions and preferences. In line with this understanding, he proposed two senses of autonomy: Circumstantial autonomy and dispositional autonomy. Circumstantial autonomy indicates a freedom from any external conditions on the way an individual lives. This type of person is not imposed upon by external factors and is not compelled to follow others' instructions. This kind of autonomy is often considered desirable. However, Hand (2006) argued that LA cannot be taught or learned because it was the external conditions that restricted a person, not the internal character. Circumstantial autonomy should

serve as a political aim rather than an educational one. Dispositional autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the “inclination to determine one’s own actions” (p. 537). This is a worthwhile, teachable and learnable sort of autonomy because it is a quality of character of a learner who wants to depend on his own judgment, to have a free mind, and to do things at his own disposition. However, Hand (2006) argued that dispositional autonomy should not be established as an educational aim because the effect of cultivating dispositional autonomy in pupils would to simply make their lives more difficult in situations requiring heteronomous action. He suggested two reasons for his argument. First, since other people often have an expertise which one person is short of, it would be beneficial for him to follow others’ directions. Second, other people possess more authority to make effective decisions. It would then be reasonable to abide by their instructions.

Reflections on Learner Autonomy

Immediate conclusions can be drawn from the LA typology described in this chapter. First, the concept of LA originated from Europe (Dam, 1995; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991), and has been further researched and developed by researchers in many countries around the world. Second, numerous terms are used by different researchers to refer to an almost identical concept. This causes confusion within the field of LA. Third, learners of a foreign language tend to pay closer attention to the psychological aspects of LA. Moreover, emphasis is placed on learners’ abilities and the internal changes that they make in the learning process. Finally, LA is regarded as an educational goal in many parts of the world. Although some criticisms against LA have been voiced, some consensus on LA has also been reached, leading to the following statements:

Autonomy is a construct of capacity, which should not be inborn.

Autonomy consists of learners’ willingness to be responsible for their own learning.

Autonomy may be unstable and changeable.

Autonomy can occur both inside and beyond the classroom.

Autonomy has a social as well as an individual dimension.

Autonomy can be promoted if one has conscious awareness of the learning process.

However, the extent to which it is possible or desirable for learners to be involved in taking control of their learning varies from context to context. If learners are expected to learn anything on their own, they have to accomplish their learning for themselves and should be involved in their own learning. In an ideal learning-centered context, not only will learners need to make decisions about what to learn and how to learn, but they should be involved in the decision-making process. It appears that educators cannot transfer knowledge ready-made into their students’ minds (Özdemir, 2015). From this perspective, one major concern for teachers is how to shift from an instructional model (focus on teaching) to one

where learning is the major concern (focus on learning). A new paradigm for community colleges may need to be established, one which defines “colleges as learning institutions rather than teaching institutions” (Boggs, 1996, p. 25). Learners need institutional support to take control over the learning. For example, learners need to be trusted to develop their own potential and encouraged to choose both the way and direction of their learning. Learners also need meaningful control over what and how things are learned, plus how the learning outcome is measured. When learners lack institutional support, the chief agent becomes the learner. Thus, students need to be active discoverers and constructors of their own knowledge. However, teachers still play a significant role in promoting LA. In the teaching model proposed by Wagner and McCombs (1995), teachers decide for the learners what are required from outside the school by defining characteristics of instruction, curriculum, assessment, and management to achieve desired learning outcomes. Teachers in the traditional teaching model focus too much on the process or ways of teaching and concentrate less on what is learned or how it is learned. Learning can occur without teaching and that teaching does not ensure learning. There is a need to pay attention to the factors related to teaching and learning. If teachers design classes according to students’ needs and interests and establish positive, constructive rapport with students, the students will be more engaged and involved. Teachers’ roles are to provide guidance to students for monitoring and assessing their own progress. In addition, teachers should be flexible according to their students’ needs or tendencies. I suggest that teachers should not simply offer instruction and evaluation but instead produce learning as an outcome. It is crucial for teachers to create ways to raise their learners’ interest and motivation, provide enjoyment and relaxation and make the lessons not only effective but also fun.

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Chapter 2

Teacher Autonomy: A Buzzword in Teaching English as a Foreign Language



Abstract In the last few decades, the pendulum of foreign language education has swung dramatically from an emphasis on teaching method to a focus on the learner (Lawson in *Educ 3-13* 32:3–18, 2004). This shift of emphasis attached greater importance to the learner-centered model of learning, which has become an emerging issue. However, the swing of the pendulum, or the development of learner-centered models of language learning, suggested a reorientation of teacher roles to share the power with learners and to give them opportunities to take greater control over their learning (Benson & Huang in *DELTA: Revista de Documentação de Estudos em Lingüística Teórica e Aplicada* 24:421–439, 2008). This reorientation of classroom roles may facilitate the development of teacher autonomy, or, in broader terms, teacher development. Teacher autonomy is a multifaceted concept. This chapter aims to clarify the various definitions of teacher autonomy which can provide insights into “teacher autonomy as self-directed professional development” (McGrath in *Learner autonomy, teacher autonomy: Future directions*. Pearson Education, Harlow, England, p. 100, 2000). Through reflections on the author’s teaching experiences, this chapter proposes the value of supporting EFL teachers in raising awareness of teacher autonomy. This chapter also suggests a need for future empirical research.

Keywords Teacher autonomy • Foreign language education • Learners’ roles
Teacher development

Introduction

Previous discussions on the development of teacher autonomy focused on the interplay between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy (Huang, 2007; Smith, 2000). In realizing autonomous language learning, learners’ awareness of being an autonomous learner is important. However, this does not mean that the role of teacher should be marginalized. Teachers traditionally expect to be viewed as authority figures. Teachers’ roles, in this perspective, include provider, nurturer,

devotee, instructor, director, manager, judge, leader, evaluator, controller, facilitator and mediator (Saban, Kocbeker, & Saban, 2007; Wan, Low, & Li, 2011). For example, Simonian and Robertson (2002) stated four primary responsibilities for the teacher as a facilitator: (1) create a space for reflective discourse; (2) provide the occasion for reflection; (3) guide the process; and (4) mediate between the classroom and the outside world. In addition, Scharle and Szabo (2000) proposed that when teachers adapt to the new roles and develop learners' responsibility and autonomy, they need to focus on the following aspects: motivation and self-confidence, monitoring and evaluation, self-evaluation, learning strategies, cooperation and group cohesion, sharing of responsibilities with the learners, consistent control, and delegation of tasks and decisions. Hence, as learner autonomy was defined as the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own learning (Benson, 2000), teacher autonomy was determined to involve teachers' capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching (Aoki, 2002).

One issue of teacher autonomy that has emerged is learners' need for assistance along the way if they are to take more control over their learning, particularly if their previous experience has been overwhelmingly teacher-directed. Teacher education program needs to provide teachers with opportunities to experience autonomy-oriented learning in order to provide teachers with the capacity to support learner's autonomy (Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2010). Breen and Mann (1997) listed some important factors for facilitation of students' autonomous learning: (1) the attributes which the teacher can contribute to their relationship with their students; (2) self-awareness as a learner; (3) belief in each learner's capacity to learn and trust in each learner's capacity to assert their own autonomy; and (4) the desire to foster learner autonomy. Teachers need to help learners undergo a transformation in their beliefs as an autonomous learner. The role of the teachers is very important in supporting the development of their students' autonomous learning.

Therefore, teacher autonomy is essential to accommodate learners' authentic needs and wishes. Teacher autonomy has been recognized as a major dimension that affects the development of learner autonomy in foreign language education. As proposed by Benson (2011), learner autonomy must be enhanced before attempting to enhance teacher autonomy. In addition, teacher development was observed to be a self-reflective process, and dependent on teachers' personal awareness of the possibilities for change and of what influences the process (Head & Taylor, 1997), and on an appropriate balance of top-down coordination and teacher autonomy (Richard & Moore, 2016b). The development of teacher autonomy is an important aspect of teacher development. Teacher autonomy is a multifaceted concept. The various definitions of teacher autonomy need to be clarified, which can provide insights into "teacher autonomy as self-directed professional development" (McGrath, 2000, p. 100).

Conceptualization of Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy, along with learner autonomy, have been valued as an educational goal, despite sociopolitical pressures advocating standardization and hierarchy (Veugelaers, 2004). Definitions of teacher autonomy can be attributed to earlier studies. Several are listed as follows:

- Teachers are autonomous in having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis, and affective and cognitive control of the teaching process (Little, 1995).
- The autonomous teacher is one who has self-conscious awareness of why, when, where and how pedagogical skills can be acquired in teaching practice itself (Tort-Moloney, 1997).
- The autonomous teacher is one who is engaged in various investigative activities, e.g., asking questions which are useful in raising students' awareness of learning. In order to engage students in autonomous and effective reflection on their own learning, teachers need to constantly reflect on their own roles in the classroom and monitor the extent to which they constrain or scaffold students' thinking and behavior (Smith, 2003).
- Teacher autonomy is a continual process of inquiry into how teaching can best promote learners' autonomous learning (Barfield et al., 2002).

The above definitions reflect the most widely used notion of 'teacher autonomy' in educational settings. Teacher autonomy appears to be used in different ways and an autonomous teacher should be responsible for their teaching, exercise continuous reflection, take the highest degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and explore the freedom that this confers. Teacher autonomy can also be summarized as related to a multidimensional capacity, and inclusive of independent decision-making according to students' needs and interests, teachers' professional competence, self-regulation and freedom from externally imposed agendas. Teachers' willingness, motivation and confidence in making choices are important for achieving teacher autonomy.

Focusing on teachers' capacity to take control over their own learning of teaching, Smith (2000) suggested that teacher autonomy can be defined at least partially in terms of the teacher's autonomy as a learner, or more succinctly, teacher-learner autonomy. This shows that learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are interrelated. As proposed by Pineda and Frodden (2008), both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy emphasize the value of co-learning, self-direction, collaboration and democratic participation and reflect three principles of action: critical reflective inquiry, empowerment, and dialogue. In comparison to the definitions above, McGrath (2000) defined teacher autonomy in a more comprehensive way. He identified two different but related dimensions: Teacher autonomy as self-directed professional action or development, and teacher autonomy as freedom from control

by others. The two dimensions are mutually constitutive. To be self-directed, teachers required freedom from control by others, and to be free from control, teachers needed to be self-directed (Benson, 2011). Following McGrath's (2000) study, researchers continued to give attention to the multifaceted nature of teacher autonomy. If learner autonomy was defined as the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own learning, teacher autonomy, by analogy, can be defined as the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one's own teaching (ibid.). However, Aoki (2002) also stated the caveat to this definition, e.g., there was no indication that teacher autonomy has any relevance to teachers' capacity to support the development of the students' autonomous learning. To include all main aspects of teacher autonomy, definitions of teacher autonomy become complex. Researchers include characteristics of and reasons for teacher autonomy, relationships between learner and teacher autonomy, as well as ways of developing teacher autonomy (Benson, 2007). Smith (2003) proposed the multidimensional nature of teacher autonomy. Its main contribution to the theory of teacher autonomy lay in its differentiation of two independent but interrelated domains of teacher autonomy: Domain of teaching and domain of teacher-learning. These domains broadened the concept of teacher autonomy to integrate teacher autonomy and teacher-learner autonomy. Building on the various definitions and interpretations concerning teacher autonomy presented above—especially Smith's catch-all model—Huang (2007) suggested that teacher autonomy can be defined as teachers' willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their own teaching and learning. This definition is close to Benson's (2011) argument for a concise definition of learner autonomy. The three terms "willingness", "capacity", and "freedom" roughly corresponded to the social motivational, technical-psychological, and critical-political dimensions of teacher autonomy. The two dimensions of "teaching" and "learning" correspond to the two interrelated domains of teachers' classroom life: Domain of teaching and domain of teacher-learning.

As a complex phenomenon, conceptualizing teacher autonomy can be difficult. In the process of achieving autonomy for teachers, many factors, including sociocultural elements, public spheres (educational policy, public opinion), organizational dynamics (institutional policy and relations), as well as personal factors (motivation, capacity and willingness for taking strenuous efforts for autonomy), need to be considered. Additional factors address whether teachers have the degree of freedom from control by the public spheres, capacity for autonomous pedagogy and degree of self-directedness regarding teaching matters in realizing teacher autonomy. This phenomenon is reflected in the following model (Fig. 2.1).

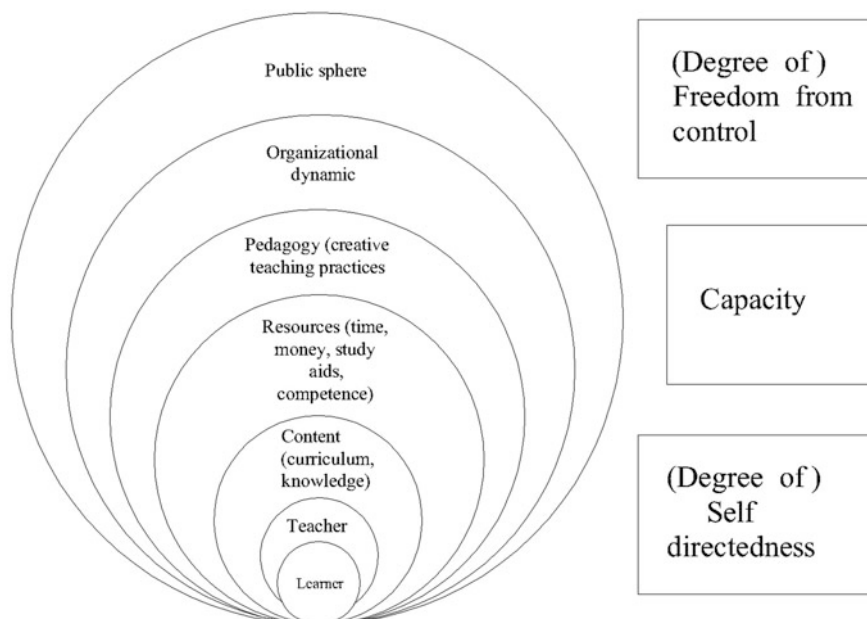


Fig. 2.1 Teacher autonomy in environmental context

Teachers' Roles in Enhancing Students' Autonomous Learning

In an early study (Dickinson, 1987), the role of teachers was described as a helper. Within this role, teachers should accept and care about their students as well as their problems, be willing to spend more time helping students, be supportive, encouraging and friendly, and regard the learner as an equal. Consequently, the learners would feel free to approach the teacher and can talk freely and easily with him/her in a warm and relaxed atmosphere. Aoki (1999) presented standards for a language teachers' capacity:

- Knowledge of benefits and drawbacks of learning a second language in general
- Knowledge of benefits and drawbacks of learning a particular language
- Knowledge of the nature of language and language learning
- Knowledge of which elements of the language need to be learned and to what extent for the purpose of one's study
- Knowledge of which language elements, if any, need to be learned, regardless of one's purpose, and to what extent
- Knowledge of the order in which these elements can be learned
- Knowledge of how much time it would normally take to learn a particular element
- Knowledge of how these elements can be learned

- Knowledge of how objectives can be set and study plans can be made
- Knowledge of the necessary resources and where they are available
- Knowledge of what kind of language learner one is and how one learns
- Knowledge of how the learning of a particular item can be evaluated as one learns and after one has learned
- Aoki (2002, p. 113) added the following standards later, as well:
- Knowledge that teachers can take control of their learning and have the right to do so
- Knowledge of how teachers' perceived needs and wishes are socially constructed
- Knowledge of how to facilitate learning
- Based on the nature of teacher capacity, Aoki (1999) also listed some key actions for teachers to practice:
 - Trusting students
 - Creating a psychologically safe learning environment
 - Providing choices
 - Leaving room for negotiation with learners
 - Allowing learners to have a voice
 - Providing information
 - Articulating the rationale of their decision made on behalf of learners so that those decisions are transparent to learners
 - Stimulating and supporting reflection on cognitive, affective and social aspects of learning.

Aoki (2002) further argued that a teacher's role in the development of autonomous learning can be defined as providing scaffolding where necessary and/or affective dispositions without impairing learners' feeling of being autonomous. Overall, these categories of teacher roles show the importance of encouraging learners to make choices and decisions, being a resource for teaching, facilitating the learning and negotiation process, and providing affective support.

Huang (2007) also mentioned six aspects of teacher roles, which are crucial to the development of learner autonomy: (1) bridging (gap-closing), (2) facilitation, (3) scaffolding, (4) negotiation and dialogue, (5) mediation, and (6) taking a critical political stance towards teaching. First, a pro-autonomy teacher should attend to the minute-by-minute classroom practice that indirectly fosters or discourages learner autonomy. In short, teachers should help bridge the gap between the public domain of learning and the private domain of learning, which roughly correspond to "classroom learning" and "out-of-class learning" (Benson, 2011). Another type of role that teachers play is to narrow down mismatches between learning and instruction (Huang, 2006). Second, the ideal role of a teacher should be as a facilitator, who provides support for learners. Types of support included, for example, helping learners to plan and carry out their independent language learning by means of needs analysis, facilitating learners to evaluate themselves, and guiding learners to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to implement the above (Voller, 1997).

Third, teachers can play a role in fostering learner autonomy (Aoki, 2002). Drawing on the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bruner's (1983) idea about scaffolding, McGrath (2000) discussed the relationship between teacher support and teacher challenge in promoting learner autonomy. Namely, teachers use scaffolding strategies to balance challenge and support to promote autonomy within and towards the borders of the Zone of Proximal Development. Using scaffolding strategies and gradually removing them is a concrete example of challenge and support in action, and is at the core of the process of learning and teaching. Fourth, Voller (1997) characterized teacher's role in autonomous language learning as one of negotiation about syllabus, both with learners and external authorities (i.e., representatives of the educational institution, and professionals from the discourse communities to which learners are trying to gain admittance). Negotiation in language learning is sometimes represented as a form of teacher-learner dialogue about learning in the classroom (Crabbe, 1993). Fifth, the development of learner autonomy was determined to be largely dependent on the extent to which constraints on the exercise of autonomy can be addressed and negotiated (Huang, 2006). Therefore, the teacher's role is to mediate between the learners' right to autonomy and these broader constraints that inhibit the exercise of this right by explaining and justifying these constraints to his or her learners. This line of argument for the teacher's mediating role in fostering learner and teacher autonomy was echoed or substantiated by other researchers (Lamb & Simpson, 2003; Vieira, 2003). Finally, drawing on critical theory, the aim in language education was observed to foster learner autonomy, and teachers should take a critical and transformational stance towards teaching and learning in the language classroom (Aoki, 2002; Benson, 2000; Smith, 2000). In addition, Lamb and Simpson (2003) argued that in order to facilitate a critical approach to learning, teachers need to experience political autonomy, or "teachers must feel in control of, or be able to take control of, what they are doing if their learners are to feel in control" (p. 61). Reviewed studies have raised the question of how teacher autonomy can be developed in EFL teaching and learning. Our assumption is that distinguishing between two types of autonomy-affecting actions—autonomy-enhancing and autonomy-suppressing—is significant towards this development.

Autonomy-Enhancing Support

A teacher is highly autonomy-supportive if the teacher receives support towards developing and realizing his/her personal goals and interests, or if the teacher's contribution and present actions to the realization of his/her personal goals and interests are understood. Assistance in the formulation and realization of personal goals and interests is likely to evoke positive feelings and positive behaviors within a teacher. This may contribute positive attitudes toward and engagement in teaching.

One approach to development of teacher autonomy is through action research. The benefits of action research on teacher autonomy have been widely discussed. For example, Hopkins (1993) proposed that conducting action research helps teachers to have more control of their professional and personal life while providing them with logic and method. In addition, Burns (1999) suggested that action research is beneficial for curriculum improvement. Through classroom action research, teachers can also self-develop their work and ideas and become a reflective practitioner through participating in action research processes. Teachers may figure out how to control, theorize and acquire knowledge rather than be subjugated by it. Teachers may use this knowledge to understand a concept and apply it in their professional development. Zeichner (2003) pointed out that action research helps school teachers to become more self-directive and proactive and enhance the skills in exploring knowledge. As they engage in more collegiate interaction with other teachers, they become more reflective and autonomous as teachers. As proposed by Pineda and Frodden (2008), action research helped teachers to reflect, conduct collaborative work and promote critical thinking. Likewise, Fandiño Parra (2008) stated that action research helps teachers to conduct critical reflection. Teachers are oriented to rigorous and systematic activities, which can open their own work to inspection and require them to construct valid accounts of their educational practices. This can also help students to deal with the emotional ups and downs of social interaction and language learning. The above-mentioned studies suggest that action research is an effective means for teaching, learning, reflection and self-actualization as a professional teacher. Overall, involving teachers in action research is useful for them to make a continuous connection between theory and practice, and help teachers to engage in professional development and exercise of autonomy.

Second, engaging teachers in reflecting on professional practices was observed as an important way for teachers to change their mind about aspects of their teaching and re-evaluate the benefits of certain practices (Pinter, 2007). Teachers should be supported to reflect on their practices effectively. Without an open attitude, a willingness to change, and in-depth reflection on professional practices, teachers may not be able to fully explore and extend their development. This suggests that reflection is linked to the development of self-confidence and empowerment for teachers to better understand their students' needs and interests. Critical reflection can develop teacher autonomy when teachers see new methodological and pedagogical opportunities for a new perspective. Teacher may also develop an appropriate expertise of their own.

Third, traditional curriculum involves a top-down approach with a focus on disseminating ideas through experts or teacher trainers. In this respect, teachers are left with no space to take their own initiative to solve problems. This calls for teacher collaboration, rather than a top-down dissemination of ideas. Teacher collaboration was found to be gaining more momentum, which may help teachers to encourage creativity, professionalism, exchange lesson ideas as part of professional development, and take charge of their own personal development (Pineda & Frodden, 2008). Although it was argued that there is a paradoxical relationship

between perceived autonomy and collaborative attitude (i.e., teacher autonomy was equated to independence and individual work and excluded collaboration between teachers) (Vangrieken et al., 2017), teacher autonomy is also considered as a notion related to collaboration. Teachers need to make choices related to their teaching based on both their own expertise and the help from peers.

Autonomy-Suppressing Constraints

A teacher's action is experienced as autonomy suppressing if the realization of the teacher's personal goals and interests are interfered with. Indeed, a teaching community that interferes with the realization of teachers' interests and goals is rather frustrating for teachers. In addition, the hindrance in the formulation and realization of personal goals and interests is likely to evoke negative feelings and behaviors within a teacher, which may affect their attitudes toward teaching.

Benson (2000) listed four categories of constraints (policy, institutional, conceptions of languages, and language teaching methodologies) on the development of English teachers' autonomy. Teachers have often found themselves in a difficult dilemma between their reflection and their expectations when encountering those restrictions, e.g., a strictly followed state curriculum, prescribed textbooks, and standardized tests and evaluations. Aoki (2002) also pointed out two more factors that affect teachers' freedom. One was the macro culture of the teaching environment. For example, lack of understanding among colleagues could be a serious hindrance to teachers' efforts. The other was the teachers' working conditions, wherein support to teachers' development was observed to be insufficient. In some teaching communities, teachers need to spend a significant amount of teaching hours per week, instruct a large number of students in a class, and handle a large amount of administrative work. This leaves little room for the teachers to support each learner's learning process.

Second, teachers often have their own agenda of development and some may not be willing to allow learner autonomy as they only believe in their way in teaching. Difficulties can occur when teachers do not hold autonomy as an important educational aim. Similarly, students who are accustomed to traditional teacher education are also likely to resist efforts at engaging them in taking control of their own learning. Some students depend heavily on teachers for transmission of the correct answers, wait to be told what to do, and reject being engaged in critical reflection. Thavenius (1999) argued that developing learner autonomy is a matter of changing teacher personality. One may ask if the nature of teacher-self enables teachers to support learner autonomy? Are teachers prepared to make moment-by-moment decisions according to the needs and wishes of each learner?

Third, some teacher education programs cannot provide a psychologically supportive environment for teachers' personal growth. Each teacher is in a different phase of personal development and goes through a psychological state where self-disclosure is painful or inappropriate. Maintaining a positive atmosphere and

waiting until each teacher feels ready to explore their private self is necessary for ensuring a good teacher education program.

Finally, finding an appropriate balance between top-down administrative control and the development of teacher autonomy has been considered challenging (Prichard & Moore, 2016a). In recent years, the tension between standardization and teacher autonomy has intensified. Although some institutions attempted to balance top-down controls and individual teacher autonomy (Pettigrew & Fenton, 2000), other schools were not willing to do this due to the organizational climate (Ylimaki, 2012) or the school administrators' personal philosophy and attitudes (e.g., Gonzalez & Firestone, 2013). Under this circumstance, teachers often felt pressured to mediate or maneuver around constraints on the development of autonomy (Benson, 2000), particularly in areas of curricular guidelines, material development, and classroom instruction.

Teacher Autonomy: What Do We Know?

There has been a growing body of research on teacher autonomy during the past decade, but research grounded in empirical evidence is still insufficient to pinpoint how teacher autonomy can be developed in both pre-service and in-service second language teacher education, in different socio-educational and cultural contexts. Teachers' roles are clearly important in developing a sense of autonomy and confidence, which are decisive factors as to why some teachers leave the profession. For example, when teachers possess a sense of autonomy and confidence, they may be successful in classroom teaching (Watters & Diezmann, 2015). Teacher autonomy may benefit teacher development and student learning. An empowered teacher could adapt the curriculum based on student needs and his or her own teaching style. Teacher autonomy may also improve teacher efficacy, which is a key predictor of learning outcomes (Caprara et al., 2006).

To develop teacher autonomy, a balance between administrative coordination and individual autonomy need to be identified. However, in practice, the challenges facing career-change professionals are often overlooked by administrators and colleagues. Teachers may lack opportunities to build a sense of relatedness in their new profession, thus they may not establish supportive relationships in an authentic teaching community. Moreover, Prichard and Moore (2016b) argued that administrator-teacher collaboration could be a substitute for top-down coordination and that teachers might accept a lack of teacher autonomy if they were involved in program-wide decision making. However, not every program offered opportunities for making decisions. This means a high degree of collaborative decision-making in some programs but a low degree in other programs (Brezicha, Bergmark, & Mitra, 2014). In addition, it was reported that some schools provided low levels of administrator-teacher collaboration (Thoonen et al., 2011). In some severe cases, when teachers lacked autonomy, they lacked feelings of professionalism. The sense

of powerlessness among teachers might lead to teacher anxiety and frustration (Mayer, Donaldson, LeChasseur, Welton, & Cobb, 2013).

Simply conceptualizing teacher autonomy as a teacher's right to freedom from control (Benson, 2000), a teacher's capacity to engage in self-directed teaching (Little, 1995), a teacher's capacity for self-directed teacher-learning (Smith, 2000), or as teacher's autonomy as learners (Smith, 2003) is not sufficient. Teacher autonomy is not a new proposition in educational research. The achievement of teacher autonomy should be understood as a critical reflection on teacher-learning, e.g., teachers' reflection on when, where, how and from what sources they should learn. In addition, teachers should reflect on the extent to which they constrain or scaffold their students' thinking and behavior, their role in classroom teaching, and how they approach understanding and advising students, and, ultimately, whether they are willing to innovate classroom activities. Teachers' engagement in reflective teacher-learning is a powerful method for constructing teacher autonomy, through which teachers strengthen their abilities and willingness to learn for themselves. This sense of teacher autonomy emerges when teachers strive to develop an appropriate expertise of their own, a capacity to monitor their own work, a willingness to validate their educational development, and an awareness to foster learner autonomy.

Teachers' exercise or rejection of autonomy in each domain cannot be easily predicted. One reason is that teacher autonomy is related to many factors which may hinder or favor teachers' desire to assume responsibility. Hence, teachers' perceived competence to exercise autonomy is important, and in realizing this, teachers need support from peers, school administrators, school culture, social organizations, and societal traditions. Bjork (2004) argued those teachers who did not receive necessary support to succeed were more likely to misinterpret the curricular guidelines and implement regulations in a superficial way. This also demonstrated that teacher autonomy involves "inter-dependence", or "relatedness" (Smith, 2003, p. 7). It appeared that not only peer support, but also training, support and professional guidance are necessary for teachers to exercise autonomy. Teachers cannot be isolated or separated. Teachers should be better understood in terms of freedom for taking professional actions, and discretion within limits, and educational policymakers, school administrators and teachers should acknowledge this condition.

Likewise, potential problems with teacher autonomy have been recognized. For example, when teachers' autonomy is eroded, negative consequences may occur (Evans, 2011). A simple and straightforward solution to increase teachers' autonomy has not been found. For example, some researchers even suggested teacher autonomy may lead to a situation in which teachers are abandoned in the classroom without direction (e.g., Pitt, 2010). In addition, some recommended that focusing on teacher autonomy in the classroom may undermine the professional status and expertise of teachers (e.g., Berry, 2012). As teaching quality is uneven, measures should be taken to improve the effectiveness of teachers and school instruction. Although many solutions to ineffective teaching have been proposed, greater

administrative oversight, increased educational and professional requirements for new teachers, and prepackaged or scripted curriculum materials are suggested (Gabryś-Barker, 2017). In this perspective, some teachers regarded teacher autonomy as not so necessary because they had limited time and space to exercise autonomy.

However, given no policy or curricula applied to all teachers can pertain to the countless needs of students, important decisions about teaching and educating should be left to teachers. If this were so, teacher autonomy would be an important dimension to teacher development due to the strong consensus that teacher autonomy is what learner autonomy depends on (Little, 1995). In addition, teachers' empowerment in exercising autonomy was determined to play a role in teacher motivation (Robertson & Jones, 2013) and teachers' job satisfaction (Hoyle & John, 1995). This role explained why educators have increasingly valued teacher autonomy, although there were sociopolitical pressures encouraging standardization and hierarchy (e.g., Veugelers, 2004). This trend suggested the great value of teacher autonomy and a need to raise teachers' awareness of teacher autonomy.

Reflections on Teacher Autonomy

I have taught college students for six years. To understand my performance in the classroom, I kept notes and reflections in a diary. Keeping memos for teaching performance and writing down ideas about my actions provided me with new perspectives. I kept teaching practices in mind and in journals to test them out later. Additionally, I attended sessions on introducing effective teaching strategies, tried out procedures that I'd kept notes on, took note of how I used them, and tested my own ideas regarding teaching practice. Following this, I realized how well procedures were working, my strengths and weaknesses while doing this, and finally established my own objectives for professional growth. Through this process, I discovered the importance of learning by doing, linking previous knowledge with new knowledge, learning through reflection and solving problems, and finally, the value of being empowered with teacher autonomy.

First, maintaining a collaborative dialogue with students is vital. This helps me better understand students' various needs. From this perspective, a teacher is not the only person who manages the information. He or she should be the one who listens to students' voices and ideas. Authority is shared between teacher and students and negotiations between the teacher and the students are open. Establishing a good rapport with students helped me discover students' real interests, develop and guide a project or curriculum that motivates students. Although some may argue that an institution may lose direction and control of what students learn in each phase when giving such freedom to the teacher, I found that collaboration helped me to better exercise autonomy in relation to the curriculum. This determination is in line with Gabriel, Peiria Day and Allington's (2011) statement that autonomy does not

equate to isolation or loss of direction, as teachers are encouraged to be innovative whilst a sense of collaboration is maintained.

Second, exercising autonomy does not imply isolation from the institution, but is connected to support and commitment within the educational community (Parker, 2015). This requires a collaborative relationship with the institution and care and support from the same. Experiencing empowerment to exercise autonomy in a collaborative atmosphere affected my role as a teacher and helped me to rethink my beliefs in terms of teaching and reflections on the teaching strategies. Examining advantages and disadvantages of teaching strategies motivated me to teach differently. Teaching is not equal to solely transferring knowledge, but to helping students understand how to search, locate, and learn knowledge as well. Cromwell (1986) suggested that teachers should be innovators rather than transmitters of knowledge if their goal is to develop students' critical thinking. I agree with this statement. Accomplishing this implies that teachers know their students very well. To be an autonomous teacher, transcending the original role of transmission of knowledge and becoming a facilitator of students' learning is crucial.

Third, collaboration with teacher peers is also valuable. A trusting collaboration requires mutual respect, a comfortable sharing of doubts, celebration of success, exchange of constructive feedback, commitment and free decisions. As advised by Lee and Anthony (2001), collegiality between teachers can help them to learn and try new strategies and gain more control of their classes and the learning process as a teacher. Mutual support between colleagues allowed me to realize that I was not alone in this new field of teaching, to open my mind to other perspectives, and to accept criticism that strengthened my qualities and overcame my weaknesses. Through negotiation about content, preparation of materials and selection of appropriate teaching and assessment procedures with teacher colleagues, I became more aware of my own teaching methods, developed new perspectives, and learned how to solve potential teaching problems. This process transformed me from a thoughtful teacher into a reflective teacher.

Finally, exercising autonomy in teaching has prompted me to consider the multiple contextual factors or constraints that a teacher may encounter when making decisions. Teacher autonomy, by nature, appears to be grounded within a complex situation. As Evans (2011) indicated, specific contexts must be accounted for when attempting teacher autonomy. In addition, because teacher autonomy involves a transformation from a traditional model of providing explicit guidelines and instructions to teachers to a constructivist model of sharing knowledge and practices, greater onus is placed on school learners, whose understanding of and support for individual teachers are essential. Teacher autonomy seems to entail a strategy of achieving compliance through internalized norms and controls. Hence, teacher autonomy, to some extent, may be regulated (Dale, 1982). Teacher autonomy likely exists in a vacuum of limited scope, while most teachers are perhaps even oblivious to it. Some teachers may even believe that the journey of teacher autonomy can progress through one's own determination, but to the contrary, the destination is set in stone. Having taught in a Chinese context where

Confucian heritage is highly valued, I recognize this status quo. A collegial relationship between teachers and school leaders will likely nurture a culture in which teachers' professional autonomy can be pursued and realized. Teacher autonomy is a hot topic which deserves more discussions in teaching English as a foreign language.

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Chapter 3

Learner Identity in Foreign Language Education: Research Nexus and Implications



Abstract Language is one of the most apparent symbols that indicate an individual's identity. However, the connection between identity and language learning seem to be overlooked somehow. In fact, a number of studies have revealed that identity could have impacts on language learning motivations, particularly in bilingual or multilingual society (e.g., Guo & Gu in *Int J Biling Educ Biling*, 2016; Sung in *J Asian Pac Commun*, 26:175–192, 2016). A positive sense of identity obtained through English learning may motivate EFL learners to practice their agencies, which could subsequently facilitate the efficiency and effectiveness of learning. This chapter reviews how learner identity determines their language learning effectiveness and outcomes.

Keywords Learner identity • Foreign language education • Motivation English learning

Introduction

Learning a foreign language refers to a holistic, socially and culturally situated process entailing construction, creation, development or modification of identity. This is a multi-layered process of making sense of oneself across time and contexts (Block, 2007). Identity has been recognized as a key driver for foreign language learning. Along with this, identity formation has become central concerns. In general, identity is an inherent dimension of human learning. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), human learning is an integral and indispensable aspect of social practice, and human learning is always linked to the construction of identities. Identity, in this scenario, implies a long-term and complex relationship between individuals and their participation in communities of practice. A community of practice (CoP), according to Lave and Wenger (1991), is a set of relationships among persons, activity, and world, over time, which bear a relationship with other tangential and overlapping CoP. Adopting a social constructionist perspective, identity construction is regarded as a dynamic, interactive,

discursively constructed, and contextually situated process (Block, 2007). In this regard, identity can be constructed, created, developed or modified, and this is related to an individual's knowledge, use of a foreign language, and a teacher's efforts and consciousness (Benson, 2011). Furthermore, the relationship between identity and learning is related to the development of the ideal self on the basis of two earlier theories: possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987). These theories are considered in Dörnyei's (2009) motivational Self-System model, which contains three components: the ideal self, the ought-to self, and the learning experience. The ideal self is the strongest component of this model and is described as an outstanding motivator. Concerted efforts need to be made to reduce the misalignment between the actual and ideal selves, with an aim of enabling learners to achieve self-actualization.

The research-worthiness of identity in the context of foreign language education has increased since Huang's (2013) findings on the subject. The findings revealed the potential of EFL students in China to extricate themselves from psychological constraints and go beyond the level of instrumental language skills to construct their self-identity. This gives a basis for rephrasing the question "who am I" in a range of discourse styles, which include selection or construction of a social role, self-perceptions of learning competencies, inner pursuits, etc. In this connection, context has an influence on the individuals' selection of selfhood. In the foreign language situation, the immediate learning context may play a dominant role in the formation or construction of learner identity. Hence, the sense of identity appears early on in life as EFL learners began to learn English. Beyond the basic need for a sense of control, what EFL learners may need to understand is a sense of identity, which may deeply drive their learning.

Definition of Learner Identity

Identity is defined as 'the self' (Taylor, 1989, p. 5). In a broader sense, identity is conceptualized as 'who we are' (Kanno, 2003, p. 3), or 'who one is' (Gao, Li, & Li, 2002, p. 95). It is an ongoing, multi-layered process involving questions such as "who am I" as a learner. Identity is also regarded as verbally enacted discursive products, which benefit social positioning (Teng, 2017a).

Several researchers attempt to define identity in the field of language education (e.g., Cummins, 2001; Norton, 2000). Norton (2000), for example, defined identity as how an individual understands his or her relationship to the society, how that relationship can be constructed across time and space, and how the individual figures out the potential possibilities for the future. Her studies are mainly connected with a context in which the interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers of the target language occur. She suggested that the issue of power relations between language learners and native speakers becomes the most salient. Her case studies also delineated how the life and work contexts of the persons had profound effects on their willingness and zeal to interact with members

of the target language community. Hence, the concept of identity at least includes two main issues—our sense of who we are and our relationship to the society (Kanno, 2003). Hawkins (2005) also touched upon how identity can be constructed in the field of language education. According to Hawkins, the process that identity is constructed is a continual negotiation between the persons and the society. Succinctly put, persons bring their own lived histories to events in situated environments, they then co-construct their views of themselves and the society through negotiations and interactions with others in these environments.

These interpretations also provide insights to the research of identity in the context of foreign language education. For example, the interpretations about identity discussed above (i.e., identity is multifaceted, contradictory, fragmented and elusive) are also relevant in researching the relationship between identity and foreign language education. The relevance of these interpretations increases in the current scenario, which reveals a growing interest in researching identity and foreign language learning. This scenario might have emerged from the growing emphasis on considering the individualism of EFL learners at the hub of intricate social networks. This scenario suggests a need to fill the gap in terms of the imbalanced research conducted in the second language and foreign language learning context. The research-worthiness of identity in a context of foreign language education has increased, particularly after (Gao et al., 2002) revealed that EFL students in China are able to extricate themselves from their psychological constraints and go beyond the level of instrumental language skills to construct their self-identity. Most importantly, foreign language learning may produce similar results like second language learning in identity construction. Therefore, the question of “who am I?” can be rephrased in a range of discourse styles, which include selection or construction of a social role (a reader, a speaker, or a writer), self-perceptions of learning competencies, inner pursuits, etc. In this connection, context of culture and context situation influence the individuals’ selection of selfhood. According to Halliday (1978), context of culture refers to a broader socio-cultural context and context of situation means an immediate learning context. In the foreign language situation, the latter one (immediate learning context) may play a dominant role in the formation or construction of learner identity. Hence, there is a need to understand the relationship between identity and foreign language education.

Learner Identity and Language Learning

Previous studies focused on exploring the relationship between identity and language learning have been largely limited to second language situations, typically immigrants in Western countries. Overall, studies conducted in second language, or immigration contexts, have concentrated on a number of issues that have far-reaching impacts on one’s sense of “who one is”. These issues, for example, include access to the social networks of their living communities, engagement in

activities of their target language communities, positioning in relations of power, negotiating in target language communities, participation in dominant discourses, and nonparticipation and resistance (e.g., Hawkins, 2005; Norton & Toohey, 2000). Existing studies also attempted to assess the influence of the immigrant community on the capacity of learners to construct new identities through new learnings (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). They provided rich insights into the interrelationship between language learning and the construction of personal identity. Additionally, they also pointed towards the multifaceted, contradictory, fragmented and elusive nature of identity, and also claimed that identity construction has values in learning.

However, one thing that bears in mind is that the two broad contexts (second language situation and foreign language situation) are different in many ways. For example, power relationships between native speakers and non-native speakers in second language situation is salient. This may not become a prominent issue in the foreign language situation because native speakers are seldom physically around to direct the access to the words of other individuals in communities of practice.

There are also some other notable studies conducted in the context of foreign language education (e.g., Lamb, 2011; Murray & Kojima, 2007). These studies highlight the reciprocal relationship between language learning and identity. Firstly, language learning has an impact on the development of learner identity. For example, Murray and Kojima (2007) adopted a life history research method (telling the story of a Japanese female adult learner of English and German), and explored the manner wherein learning a foreign language in an out-of-class setting can play an important role in evolving learners' identity. The study concluded that learners realize a sense of self when they learn a foreign language in their own cultural context. Additionally, a learner's experience as a language learner and speaker provides personal fulfillment, and this fulfillment strengthens the learner's identity. Identity, in this regard, is related to personal pursuit and fulfillment, and self-perception. Day (2002) documents that learner identities are shaped when learners are engaged in classroom activities or learn a language in socially shaped classrooms. Likewise, Toohey (2000) suggests that learners' identities are negotiated, constructed, and shaped while learning a language. Studies discussed above show that language learning is not purely a cognitive academic activity, but a socialization process in which learner identities are constructed.

In addition, learner identity has an impact on language learning. According to Norton (2000), a language learner is not a unitary and fixed personality, but an individual with a complex and changing identity, who constantly interacts with the society. The elusive and fragmentary nature of identity affects learners' investment in language learning. Hence, identity can negatively or positively impact language learning. Learners with a low sense of learner identity might show resistance to language learning or become a non-participant during the learning process. On the other hand, those with a high sense of learner identity might invest additional efforts in language learning. Hirst (2007) further added that a disconnect between the learners' desired learning community and actual learning community causes the learner to resist language learning.

The aforementioned philosophies and findings suggest the existence of an interrelationship between language learning and the construction of learner identity. As stated earlier, the nature of identity is multifaceted, contradictory, fragmented, elusive, and changing, and identity can be constructed, reconstructed, maintained, and negotiated to a significant extent. As pointed out by Phan (2008), identity contains “stability within changes or changes that take place along the lines of continuity” (p. 56). An exclusive focus on identity continuity or identity change would fail to create a complete picture of identity. We may still need to look deeper into the learner identity and foreign language learning.

Factors that Affect Learner Identity

EFL learners' identity is a complex process, which is negotiated and interacted over time with at least five factors: asymmetric power relationship between teachers and students; cognitive awareness (the awareness of a cognitive framework concerning goals, beliefs); learners' situated institution system and 'hidden' conventional practices; learners' internal emerging sense of professional agency; and learners' investment in identity.

First of all, asymmetric power relationship between teachers and students influences learners' negotiation of identities in relation to their conflicting emotions (Yuan & Lee, 2016). The unequal power relationship between student and teachers often leave learners vulnerable to a wide array of negative emotions (e.g., Bloomfield, 2010; Sert, 2006). In some cases, teachers may fear a loss of power and status in class, which may keep them from listening to the students' suggestions or trusting students' ability to learn. Teachers may also suppress learners' discontented mood and feelings without giving place to disputes, which in a way strengthened the learners' identities as 'obedient English learners' in the school. This could also be attributed to the fact that teachers usually exercise their authority over the students, and the students do not have the right to question the teachers. The asymmetric power relationship between teachers and students force learners to disguise their feelings in classrooms, which could produce a detrimental effect on the construction and development of learner identity.

Second, learners' level of cognitive awareness also impacts their identity formation. A higher level of cognitive awareness plays a vital role in the construction and development of learners' identity as well as their EFL learning. Additionally, an individual's ability to assimilate and accommodate cognitive processes is necessary to progress to the next stage (Allison & Huang, 2010). Assimilation is the process of fitting in new stimuli from the environment into a pre-existing mental schema. Conversely, accommodation refers to the utilization of new information for modifying pre-existing cognitive structures while facilitating developmental growth. However, learners who possess a lower level of cognitive awareness, a diffuse-avoidant type, are likely to be skeptical of their self-perception and resist confrontation on their identity conflicts.

Third, the situated institution system of learners and hidden conventional practices also impact identity development. An example could be the tightly organized, hierarchical, and collectivistic structure of the Chinese society that influences educational practices. Teachers in China mainly adopt a top-bottom method—teacher-centered, textbook-centered, grammar-translation method, and exam-oriented instructions. This could have contributed to the negative emotions of the learners. Some students may be unconfident in class and display non-participative traits, as they prefer listening to the teacher and avoid answering or asking questions. Classroom atmosphere, which is related to the institution system, can play an important role in learners' identity formation. The EFL classroom may not be a pleasant, effective and motivating learning environment. In addition to a non-conducive classroom atmosphere, students have to cope with external threats arising from school policy, organizational climate, and so on. In this context, the students may experience a dramatic loss of a sense of self as learners. In addition, pressures to achieve good examination grades, imposed by the institution, can also detach learners from a new learning community while leading to a concomitant loss of power and satisfaction. Closely related to the institution system are the hidden conventional English learning practices of learners, which also impact the realization of the ideal self (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Henry, 2015). For instance, some EFL students may display a strong sense of ought self, as they believe that they ought to possess the attributes of an English learner.

Learners' agency also mediates identity construction and development. The achievement of agency is always notified by past experience (Priestley & Biesta, 2013). Furthermore, the achievement of agency is always orientated towards the future in some combination of short-term and long-term objectives and values. Although learners' agency could be constrained by structural and material resources; responding positively to the external threats can help learners monitor and manage their own feelings and guide their thinking and actions. Although some students may experience doubt and frustration after entering university, their determined actions in embarking on the path of self-actualization or 'emotional intelligence' (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189) may help them monitor their own feelings and emotions. It may also steer their thinking and actions towards an appropriate future career selection. It implies that students who develop skills related to 'emotional intelligence' regulate and use emotion to stimulate adaptive behaviors. Although some students may comply with the surrounding contexts by concealing their emotions and following the teachers' requirement, they may find ways of adhering to their own beliefs and make mental commitments towards reflective and agentic learning. Employing 'tactical compliance' (Roberts & Graham, 2008, p. 1401) and 'agentic work' (Miller, 2010, p. 286), students may manage to inject positivity into their English learning process and regain their motivation and confidence. On the other hand, negative emotions and perfunctory attitudes, stemming from the strained relationship with the learning environment, may lead students to block the steps that exhibit agency. The school system and unproductive learning methods may isolate them from the learning environment, despite their strong willingness to try out new ideas to learn English.

This detachment from the learning community may finally repress their professional agency and obstruct the development of learner identity. Interestingly, given the negative influences from external threats and disillusioned emotions, some students may still actively project their future vision into another area and restore their proactiveness and determination. This led to the creation of an ‘imagined identity’ (Gao, 2012; Teng, 2017b). This transformation reflects the future-oriented traits of a learner’s agency and identity in transcending the present impediment and pursuing changes in the future (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Finally, an investment, based on Norton and Gao (2008), notifies the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice the language. An investment in the target language equals to an investment in learner’s own identity. Norton (2015) argues that if a community is the imagined or a desired community of the language learners, then it may offer an enhanced range of identity options in the future. Therefore, the community may also be, to some extent, a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted relationships. An imagined community, per se, assumes a new identity, and a learner’s investment in the target language may be perceived within this context. The social negotiation of identity influences identity construction, and coexists with individuals’ agency (Norton & Gao, 2008). Combined with previous research (e.g., Cummins, 2001; Reeves, 2009), a good interaction between the teacher and students may yield coercive or collaborative power and facilitate the development of learner identity. Successful English language teaching should include an appreciation of the institutional forces that contribute towards constraining or enabling learners’ investment, revealing the manner in which learners deploy a variety of knowledge, skills and understandings in support of this investment.

Reflections on Learner Identity and EFL Learning

Building on the various definitions and interpretations concerning identity discussed above, the nature of identity is concluded as multiple, changing, contradictory, elusive, and fragmentary; identity can be constructed, reconstructed, maintained, and negotiated to a significant extent; identity can be transformational and transformative; identity can be socially mediated.

Learner identity and EFL learning have been a hot topic. The structural learning contexts and learners’ conventional practices may considerably impact identity construction and reconstruction. EFL students may need emotional support, social acceptance, and the sense of belonging to a new learning community. An awareness of student’s needs, and consideration of identity development can deepen our existing knowledge on the complexities of learner identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011). In this context, a number of factors, such as emotions, achievements, conventions, skills, satisfaction, and frustration may be a direction for a unit of analysis. In addition, identity is multiple, and students may have overlapping goals and

desires at the same time when going through transitional phases (Bluck & Alea, 2008).

Identity is historically and socially formed, the development and construction of learner identity, whether or not the actual communities and identities are congruent with the imagined communities and identities, influence EFL learning. Therefore, constructing an imagined identity can promote a learner's engagement with language learning. In this regard, an understanding of students' needs and their imagined worlds is critical for developing appropriate curriculum or choosing English pedagogy tailored to students with diverse background, different language proficiency level, goals, and expectations.

The power issues inherent in the teacher-student relationship is an issue that needs to be considered in researching learner identity. It is important to build an open and democratic relationship between teacher and students for facilitating a smooth transitioning of learning from the old community to a new one. This kind of relationship will not only equip teachers with the right methods to teach but will also help teachers monitor the various emotional episodes their students encounter in school. This relationship may also lay foundation for initiating changes and reforms and may form a strong professional organizational climate in the school, which improves EFL teaching and learning. In this connection, teachers, administrators, curriculum designers and policy makers should be willing to create a platform that will make students' voices heard.

Finally, teachers may need to focus on issues that students face while adapting to a new learning community. Teachers equip students to monitor and reflect on their emotional flux and develop a strong identity. Students develop emotional intelligence to manage, mediate, control their emotions for accepting, modifying, or rejecting discourse practices embedded in a new learning community, and finally build a connection with this new learning community. To that end, teachers can model ways in which they coped with their emotions during their student life. In addition, some concrete strategies such as 'emotional diaries' (Zembylas, 2003), and 'emotional support' (Protheroe, 2007), can be applied for providing students with the opportunities to manage their own emotions.

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Chapter 4

Teacher Identity in Foreign Language Education: From the Perspective of Teacher Autonomy, Communities of Practice, and Affordances



Abstract This chapter reviews key constructs (e.g., communities of practice and affordances) related to the development of teacher identity in foreign language education. Definitions of teacher identity, teacher autonomy, communities of practice, and affordances are reviewed first. A possible interrelationship between those notions is also mapped out. Based on a scrutiny of those ideas, we propose that although teacher autonomy, teacher identity, and affordances are best treated as distinct concepts, the interrelatedness between them is complex, iterative, dynamic, interactive, and non-linear. The development of teacher identity is related to the contextual factors that promote or hinder the development of teacher autonomy and teachers' capacity in perceiving affordances in a community. The need to explore the community in which teachers are situated and their communities of practice is implied. Through the discussions presented in this chapter, we aim to arouse more discussions on teacher identity from the perspectives of communities of practice, and affordances.

Keywords Teacher autonomy • Teacher identity • Communities of practice
Affordances

Introduction

Recent literature has acknowledged the importance of identity in foreign language education (Chik, 2007; Gao, Cheng, Zhao, & Zhou, 2005; Huang & Benson, 2013; Teng, 2017a, b; Yuan & Lee, 2016). Clearly, teachers tend to undergo a shift in identity as they move through programs of teacher education, assume positions as novice teachers and develop into experienced teachers. This shift has become more evident along with the blossoming of the reform in foreign language education in China. Foreign language teachers, i.e., teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL), are expected to develop new perceptions regarding their roles and professional development. This may introduce different answers to the question “Who am I as an English teacher?” or “What does this identity mean in terms of the

way I teach?" In addition, identity shifts may occur as teachers enter the school communities of their practice with increasing challenges, complexity, and contradiction (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). Shifts in identity are an acknowledged part of becoming a teacher, for which teachers may question and perhaps reframe their developing identities (Roberts, 2000). Hence, identity is a complex issue, which requires a detailed examination of the literature discussed.

A review of recent literature suggests varying reasons for attending to identity. First, identity is regarded as an analytic lens through which key aspects of teaching are examined (Gee, 2000). Second, identity was found to be an important dimension in directing, explaining, justifying, and making sense of teachers' professional lives related to others, the community and the world at large (MacLure, 1993). Third, developing an identity as a teacher was revealed as an essential part of securing teachers' commitment to their work and adherence to professional norms (Hong, 2010). This shapes their dispositions, where they expend their efforts, whether and how they seek out professional development opportunities, and what obligations they view as intrinsic to their role (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

In our efforts to gain insight from the growing literature on teacher identity, we noticed that teacher identity has been explored from the following aspects: First, teacher identity is influenced by a wide range of personal, professional and contextual factors (Flores & Day, 2006; Pennington & Richards, 2016). Second, a variety of discourses teachers participate in and produce, for example, "identity-in-discourse" and "identity-in-practice" (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005), emerge as new issues related to teaching and teachers. Third, teachers find aspects important in their work based on their reflective practice, personal backgrounds, or narratives (Anspala, Eisenschmidt, & Löfström, 2012; Farrell, 2011). Fourth, the development of teachers' professional identity, including the way teachers teach, the way they develop as teachers, and their attitudes toward educational changes, is related to teachers' beliefs (Wu, Palmer, & Field, 2011), teachers' emotions (O'Connor, 2008), teachers' personal and professional selves (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006), and teachers' roles (Sexton, 2008). One common theme among the mentioned studies is that identity is not a static attribute of a teacher, but a dynamic, variable, and relational phenomenon that can be best characterized as an ongoing process. In addition, reaching a full understanding of the various aspects of identity and the ways in which they are related appears to be challenging.

However, a more complete understanding of teacher identity is essential to foreign language education and teacher development. Hence, readdressing identity as an important component in teacher development was found to be necessary (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In searching relevant literatures, several issues that are closely related to teacher identity include teacher autonomy, communities of practice, and affordances. Against this backdrop, there is a need to gain greater insight into this research area, and through this, contribute to a thorough understanding of what teacher identity entails in foreign language education. The purpose

of this chapter is to present an in-depth exploration of the notions (teacher autonomy, communities of practice, and affordances) as well as the interrelation between those notions and teacher identity.

Identity and Teacher Identity

Identity refers to the sense that an individual has of the self, including his/her self-image and self-awareness that can be captured in the stories shared by that person about himself/herself and how these are projected to and perceived by others (Richards, 2015). In exploring the range of issues related to identity, the formation of identity is an important dimension of growing and maturing as an individual and of defining one's position in a community (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Identity is multi-faceted, constantly evolving, and subject to change within a variety of contexts (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Identity has been determined to reflect individual characteristics (Chavez, 2007), yet is also subject to social context (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). In other words, identity was found as both a product and a process which result from the influences of various contexts on an individual (Olsen, 2008). This relationship may be as elucidated in Wenger's (1998) discussion on communities of practice, wherein an inextricable link between identity and practice in negotiating the self as a member of the communities of practice existed. Therefore, a close interrelationship was discovered between the self and the professional context (Alsup, 2006). This suggests the development of identity is related to personal values as well as contexts that may constrain certain types of behavior while allowing others to habituate possible forms of behavior (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). This relation may explain why some persons might create relatively stable features of identity when their existing patterns of thinking and behaving are reinforced during interactions with others. However, the negotiation of one's identity was determined as an ongoing process in a site of struggles (Varghese et al., 2005). Individuals may accept, downplay, challenge or reinforce the characteristics that are ascribed to them, which helps to explain why identity evolves constantly.

The review of literatures on identity provides insight into teacher identity, which was explained by Sachs (2005) as "how to be," "how to act," and "how to understand" their work (p. 15). In other words, teacher identity refers to what it means to be a teacher (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). A self-image, among other things, constitutes the teacher identity. Teacher identity can be defined as a social matter because the construction, reconstruction, and development of teacher identity are fundamentally a social process which occurs in various institutional settings, including pre-service teacher education programs and in-service teacher education. However, as proposed by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), owing to the three underlying characteristics of teacher identity—multiplicity, discontinuity, and social nature—conceptualizing teacher identity is difficult, particularly when it relates to how teacher identity influences their school work. These characteristics

infer that teacher identity is not fixed or stable, but rather it adjusts over time and according to settings. The development of teacher identity can also be described as a largely a non-linear process (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005). In this regard, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) called for a dialogical approach in exploring the complexity and dynamics of teacher identity, for example, through a micro-analysis in describing how a teacher responds to different school managers, students, and colleagues, and through a macro-analysis that explores teachers' current situations, prior experiences, future stories, and the social-cultural conditions. Teachers are no longer regarded as a sole entity in acquiring knowledge and teaching competencies, but rather as agents who need to take reflexive actions while making decisions in their teaching practice.

In defining teacher identity, researchers (e.g., Goodson & Cole, 1994) suggested the development of teacher identity is a process of integrating the "personal" and "professional" dimensions in becoming and acting as a teacher. They stated, "We consider teachers as persons and professionals whose lives and work are influenced and made meaningful by factors and conditions inside and outside the classroom and school" (p. 88). However, other researchers claimed that the development of teacher identity is not just related to the personal and professional dimensions of the individual voices, but also the collective discourses, which shape personal worlds and individual voices (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Therefore, understanding teacher identity should originate from the overall communities and teachers' experiences underwent in the communities. Sachs (2005) stated,

Teacher professional identity provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (p. 15)

Beijaard et al. (2004) also described the complex process of identity formation from teachers' knowledge perspective. They presented a process of practical knowledge-building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant to teaching. They illustrated an interactive process from quadrant 1 to quadrant 4, as detailed in Fig. 4.1.

From the reviewed studies, teacher identity was concluded to not be a stable or unitary entity but one that evolves along with the complex and dynamic social and educational discourses. Teacher identity involves the teacher being perceived as a teacher by himself or herself and by others. A teacher may build a professional self-image based on the roles they feel they should play. In light of these roles, there may be a tension between autonomy and identity, wherein development of autonomy relies on identity construction and identity construction can be a point of origin for autonomy (Huang, 2011). Research on teachers' professional identity formation is relevant to teachers' capacity for taking control of their teaching and learning. Both concepts seem strongly interwoven but have been individually highlighted by researchers.

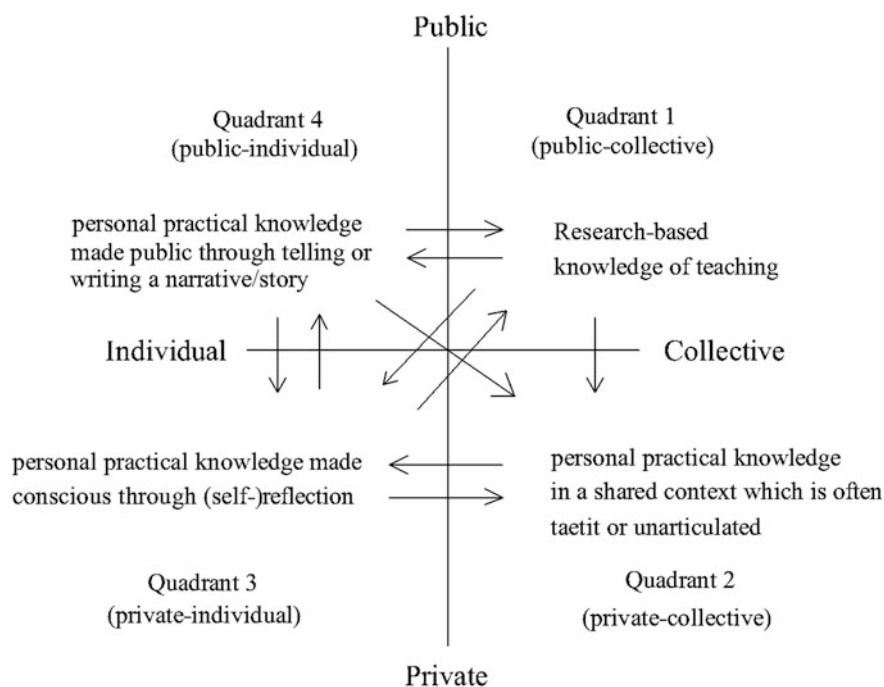


Fig. 4.1 Representation of identity formation from a teacher's knowledge perspective (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 124)

Autonomy and Teacher Autonomy

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the theory and practice of autonomy has evolved considerably in response to the changing landscape of foreign language education. As the view “language as a tool” gained recognition among linguistics experts, educators, and philosophers, the learner-centered approach has been opted for over the conventional teacher-led classroom instructions. The concept of autonomy has a political and philosophical origin. Tracing back to ancient Greece, the word autonomy consists of two parts: “autos” (self) and “nomos” (rule or law), and has been defined as a state that is self-ruled or self-governed (Boud, 1981). Holec (1981) described learner autonomy as “an ability to take charge of one’s own learning” and asserted that “the elements of learner autonomy include determining the objectives, defining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and techniques, monitoring the procedures of acquisitions, evaluating what has been acquired, arguably focused on the mechanics of day-to-day learning management” (p. 3). So far, this is the most widely cited definition. Based on Holec’s (1981) definition, Benson (2011) stated that autonomy can be best defined as “a capacity to control one’s own learning” (p. 58). The differences between the two definitions lie in the concept of “capacity” rather than “ability”, and the use of “control”, rather

than “take charge”. “Control” indicates having the power to make choices and decisions and acting on them. Benson (2011) proposed three dimensions of control over learning, which are learning management, cognitive processes and learning content. This concept of autonomy has proved remarkably stable over the years.

The conceptualization of autonomy is the basis for discussing teacher autonomy. As Little (1995) argued, a successful teacher is autonomous through their responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection, taking the highest degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploring the freedom that this confers. Huang (2007) defined teacher autonomy as “teachers’ willingness, capacity and freedom to take control of their own teaching and learning” (p. 33). Teacher autonomy has a positive impact on teacher development (Xu, 2015), and has been widely regarded as a notion related to empowered engagement of teachers in teaching practices, curriculum, and the institution, as well as a professional attribute pertaining to an autonomous search for potential opportunities for professional development in various teaching contexts, including even constrained ones (Benson & Huang, 2008; Dierking & Fox, 2013). To conceptualize teacher autonomy, three models have been posited:

- a. Engaged autonomy: An innovative but independent development for teachers while a sense of collaboration is retained, and shared expertise is respected (Parker, 2015). In this context, autonomy is not equal to isolation. In addition, a greater responsibility of school leaders is required as it involves a management strategy of achieving compliance through internalized norms, rules, and controls.
- b. Regulated autonomy: A setting where teachers can only exercise their autonomy in a vacuum of limited scope, with some teachers possibly in an oblivious status quo (Vansteenkiste et al., 2012). In other words, teachers in an autonomy-supportive setting equip students with a function of their personal interest, psychological freedom, and values, while teachers in an autonomy-regulated setting feel occupied and languid in fostering their personalized teaching practice (Reeve, 2009). Regulated autonomy is similar to the occupational autonomy discussed by Berry (2012), through which the journey of an autonomous teacher can be of one’s determination, although setbacks may hinder the ability to reach the destination.
- c. School autonomy: A model relates to individual teachers’ autonomy, indicating a need to examine the asymmetric power relationship between teachers and school learners.

In teacher autonomy research, teachers’ capacity to take control of their teaching and learning has been argued to be severely constrained by their working conditions, e.g., school rules, standardized curriculum, and educational policy (Benson, 2000). However, the constraints on teachers’ judgment and capacity to take control over their teaching tend to be mediated by their own agentic behavior, particularly of a strong self-belief. In addition, the positive or negative response to a diverted teaching context supports or prevents the construction of teacher identity and the

ongoing professional development (Song, 2016). A review of relevant literature revealed that exploring what affects the development of teacher autonomy and teacher identity is necessary. One of the roots of this development is the communities of practice.

Community and Communities of Practice

A community is described as “an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Learning occurs and develops within the social interactions situated in communities of practice (CoP) and through observing, experiencing, participating and belonging, the self and identity can be developed (Blanton & Stylianou, 2009). In other words, a community is the prerequisite for creating a social milieu for learning and offers opportunities for members to “negotiate competence through the experience of direct participation” (Wenger, 2000, p. 229). Through this environment, identities were (re-)constructed through learning and sharing of practices and knowledge, and identities were expanded when members develop competence that signifies their belonging and gives meaning to practice.

The above studies on community hint that engagement in a community is a source of identity development and transformation. Members develop through participation in or across communities of practice, which are defined as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in the area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). According to Wenger (1998), as members go through a succession of forms of participation, their identities form trajectories, both within and across communities of practice. While forming trajectories, identities “incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present” (p. 155). In this regard, a range of trajectories representing differing paths of identity formation have emerged, connecting past and present experiences with future possibilities. Descriptions of these trajectories are presented in Table 4.1.

CoPs can be applied to the field of teacher development. For example, when teachers in a CoP accomplish their commitment on an ongoing basis, they interact with one another to clarify their work and to define and even change how the work is done, for which they share in a ‘joint enterprise’ or ‘mutual engagement’. Through this mutual engagement, teachers build and develop their identities relative to the community. To achieve the goals of the community, new teachers need to have mutual engagement with both experienced teachers and peers. New teachers’ identities change when they are increasingly recognized as belonging to, and contributing to a community. The notion of belonging, which refers to new teachers’ sense of their place within their community (Jawitz, 2009), is an important dimension of CoPs. Teachers may encounter challenges when attempting to belong or find their place in the profession (Danielewicz, 2001). Beginning teachers not

Table 4.1 Descriptions of identity trajectories

Identity trajectories	Descriptions
Peripheral trajectory	By choice or necessity, newcomers cannot gain full membership in a community of practice
Inbound trajectory	Newcomers' identities are invested in the prospect of gaining full participation in its practice
Insider trajectory	Formation of an identity does not end with full membership
Boundary trajectory	Some identities find their value in spanning boundaries and linking communities of practice
Outbound trajectory	Trajectory that leads out of a community, and may involve developing new relationships, finding a different position with respect to a community, and seeing the world and oneself in new ways

Source Wenger (1998, p. 154)

only need to deal with their sense of belonging within the profession but also figure out the ways of belonging to the community of their teaching practice. In this process, new teachers are initially peripheral members but gradually transform into experienced teachers with more participation, followed by full participation as they stay engaged in the socio-cultural practices of the community. However, teachers' social and interactional contexts as well as experiences may change because of the various characteristics of different educational settings. This may bring about changes to some aspects of teacher identity. Teachers' interactions within these communities also shape their identities and raise their awareness of identities they are expected to assume in those contexts (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Hence, teacher identity is open to learning and contextual modification in daily and professional practice as well as in initial language teacher education and ongoing professional development sessions.

In summary, teacher identity is built around participation in a community and is constantly evolving as teachers move through different forms of participation or different communities. However, teachers are subject to the inevitable negotiation between norms and practices in the community and the teachers' sense of subjectivity and identities. In addition, not all teachers of a community actively participate or necessarily enjoy participating. Some teachers may not enjoy strong connections with each other, especially if the groupings are not voluntary. Identity is not simply constructed through the opportunities provided by existing structures, but are also shaped through a process wherein teachers exercise their agency in the workplace (Jawitz, 2009). In terms of teachers' agentic behaviors in sensing the possibilities for taking control of their teaching within a school community, some may perceive it as positive while some may regard it as negative. This suggests a need to understand the idea of affordances, which provides a more complete understanding of teacher identity.

Affordances

Gibson (1979) proposed the notion of affordances first. According to Gibson, “The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill ... It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment” (p. 127). In other words, affordances are possibilities for action within an environment as perceived by the observer (Gibson, 1979). In foreign language education, affordances are opportunities for learning that the learners perceive within the community. They may signify different emphases to different learners. This indicates a need to analyze the community of foreign language education from the perspective of affordances, which was described as a reciprocal relationship between an organism and its environment (Gibson, 1979). From Gibson’s conceptualization, it can be inferred that affordance is related to the relationship between the actor and the environment but not determined by the qualities of the actor or the qualities of the target of action. According to the sociocultural theory, affordances refer to a property of the learning community, and an active and engaged learner may perceive and use them for future actions, leading to higher and more successful levels of interaction (van Lier, 2000, 2004). In addition, affordances may allow further action, but do not cause or trigger it. This also suggests an interactive relationship between the learner and the community and a need to investigate cognitive (internal) and contextual (external) aspects of foreign language education. For example, one language-learning task may offer very different affordances to various learners depending on what they perceive and how they react. These differences emphasize the relationship between a learner and the learning community as well as the learner’s observation and action as compared to the learning community.

The idea of affordance as an index of opportunities for action provided by the community is extended to teacher community. Whether a teacher can turn the properties inherent in the community into a positive affordance is dependent on his or her capacity to recognize those possibilities. Norman (1999) stated affordances are not only dependent on the actor’s physical capabilities but also on his/her prior experience, expectations, level of attention, and perceptual ability, among other things. Tella (2005) divided the concept of affordance into dominant affordances and dormant affordances. The former concept developed from Gibson and van Lier’s early ideas. It refers to conceptions which the teacher is aware of and with which she has a functional relationship. The latter concept indicates expanded conceptions of language teaching and learning, for which the teacher is not yet cognizant or unwilling to take use of. The affordances offered by the community are the same for all teachers. However, different teachers may perceive them in different and diverging ways due to disparities in their prior education experiences, knowledge, and understanding, a perceived sense of agency in taking control of teaching, identity recognition, and personal goals in work. Therefore, some teachers utilize some affordances while others do not. The various perceptions observed and utilized by the teachers may affect what each language learner views as affordances

and how learners take action towards language learning. Thus, effective language teaching depends on the language teachers' capacity to perceive and utilize the affordances within the community.

In summary, affordances are properties that the action environment offers to teachers or learners, provided they can perceive and take advantage of that "semiotic budget" (van Lier, 2000). This idea of budget refers to opportunities for actions opened for an active person. The retrieval or perception of affordances is dependent on certain aspects of second language acquisition, e.g., input, intake and interaction. When a learner or a teacher is engaged in a community actively, he or she may be entitled to profit from the linguistic and social affordances in the community.

Overview of the Interrelationships Between Presented Notions

This section presents the interrelationships between different notions. These include the interrelation between affordances and teacher autonomy, affordances and teacher identity, and a possible interrelationship among the notions.

Affordances and Teacher Autonomy

To facilitate a better familiarization with affordances, additional related aspects need to be considered. First, a learner who can take control of his learning may better perceive positive affordances. Similarly, a teacher who has the capacity to take control of his/her teaching may better accept the possibilities for his/her teaching. In other words, a teacher who is empowered with more autonomy is more likely to notice and utilize affordances in the community. When being constrained by embedded rules in a community, affordances may not be viewed as feasible to the teachers. With a weak foundation of autonomy, they may struggle to assume more teaching responsibility and hesitate to take part in autonomous practices. When teachers are given more freedom in developing interest-driven in-class activities, learners' reflectivity and self-efficacy (e.g., Oxford, 2003) may be developed further, which may help teachers act on positive affordances to support their motivation in language teaching. On the other hand, affordances of the community lie in the teachers' ability of foreseeing the potential affordances that can be actualized by pushing the teachers into action to take control of their teaching. Succinctly put, gaining a stronger sense of affordances may help teachers find their own personal purposes in teaching and in turn, further strengthen their autonomous behaviors for better teaching.

Affordances and Teacher Identity

Another crucial feature of affordance is its reciprocal relationship with teacher identity. Affordance is neither invoked in the person, nor in the environment, but rather as the product of the interaction between the two, and each interaction potentially changes the person as well as the micro-environment. For example, when teachers perceive positive affordances from the environment, they may construct a positive professional identity. They may further negotiate appropriate identities to overcome unequal power relations and social sanctions. When the environment constrains their adaptation, even against everything they desire, they are likely to develop a negative identity. On the other hand, a teacher's propensity to perceive affordances in any community is dependent upon his or her identity. Different teachers may see different opportunities for action or act on them in diverse ways. The negotiation of positive identities helps teachers strengthen their perceptions of affordances and open up more learning opportunities. Some teachers who feel frustrated in their identity recognition may not accept the notion of affordances.

A Possible Interrelationship Among the Notions

First, the perceived affordances in a community can be viewed as the origin for the development of teacher autonomy. A positive teacher identity (e.g., a feeling of belonging to the community and legitimizing their peripheral participation) may be constructed as the outcome when the affordances have the potential to give rise to any number of opportunities for teachers to take control of their teaching. Following this, the construction of a positive identity facilitates teachers' capacity to perceive the affordances in the community. As van Lier (2004) stated, the development of autonomy is through the actions and interactions of members within the community. Similarly, Paiva and Braga (2008) asserted that autonomy encompasses properties and conditions that are inextricably linked to the community. Therefore, when teachers in a community perceive the affordances, they may form a sense of agency in taking control of their teaching, then construct properties for a positive professional identity, and finally perceive more positive affordances.

Second, the development of teacher autonomy can be perceived as an affordance that may facilitate teachers' actions in the community. This in turn leads to emergent community development and a feeling of positive identity of belonging to the community, followed by further development of teacher autonomy. Murray and Fujishima (2013) stated that autonomy is an affordance "emerged from the self-organization of elements within the environment" (p. 154). Their idea can be extended to teacher development. Through acting autonomously, teachers may act on affordances as they arise. Through these actions, teachers may shape the environment and construct a part of the ongoing self-organization, which may lead to

the emergence of a dynamic community and the construction of a positive professional identity, and finally a willingness to create more spaces and opportunities for maneuvers in their teaching.

Third, Benson (2010) claimed that the conceptualization and construction of teacher identity could be a point of origin for teacher autonomy. The development of teachers' identities could affect their capacity to acquire a degree of freedom from both structural and internal constraints on their autonomy. On the other hand, the development of teacher autonomy involves a self-critical approach towards the wider structural constraints, which are mediated through the teacher's own agency. It is suggested that "teachers need to understand the constraints upon their practice but, rather than feeling disempowered, they need to empower themselves by finding the spaces and opportunities for maneuver[ing]" (Lamb, 2000, p. 128). However, teachers' sense of understanding the constraints embedded in their teaching settings is dependent on teachers' capacity for perceiving and acting upon opportunities as they see fit. Likewise, the development of teacher identity depends on the teacher's capacity to perceive the affordances embedded in his/her teaching community and on the ability to utilize them in teaching (*ibid.*).

Finally, as stated by Cotterall and Murray (2013), "an individual's propensity to perceive affordances in any given environment is dependent upon his or her identity" (p. 42). In other words, different people will see assorted opportunities for action or view them in various ways. Teachers have multiple identities, and this affects teachers' ability in perceiving some affordances as opportunities for teaching within the school structure. This perception, in turn, affects the development of teacher autonomy and finally the construction of teacher professional identity.

In summary, the interrelationship among teacher autonomy, teacher identity, and affordances is complex, iterative, dynamic, interactive, and non-linear (Fig. 4.2). These findings direct our further attention towards exploring the community in which teachers are situated and their communities of practice.

Reflections on Teacher Identity

First, we acknowledge the importance of autonomy in helping teachers to function effectively in community, e.g., foreign language teaching. Therein, teachers need to form a sense of belonging to the community. To form a sense of belonging to the community, teachers need to participate in a community, take an active role in being creative in teaching, and be reflexive collaboratively and individually in a community. To develop teacher autonomy from the perspective of CoPs, certain features need to be considered: self-directedness, initiative taking, responsibility assuming and sharing, purposiveness or target orientation, collaboration and communalism, as well as shared, distributed or combined expertise. Considering these features may present challenges to language teachers. For example, teachers may question how to change from a "sage on the stage" to a "guide on the side" (Harjanne & Tella, 2007, p. 215), how to take into account the conceptions of

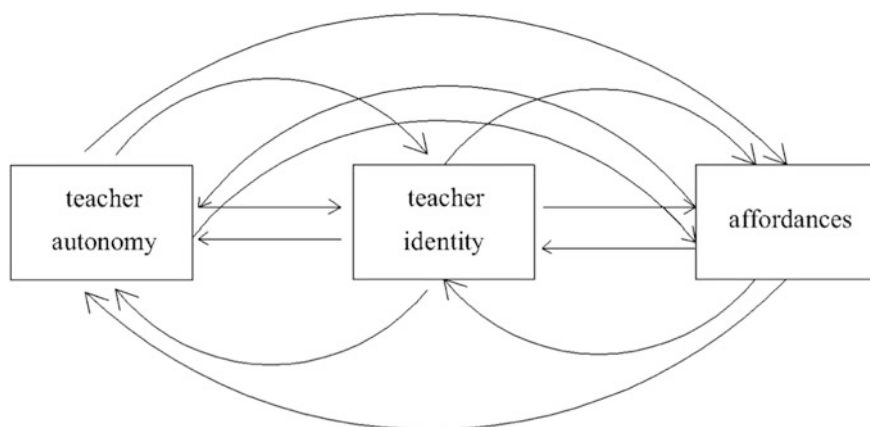


Fig. 4.2 The interrelationship between teacher autonomy, teacher identity, and affordances

knowledge and learning, and how to deal with the pressures of being a language teacher. When considering this perspective, teachers may need to develop a sense that language is not taught by code-based rules but through a communicatory-meaningful situation. Teachers need to be autonomous in teaching and it is a teacher's task to help learners gradually become more autonomous in their learning.

Second, the construction of identity is a process of negotiation between individual and contextual factors. During this process of negotiation, teachers encounter struggles that prevent the enactment of an ideal professional identity, which affects development of teacher autonomy. This challenge suggests a need to explore the ongoing process of identity enactment, the individual and contextual factors related to identity, and the negotiation of various sub-identities (Beijaard et al., 2004). Teachers who fail to build a positive identity may encounter challenges in being agentic when pursuing the goals and values of teaching, and thus may fail to perceive the affordances at varying levels (macro, meso, and micro) within the community. This demonstrates a need to explore teachers' personal and professional identity and the significance of CoP in identity construction during future studies.

Third, affordances always interact with various action environments. One of the emerging action environments is the foreign language teaching and learning classroom. In the foreign language teaching and learning community, countless aspects of action environments manifest themselves frequently. Explicit and implicit restrictions or possibilities may encourage or discourage affordances in foreign language teaching. While developing teachers' perceptions of positive affordances, the linguistic and social environment is highlighted in the classroom. Teachers, within this perspective, can encourage students to capitalize on the properties of the affordances in the foreign language learning community. These properties include language input, interaction with peers, more opportunities for language output, artefacts and the discourse within and beyond the classroom.

Teachers can structure the classroom-based language tasks, either physical or virtual, to encourage the learners with more engagement in retrieving the access available to them. For example, students should be encouraged to exploit the language tasks as a platform for practice, participation, communication and learning opportunities. The language tasks may then become affordances perceived by the learners.

Finally, from an understanding of affordances, teaching a foreign language must be thought of as part of the extensive societal development. We acknowledge the societal challenges inherent in foreign language teaching, and to better understand them, the values in the education system, school culture, and school structure, along with the embedded rules in a community and how this is related to teacher autonomy and teacher identity need to be analyzed. The interactions between teacher autonomy and teacher identity are complex, and the existence of affordances makes it more intricate. Although teaching is the central instrument to orient learners' study processes, teaching does not automatically lead to learners' effective learning of a skill or information (Prabhu, 1999). Indeed, teaching a foreign language does not guarantee a learner's mastery of it. Therefore, the notions of 'community' and 'affordances' have gained momentum in foreign language teaching contexts. This introduces a different perspective to foreign language teaching, and in my opinion, is particularly worthwhile to notice and reflect upon.

Teacher identity is closely related to the self, the context, teachers' role in reflection, agency, and the contextual factors that promote or hinder the development of autonomy, and ultimately affordances in creating opportunities for the negotiation of identity in the communities of practice. This is why researchers argue that the notion of teacher identity is multifaceted. The scope of this chapter does not permit a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher identity; it does, however, permit us to gain an understanding of teacher identity from the perspectives of communities of practice, and affordances.

By the same token, although I want to discuss some of the issues highlighted about teacher identity, for example, those that were noted in the preceding chapters, I do not aim to delineate one from the other. Hence, the discussions of teacher autonomy and identity, for example, may overlap with discussion of self, contextual factors, and affordances in a community. There is a need to interlink one notion with another to gain a more complete understanding of teacher identity.

In conclusion, the complex interaction between teacher identity, teacher autonomy, communities of practice, and affordances is an emerging research area. Differences pertaining to perceptions of affordances in a community on shaping professional identity, and the relationship with teachers' willingness and freedom to take control of their teaching, seem to be a sound theoretical basis for researching the complex foreign language teaching environment.

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Chapter 5

The Complexities of Learner Agency and Teacher Agency in Foreign Language Education



Abstract The concept of agency has been central to language education. The educational goal that learners become capable of independent learning has had a profound impact on learner agency. Learner agency refers to a conscious initiative in learning taken by the learners, rather than the requirements that are imposed to the learners from the teacher, curriculum, and so forth (Biesta et al. in *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 21(6):624–640, 2015). In our traditional teaching mode, most of the schools tend to cater for groups of learners with a one size fits all approach. Many students felt disenfranchised or became passive (Mercer in *System* 39(4):427–436, 2011). Exploring the issue of agency is important, following the continuous call for enhancing learners’ autonomous leaning and teachers’ capacity in taking control of their teaching. This chapter attempts to contribute to a fuller understanding of agency through exploring the components of teachers’ and learners’ agentic systems. This chapter also attempts to explore the complex components related to learner and teacher agency, which pose a challenge for educational theory as to how best language educators can use such insights to help teachers and students to become more effective in English language teaching and learning.

Keywords Learner agency • Teacher agency • English teaching
English learning

Introduction

Successful language learning depends heavily on the initiative of the learners (van Lier, 2008). The precondition for a learner to take actions in his/her learning is to have a personal sense of agency, or a belief that they regard it helpful to make a difference to their learning. To a foreign language learner, agency is a construct like motivation and intelligence. Two major developments have led to the elaboration of learner agency. The first development is related to the concept of learner-centeredness and autonomy, which stress the role of the learner as an active agent in

learning a second and a foreign language (Benson, 2001). Along with the need for self-directed learning, it has become increasingly essential for learners to foster a sense of agency to make the most of the learning opportunities. The second development is related to the growing recognition of the interactive process between learners and their learning contexts, for which learners are agents who “actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 145). The two major developments within second language acquisition generate insights into the central role of learner agency.

Similarly, there is an emerging tendency in educational policy around the world to acknowledge the role of teacher agency. Teachers’ commitment to work, in this regard, positively shapes teachers’ attitudes toward the work conditions. For example, rather than a top-down approach to the educational improvement, teachers should become co-creators of curriculum (Donaldson, 2011). Teacher agency, or teachers’ central and crucial role, can be viewed as an integral part of educational reforms. Therefore, teachers should not simply receive prescriptive curricula or oppressive regimes of assessment and bureaucratic forms of accountability (Biesta, 2010). Teachers should be empowered to exert higher degrees of professional judgment and discretion within their working settings (Sugrue & Dyrda-Solbrekke, 2011). It appears that, returning to teacher agency is of significant value and should be regarded as an indispensable part for teachers’ professional development.

However, returning to agency raises a lot of problems. First, agency is a complex dynamic system (Mercer, 2011). The inherent complexity in agency poses challenges to initiate agentic behaviors in learners. In addition, although some learners attempt to be as agentic as possible, this may not be the case in every context and for every purpose. Second, defining agency is problematic given its multi-componential and non-visible dimensions. It is still difficult to explain the nature of the relationship between individual, collective and co-evolving agency across contexts. Third, there are still controversies whether teachers should be offered more space for professional agency, particularly in considering the Confucius impact on the society (e.g., China). It seems that offering space for professional agency is not only related to the structures within which teachers work, but also related to the remit of politicians and policy-makers. One thing to bear in mind is that although the context or the culture plays a decisive role in agency, whether teachers are able to perceive affordances within such cultures is also important. In addition, there is a question of whether teachers—individually and collectively—want to be an agent of change in their work. The fact is that teacher identity may be eroded under the structures or cultures in which they are situated.

This chapter revisits the notion of agency with a focus on the role and position of learners and teachers. The aim was to shed light on learner agency and teacher agency in foreign language education. Learner’s sense of agency emerges from the complex dynamic interaction of a range of components in multiple levels of context. For example, it is situated contextually, interpersonally, temporally and intrapersonally (Mercer, 2012). This raises the importance of exploring its nature, development, and the potential merits of learner agency. In addition, if we regard

student performance as ‘output’, then teachers’ work is ‘input’. Teachers are the most important ‘factor’ in the educational discourses, which is related to certain educational ‘outcomes’. This shows the importance of exploring teacher agency, as well as the factors that limit and confine teachers’ space for professional judgment and actions. Through exploring a broad perspective from learners and teachers’ situations and sociocultural or educational contexts, this chapter can help us better understand the role of agency in foreign language education.

Defining Learner Agency

Within sociology, agency is often regarded as a capacity to act otherwise, or to select a course of actions from a range of options (Giddens, 1984). In other words, agency is the capability that the individual possesses to improve his/her pre-existing state of affairs or course or events. This is opposed to social structures, which are conceived to exist in a state of tension (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). This is demonstrated by the fact that individuals actively participate in the construction of their own learning (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). Researchers have provided different definitions of agency, which provide insights into how agency is defined in the broader fields.

- Agency is an intentional act that leads to a particular outcome. It describes the process through which individuals intentionally transform themselves or their situations through their own actions (Ray, 2009).
- Agency is “the capacity to initiate purposeful action that implies will, autonomy, freedom, and choice” (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011, p. 813).
- Agency is an array of actions that involve self-consciousness and reflexivity, and these attributes often arise from the deliberation and choice of individuals (Huang, 2011).
- Agency plays an important role in a learner’s self-regulation, which is an important variable in the improvement of learning (Bown, 2009).
- Agency is linked to an individual’s initiative, motivation, volition, and effective control of learning (Mercer, 2011).
- Agency is “the ability of individuals to exercise choice and discretion in their everyday practices” (Pickering, 1995, as cited in Ollerhead, 2010, p. 609).
- Agency is a socio-culturally mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001). Similarly, agency arises out of individuals’ engagement in the social world (Lantolf, 2002).
- Agency is not necessarily the same as “taking initiative but can also be linked to those situations in which people take control of their life as a result of a perceived calling or sense of duty” (Huang & Benson, 2013, p. 12).

Overall, the above views of agency imply that an individual (agent) has the potential for conducting physical, cognitive, affective, and/or motivational actions,

and making choices based his/her purposes. A learner with a high sense of agentic behaviors has the capacity to exert control over the course of his or her life. However, an individual's psychological dispositions are essential to one's course of learning. In addition, one's actions are socioculturally mediated, which means agency is not residing only in the individual but linked to a historical and cultural world. In this regard, agency is related to individuals, group, and communities. Similar thoughts were also conveyed through Kohonen's (2009) argument that agency is the ability of individuals to act in a socially constructed environment. Therefore, many contextual factors, including society, interaction, culture and institution, mediate learners' agency (Mercer, 2011).

In the field of applied linguistics and foreign language teaching, attempts have been made to define agency. Gao (2010) explored the interaction between contextual conditions and agency. In this case study, a learner demonstrated the agency through the exercise of capacity and willpower to reach desired outcomes in the process of learning a foreign language. Hence, agency is defined as a universal attribute of agents that places learners in the position of being subjects who can act, rather than objects that are acted upon. As cited in Huang and Benson (2013, p. 12), applied linguists Candlin and Sarangi conceptualize agency as "the self-conscious reflexive actions of human beings". One characteristic of this definition is that it connects agency to actions and highlights the reflexive capabilities of human beings. Although agency has been mentioned in previous studies focusing on learner identity in learning a second language (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001), this term was not explained in their work. Some previous researchers have attempted to provide a detailed discussion of agency (e.g., Lantolf, 2002; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). One feature of their discussions is that agency arises out of individuals' engagement in the social world. Agency is not a 'property' of an individual (Morita, 2004, p. 590), but is shaped by historical and cultural trajectories. Hence, agency is "a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 148). In this regard, there may be some constraints that hinder certain actions become possible, there may also be some affordances that facilitate the enactment of certain actions. We can also conclude that no human actions that are not mediated. The mediation means, in some cases, are not visible. However, they may be detected in other cases. Inherent in the views of Taylor (1985), Lantolf and Thorne (2006) stated that agency is socioculturally mediated and dialectically enacted. They also argued that agency implies the capability to assign relevance and significance to things and events.

The conceptualization of agency has been the subject of numerous theoretical and philosophical debates. In early research, agency is described as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112), which is a widely accepted definition. From this definition, we understand the situated nature of agency in sociocultural terms and the role of mediation. It seems that when we talk about how an individual is socioculturally, contextually and interpersonally mediated, we need to pay attention to an individual's physical, cognitive, affective, and

motivational capacities to act. Following this, Gao (2010) defined agency as an individual's will to act as well as their capacity to act in sociocultural discourses. The multicomponential, intrapersonal nature of agency as well as the role of socioculturally-mediated processes are important dimensions to be considered. Mercer (2011) added that an individual's sense of agency refers to how agentic he/she feels. An individual may choose to exercise their agency through participation and action, or through deliberate nonparticipation or non-action. Therefore, agency is not only related to what is observable but also non-visible behaviors, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. These should be interpreted in considering the various sociocultural contexts. However, context is neither static nor monolithic (Funder, 2001), but dynamic and interactive (Mercer, 2012). This suggests that context is a complex and unique system comprised of a multitude of components. It seems that various contextual factors, possibly the combination of micro- and macro-level structures and artefacts, may affect (or be affected by) agency. However, recent studies have suggested a more balanced view and assigns equal importance to both the individual and the context (e.g., Mercer, 2012). As suggested by Carter and Sealey (2000),

Too great an emphasis on structures denies actors any power and fails to account for human beings making a difference. Too great an emphasis on agency overlooks the (we would claim) very real constraints acting on us in time and space (p. 11).

One hint from this view is that individuals and contexts are a reciprocal relationship in which the emphasis should be on the complex dynamic interaction between the two elements. This suggests that learners are agents who are creative and proactive towards the contexts, rather than just reactive to the contexts. In addition, human functioning emerges from the complex interplay between three constituent factors of intrapersonal (biological, cognitive, affective and motivational), behavioral, and environmental factors that interact within a system of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 2008). This is also delineated in a triadic model of human behavior proposed in Bandura's early study (Bandura, 1989):

... persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyors of animating environmental influences. Rather, they make causal contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation. In this model of reciprocal causation, action, cognitive, affective, and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants. Any account of the determinants of human action must, therefore, include self-generated influences as a contributing factor (p.1175).

Therefore, it appears that learner agency is a complex and interactive process with a focus on individual and contextual factors, and it plays a central integral role in facilitating reflexive, conscious, autonomous, self-regulatory and goal-orientated strategic learning behaviors (Gao, 2010; Huang, 2011). As argued by van Lier (2004), context is "relations of possibility" (p. 95), which suggests an interaction between learners and the contexts (ibid.). It appears that an individual's agency emerges during the interaction between the individual and the multiple contextual systems. It can also be stated that agency is a notion originated from the interaction

between contexts and the individuals' mediated capacity to perceive and act on them. This suggests that learners are members in a community for which they not only need to make sense of the context but also engage with, influence, or change the contexts. Hence, the process of learning a foreign language is complex.

Complexity in Adopting Agentive Behaviors in Learning a Foreign Language

According to Larsen-Freeman (1997), language learning is a non-linear, complex process wherein many independent agents are interacting with each other in unpredictable and unplanned ways. Due to the complex interactions, regularities emerge and it is unlikely to accurately identify or measure all of the factors in this complex system. This suggests a need to explore and acknowledge the dynamic complexity inherent in learning a foreign language. Thus, language learning is not a simple cause and effect relationship. It should be a dynamic process which can vary across individuals and be dependent on a wide array of contextual factors.

According to Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008), the following features makes language learning a complex system. First, language learning is composed of at least two interrelated agents: Teachers and learners. Second, the components of a system may lead to complex systems nested within various levels; all of which contribute to larger complex systems. Third, the context of learning a foreign language is not a stable variable but a component closely related to the individual. Finally, language learning is dynamic in nature. Everything within this system is in a constant state of flux. Components are independent of each other, and changes in one dimension of the system may cause unpredictable changes in other dimensions of the system. Therefore, it is argued that the language learning system can be sometimes smooth, continuous, and gradual over time while it may have dramatic and sudden change at other times. In other words, learning a foreign language is a process of variability and stability, which can drive or limit learners' motivation in learning that language.

Considering the characteristics of complex dynamic systems in language learning, the nature of adopting agentive behaviors in language learning is also complex. As proposed by Mercer (2012), learner agency appears to emerge from the interplay of several variables, which include learner beliefs, motivation, affect, perseverance, and self-regulation. Therefore, agency is related to different contexts, e.g., the sociocultural and educational contexts, the family and classroom contexts, and the learners' interactional contexts. There are multiple and interconnected causes that can affect learners' capacity to exercise agency, and those causes often interact in unpredictable ways and may vary in their relative significance. Therefore, learner agency can be reframed as a complex dynamic system.

Defining Teacher Agency

Teacher agency, as a notion, has not received the deserved attention. Recent literature theorizes it as an alternative means of understanding the manner in which teachers might demonstrate teaching practice and engage with policy (e.g., Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2014). Teacher agency is often connected to narrow agendas of school management, wherein the contribution of agency is restricted to bringing about change in the school curriculum (Fullan, 2003). Citing Emirbayer and Mische (1998), Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) formulated an ecological model for understanding teacher agency based on the temporal/relational conception of agency. The three dimensions of teacher agency (iterational dimension, practical-evaluative dimension, and projective dimension) were included in this model.

The iterational dimension suggests that teachers' agency arises from their accumulated teaching experience, professional qualifications, and past patterns of thought and action. This dimension distinguishes between the influence of general life histories of teachers and their specific professional histories. It implies that the knowledge of these two separate influences may enable teachers to develop the capacity to deal with immediate dilemmas and problems, and foster stronger future orientations.

The practical-evaluative dimension suggests that actors can make practical and normative judgments based on presently evolving situations. This dimension distinguishes between various contextual components that facilitate teacher agency. In other words, the different structural environments that provide conditions for teachers also provide the resources for the achievement of agency. Revealing the paradoxical nature of agency, this dilemma underlines the significance of structure and contexts, which are also regarded as social elements. The social nature of structures and contexts attribute to the dialogical process of agency by and through which actors interact with others within collectively organized contexts of action. Hence, teacher agency is partly influenced by the availability of physical resources and the nature of physical constraints.

The projective dimension suggests that teachers' agency is motivated by an intentional act of creating a future, which is different from the present and the past state. Actors, in this regard, creatively reconfigure their actions or structures of thought in the direction of their hopes, expectations, and desires for the future. This is a process of continual imaginative reconstruction of the future, which requires an actor to recognize motives, modify goals and intentions, discern possible future constraints, and determine practically appropriate course of actions. This process seems to imply that teachers capable of making expansive projections about their future trajectories are likely to exercise greater levels of agency than teachers having relatively limited desires, and hence the former are more likely to translate their repertoire of alternative future into actions.

Simply put, the model highlights that teacher agency is influenced by past personal and professional experience and enacted in a concrete present situation. This sort of agency is guided towards the future in some combination of short-term and long-term educational goals.

Teacher agency remains a poorly conceptualized construct, despite the aforementioned models that are designed to explain teacher agency. For instance, it is still unclear whether teacher agency refers to an individual capacity of teachers to act agentially or to an emergent ecological phenomenon based on the quality of teachers' engagement within their contexts. In addition, there have been limited studies or models that explain the role of teacher agency in educational innovation.

Complexity in Teacher Agency

The complexity in teacher agency can be traced back to Emirbayer and Mische's (1998), from which it is concluded that teacher agency is related to routine (e.g., the experience and expertise teachers bring to their work), purpose (e.g., the orientations that guide teachers' work), and the judgment (e.g., the decisions that teachers made on what to do and how to do it in the present state). The three dimensions form a dynamic interaction. However, the interplay of the three dimensions varies within different structural contexts of action. In this perspective, the teacher agency should be explored as a configuration of influences from the prior experiences, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present. It is suggested that the three dimensions are iterative, projective, and practical-evaluative. From the perspective of ecological approach, past, future and present all play an important role in the achievement of agency. This suggests that there are a lot of things that may impact the ways in which and the extent to which teachers can exercise agency in their teaching communities. This shows the complexity for teachers to form a sense of agency.

Teacher agency is an interplay of individual efforts, available resources, institution system, and contextual and structural factors. An agentic teacher is also a reflexive and creative teacher, acting counter to contextual constraints while protecting students from unhelpful or harmful practices. Teacher agency is strongly influenced by current and recent policy, and the wider purpose and nature of education. Therefore, access to wider professional discourses about educational purposes may have an impact on teacher agency, which should be suggested as an important aspect of teacher education (Biesta, 2015). Teachers need a robust professional discourse and a set of orientations towards the future that they can bring to the situations in which they work. This can expand agentic possibilities, which the teachers can grasp to utilize their beliefs for achieving agency within contexts that are to a significant degree—albeit not entirely—constructed by systems of accountability. This brings complexities to the understanding of teacher agency.

Reflections on Agency

Agency, based on a relation between actors and the environments in and through which they act, is both a temporal and a relational phenomenon, which occurs over time. Teachers' professional agency plays an important role in shaping their practices in teaching. For example, their professional agency could be seen from the attempts to build rapport with students; resist the normative discourses in the school; reflect on teaching methodology; and initiate positive changes to students' learning that align with their own educational beliefs (Roberts & Graham, 2008). Teachers' belief in teaching can be viewed as the means through which they individually navigate, interpret, and occasionally resist the official ethos of the school in which they work.

In addition, apart from Ticknor's (2015) four recommendations to foster agency (rehearsals over time, dissonance to the point of frustration, observations and approximations in field experiences, and interactional spaces for critical reflection), a forward-looking teacher belief helps teachers to engage in more agentic and pro-active ways with their situational environments. Several issues need to be taken in account. The first issue is related to the way in which ongoing professional development for teachers is structured and organized. Teacher education should ensure that teachers are given the opportunity to engage with a range of educational discourses and discursive repertoires. However, current form of teacher education has geared towards the instrumental side of the spectrum—getting the job done—and has isolated itself from a more intellectual engagement with the nature of teaching, educational purpose, school and society. Second, the teleological nature of education—education is constituted by purposes—is a manifestation that education is different from learning. Thus, all our educational actions and activities are ultimately formulated by our perception or belief on the purpose of education. This issue is not only a question at the curriculum level, school level, or the level of education policy, but it is also an issue that engulfs the entire teaching practice. In considering that the purpose of education is multi-dimensional, the ability to judge and to do so in an educational way is crucial to facilitate good teaching (Biesta, 2015). However, determining the ability to bring judgment to teaching and identifying the best way in which the teacher education program can support teachers in developing this ability are questions that require further research. Finally, it is important to develop educational virtuosity through examples, which requires an embodied and situated learning of the virtuosity of others (Hillier, 2012). Further research in this regard will require an understanding of the nature of teaching and learning, and its connection with teacher agency and learner agency.

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Chapter 6

Interrelationship of (Teacher) Autonomy, (Teacher) Agency, and (Teacher) Identity in Foreign Language Education



Abstract In research on foreign language education, limited attention has been paid to the interrelation between autonomy, agency, and identity. This chapter was to discuss the possible relationship between autonomy, agency, and identity, as well as between teacher autonomy, teacher agency, and teacher identity. First, there is an interconnection between autonomy, agency, and identity. Second, teachers may encounter constraints inherent in the system-wide ‘Schemes of Work’ and school-based evaluation mechanism. This affects their capacity to cope with diverse challenges emerging while constructing their professional identities. This also restricts their agentic behaviors in creating their own space for autonomy. However, a robust professional identity developed through previous teaching experience and teacher training may partly help teachers to take advantage of the affordances in the working conditions and create conditions for autonomy in teaching. This chapter argues for the importance of considering the three interrelated factors as an indispensable part of teacher education.

Keywords Autonomy • Agency • Identity • Foreign language education

Introduction

The notion of autonomy has received increasing attention in educational research, especially in foreign language education (Benson, 2007). Over the past two decades, the idea of autonomy has evolved to be not only a goal of education but also an important element in quality teaching and learning. While autonomy has been extensively investigated, autonomy has not gained as much attention on its relationship with agency and identity.

Likewise, teachers’ capacity to take control of their teaching and learning is constrained by their working conditions, e.g., school rules, standardized curriculum, and educational policy (Benson, 2000). However, the constraints on teachers’ judgment and control over their teaching tend to be mediated by their own agentic behavior. Teacher agency has evolved as an element of meaningful education

(Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). In addition, teachers' positive or negative responses to teaching context supports or prevents their identity construction and ongoing professional development (Song, 2016).

There are one or two notable exceptional studies attempting to explore the interconnection between autonomy, agency, and identity (e.g., Huang, 2009). However, there may also be a need to envisage bridging this gap, with a focus on exploring both structural and internal constraints on teacher autonomy, teachers' agentic behavior, the ways in which how their professional identities are constructed, as well as the interrelated influence of the three notions.

Interrelationship Between Autonomy, Agency, and Identity

In an attempt to gain an in-depth understanding of agency, literature on agency in foreign language education tends to link the idea of agency to autonomy and identity. According to Benson (2007), "Agency can perhaps be viewed as a point of origin for the development of autonomy, while identity might be viewed as one of its more important outcomes" (p. 30). This provides new insights into understanding of how agency is conceptualized differently across different institutions, socio-cultural and political contexts.

The boundaries between autonomy and agency are often blurred and muddled. Some literature conceptualizes agency and autonomy in much the same way. For example, Toohey (2007) proposed that "learner autonomy as socially situated agency" (p. 232). Likewise, Toohey and Norton (2003) argued that autonomy is a socially oriented agency rather than individualized performance. In a similar vein, Benson (2011, 2013) suggested that autonomy involves learners' capacity to self-regulate and self-direct their learning, and agency is a sense of agentic behavior. Furthermore, Hunter and Cooker (2007) regarded agency as a system of socially mediated autonomy. Both agency and autonomy stress an individual's capacity to initiate an intentional act. Luck and d'Inverno (1995) described autonomy as 'motivated agency' and 'autonomous agent' (p. 258). Therefore, the two notions were often deemed as synonymous and social matrix.

However, the two notions are also distinct. For example, agency is mainly a set of a self-conscious, reflexive learning actions, while autonomy is a sense of capacity in controlling the learning process. In this regard, Huang and Benson (2013) posited that agency might relate to taking conscious actions for a certain purpose while not being in a state of autonomy—having a controlling capacity. This means that an individual initiates actions consciously for a certain purpose (the enactment of agency), but s/he may not be in control of the learning process (autonomy), even though self-conscious and personally relevant actions may often precipitate his/her controlling capacity (autonomy). Agency, in this scenario, is "a point of origin for the development of autonomy" (Benson, 2007, p. 30). Menezes

(2011) also proposed that while autonomy is a premise for agentic behavior (agency), agency is the capacity to act with or without autonomy. The nuanced interplay between what may be understood as agency and autonomy is delineated in the two of the essential elements of the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), that (1) humans have inherent inclinations toward growth development and integrated functioning, and (2) the optimal development and actions inherent in humans do not happen automatically. In other words, although learners may take conscious actions for a certain purpose (agency), this controlling capacity (autonomy) may not occur automatically. Menezes (2011) also stated:

Autonomy is a socio-cognitive system nested in the SLA system. It involves not only the individual's mental states and processes, but also political, social and economic dimensions. It is not a state, but a non-linear process, which undergoes periods of instability, variability and adaptability. It is an essential element in SLA because it triggers the learning process through learners' agency and leads the system beyond the classroom (p. 63).

According to this comment, while autonomy is a required premise for agentic behavior (agency), agency is the capacity to act with or without autonomy.

Building on the various definitions and interpretations concerning agency discussed above, agency can be concluded as a learner's self-conscious agentic behavior, natural disposition, contextually mediated act, and a dialogic engagement with the context to develop a capacity to act. This is not strictly a definition for agency, but a conceptualization that provides a close scrutiny of language learners' beliefs and metacognitive skills in responding to the constraints and opportunities in a particular context. This provides insights into how a foreign language is actually learned and taught. In other words, agency exists as potential to engage in self-directed behavior. However, how and when can learners perform self-conscious actions is dependent on his/her sense of agency. This includes the belief system, and the control parameters of motivation, self-regulatory skills, and the actual abilities and the affordances (Huang, Long, & Teng, 2018).

There is an implicit relationship between agency and identity. Vitanova (2004) argued that subjects can move between discourses of agency and identity; they can reflect on how they position themselves; and negotiate, modify, reconstruct or even resist identities in the course of experiencing one's subjectivity. This argument delineates an implicit connection between agency and identity—agency has an effect on the construction of one's identity. Other researchers (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) also pointed out that learners are likely to construct or reconstruct an identity when increasingly exposed to communities of practice. On the other hand, other researchers argued that identity development is a required precondition for agency. For example, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) suggested that learners develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves (identity), which permits these persons to develop the agency or control over their own behavior. Therefore, agency and identity are interrelated, although the nature of this relationship is still disputed by various researchers.

There are also some other notable studies conducted in the context of foreign language education (e.g., Chik, 2007; Huang, 2009; Murray & Kojima, 2007).

These studies all provided insights into connecting agency to the ideas of identity and autonomy. Murray and Kojima (2007) adopted a life history research method (telling the story of a Japanese female adult learner of English and German), and explored how learning a foreign language in an out-of-class setting can play an important role in learners' evolving identity and their motivation. Learning a foreign language in the learner's own culture has an impact on their lives and sense of self. For example, this learner's learning motivation in their study has evolved over time with her identity. Learning motivation and identity are both strengthened by the personal fulfilment as this learner experiences as a language learner and speaker. Although a foreign language learner has not had the experience of reconstructing his/her identity in order to survive in another different culture, s/he may have reconstructed a self in the process of learning a foreign language. Identity, in this regard, includes personal pursuit and fulfilment, and perception of self.

Similarly, Malcolm (2005) explores an Arabic-speaking English learner's development of autonomy. The learner's active participation in learning means he has a high level of personal stake (agency). He assumes this is relevant to his own life. In the process of learning, agency affects him in formulating, testing, and revising of his perceptions or beliefs about reading. Chik (2007) added one idea that learner autonomy may evolve in tandem with the development of learner identity through a biographical study of two Hong Kong learners. According to Chik, the learners' ability to form a well-grounded identity motivated them to take control of their study (autonomy). Karen (one learner in Chik's study), sidestepped classroom routines and actively participated in out-of-classroom English oral activities to improve her speaking skills. Therefore, Chik also argued that in the case of Karen, the development of autonomy as a learner evolves side by side with the development of identity. Karen also had the ability to craft individual spaces and took necessary actions within the constraints to pursue personal language development (agency). Chik therefore suggests the role of agency in the formation of learner identity and the development of learner autonomy.

Benson (2007) connected the three notions of agency, identity, and autonomy. In this regard, Benson argued that agency facilitates the development of autonomy, and identity is one of the most important outcomes of this development. Huang (2009) further his study in the context of foreign language education and linked the idea of identity and autonomy to agency in a more explicit manner (Fig. 1).

Participants in Huang's (2009) study were students in a non-prestigious university in Mainland China. He used multiple instruments to collect data, for example, learner autobiographical accounts, life history interviews, participant observation, and documents. Through examining the long-term parallel development among learner autonomy, agency and identity, this study provided insights into how students have transformed from more reactive learning stages to more proactive learners, and how students assume greater control over their learning and personal development. He also suggested that autonomy, agency and identity are interrelated but distinct concepts. Similar views expressed by Yamaguchi (2011) stressed both autonomy and identity are activated by agency. Additionally, a recent study (Mackenzie, 2015) revealed that the adaptive preferences and internalized

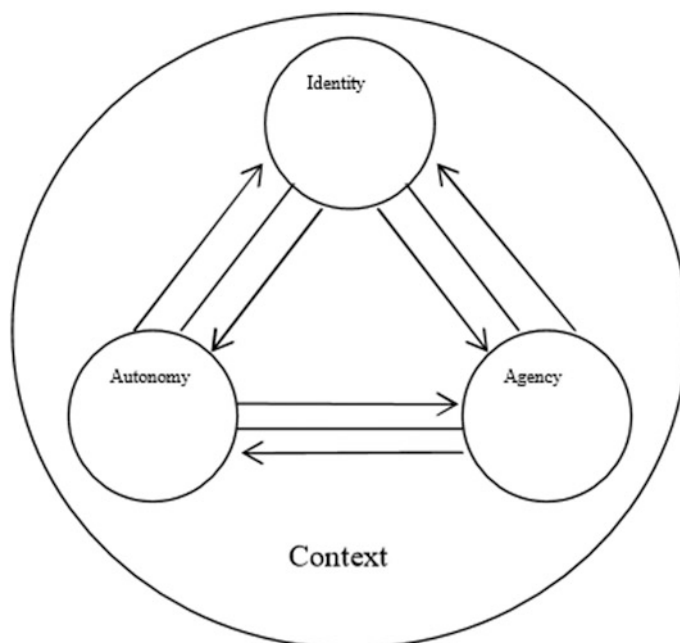


Fig. 1 Relationships among identity, agency and autonomy (Huang, 2009, p. 259)

oppression of individuals in autonomy also affects agency. Agency is of benefit to not only the development of autonomy, but also the construction of identities through, for example, negotiating and resisting positioning, adapting to social, cultural, and historical context, attempting repositioning, and deploying discourses and counter discourses (Morita, 2004).

The aforementioned studies have established that there are complex interconnections between agency, identity, and autonomy. Furthermore, they clearly foreshadow the need for explorations of agency and identity, and the role of these two notions on development of autonomy in foreign language education.

Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy has a positive impact on teacher development (Xu, 2015). It has been widely regarded as a notion related to an empowered engagement of a teacher in teaching practices and curriculum development, as well as a professional attribute pertaining to an autonomous search for potential opportunities for professional development in various teaching contexts (Benson & Huang, 2008; Dierking & Fox, 2013). In an attempt to conceptualize teacher autonomy, three models have been posited:

- a. Engaged autonomy: It refers to an innovative but independent development for teachers while a sense of collaboration is retained and shared expertise is respected. In this case, autonomy is not equal to isolation. In addition, a greater responsibility is required from school leaders as it refers to a management strategy of achieving compliance through internalized norms, rules, and controls (Parker, 2015).
- b. Regulated autonomy: It is a term used to delineate a setting where teachers can exercise their autonomy in a vacuum of limited scope (Vansteenkiste et al., 2012). Teachers in an autonomy-supportive setting may facilitate students' psychological needs and autonomous learning behaviors while teachers in an autonomy-regulated setting may feel occupied and languid in fostering their personalized teaching practice (Reeve, 2009). This is similar to the occupational autonomy suggested by Berry (2012), where the journey of being an autonomous teacher can be of one's determination, but setbacks may hinder the ability to reach the destination.
- c. School autonomy: It refers to the degree of autonomy granted to schools. This suggests that more autonomy should be given to the schools that are able to benefit from it as part of an overall system strategy to improve student learning. This also indicates a need to examine the asymmetric power relationship between school teachers and student teachers (Yuan & Lee, 2016).

Teacher Agency

In terms of curriculum policy, a new trend—considering teachers as agents of change—has emerged (Priestley, 2011). Teachers are expected to take agentic actions in their professional communities (Gurney, 2016). They are also encouraged to adopt reflective practices on their teaching behaviors and agentic actions (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012). Teachers should always act by means of their context rather than simply being in their contexts, and by taking advantage of individual efforts, available resources, and contextual dimensions (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). This is a breakthrough in teacher education as teachers have long been imposed by prescriptive curricula and oppressive regimes of exams and evaluations, indicating a trend towards de-professionalization that eliminates the teacher agency (Bloomfield, 2010). This shift towards teacher agency calls for more exerted efforts and professional agentic actions within the contexts wherein teachers work.

However, a thorny issue remains as how to stimulate agency in teachers whereby they could find a room for maneuver within a system of constraints, particularly when they are entangled in a state of emotional flux, for example, being a novice teacher. Unexpectedly, there is a lack of relevant research on teachers' agency (Yamaguchi, 2011). If teachers are expected to become agents of change in their teaching contexts, then developing professional agency becomes necessary.

Teacher Identity

As argued by Benson (2010), teachers' capacity to find a room for agentic behaviors is affected by their professional identities formed across a variety of teaching experiences. A self-image, *inter alia*, constitutes the teacher identity. In other words, teacher identity refers to what means to be a teacher (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005). Teacher identity is a social matter because the construction, reconstruction, and development of teacher identity is fundamentally a social process, which occurs in various institutional settings.

However, as proposed by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), owing to the three underlying characteristics of teacher identity (the multiplicity, discontinuity, and social nature of identity), it is difficult to conceptualize teacher identity, particularly when it relates to how teacher identity impacts their work and study. It can be inferred from the three characteristics that teacher identity is not fixed or stable, but rather it waggles across the time and settings. It can also be stated that the development of teacher identity is a largely a non-linear process (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Yuan & Lee, 2016). In this regard, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) called for a dialogical approach in exploring the complexity and dynamics of teacher identity, for example, through a micro-analysis in describing how a teacher responds to different school managers, students, and colleagues, and a macro-analysis that explores teachers' current situations, prior experiences, future stories, and the social-cultural conditions. This indicates that teachers are no longer regarded as a sole entity in acquiring knowledge and teaching competencies, but rather as agents who need to take reflexive actions while making decisions in their teaching practice.

A Link Between Teacher Identity and Teacher Autonomy

A dynamic nature exists between identity and autonomy. This serves as a basis for us to discuss the relationship between teacher identity and teacher autonomy. In real practice, some teachers may be empowered with a sense of agency, some may be rigid and unwilling to change in a certain state, some may have a fragile identity, and some teachers' identities may collapse due to the differences between imagined communities and actual communities (Xu, 2012). Influenced by the different types of teacher identities, the development of teacher autonomy may also be a process characterized by unevenness. As suggested by Teng (2017), rigid and fragile teacher identities may hinder the development of teacher autonomy. On the other hand, teachers who are guided by negotiable teacher identities may find spaces and opportunities for taking control of their teaching. It seems that when multiple teacher identities exist simultaneously, teachers may exercise different degrees of autonomy on different aspects of work. Therefore, degrees of teacher autonomy may be due to the multiplicity of teacher identity. However, both personal identities

and professional identities should be considered (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006), and this interactively influence the development of teacher autonomy. In addition, when multiple teacher identities coexist at a given time and context, there are always one or two core identities that direct a teacher's actions (Danielewicz, 2001). The more dominant teacher identities may guide teachers to exercise a higher degree of autonomy on one aspect of work while the less dominant teacher identities may direct teachers to exhibit a lower degree of autonomy on another aspect of work.

Another dimension noted for the interrelationship between teacher identity and teacher autonomy is that the development of teacher autonomy fosters the construction of teacher identity. However, as teacher autonomy involves teachers' capacities, attitudes, willingness, choices, planning, actions, and assessment, the development of it may be dynamic, unpredictable, non-linear, and sensitive to the contexts (Chuk, 2010). This may be explained as the origin for the multiplicity of teacher identity. The individual perspective of teacher autonomy (e.g., ability and willingness) and the social perspective of teacher autonomy (e.g., freedom and interdependence) also affect the construction of teacher identity. The interaction between the individual and social perspectives needs to be considered as they mutually influence each other. This may explain why teachers have personal and professional identities. Teachers who are unable to assert professional freedom may embrace a fragile identity. Teachers who are incompetent and reluctant to take control of their teaching may have a rigid identity. When teachers are likely to exercise autonomy with their strong knowledge base and strong motivation, their identities may be negotiated and may prevent an identity as a teacher from collapsing within a site of struggles and constraints.

In summary, the interrelationship between teacher identity and teacher autonomy is reciprocal. In other words, the two notions are interrelated in that they mutually influence each other. Teacher identity develops in tandem with teacher autonomy. This process and this type of interrelationship is complex and dynamic, and subjected to various factors. One of factors to be claimed in this chapter is the community in which teachers are situated and the practices they conduct in the community. Figure 2 is developed to illustrate the interrelationship between teacher identity and teacher autonomy.

An Interconnection between Teacher Autonomy, Teacher Identity, and Teacher Agency

Early empirical studies (e.g., Huang, 2009) suggest that identity formation provides a direction for the development of autonomy, or the construction of identity and the development of autonomy and may go side by side. Following his study, teacher autonomy equals teacher agency in certain socio-cultural settings. In other words, teacher agency is a concrete manifestation of teacher autonomy. In addition, a sense

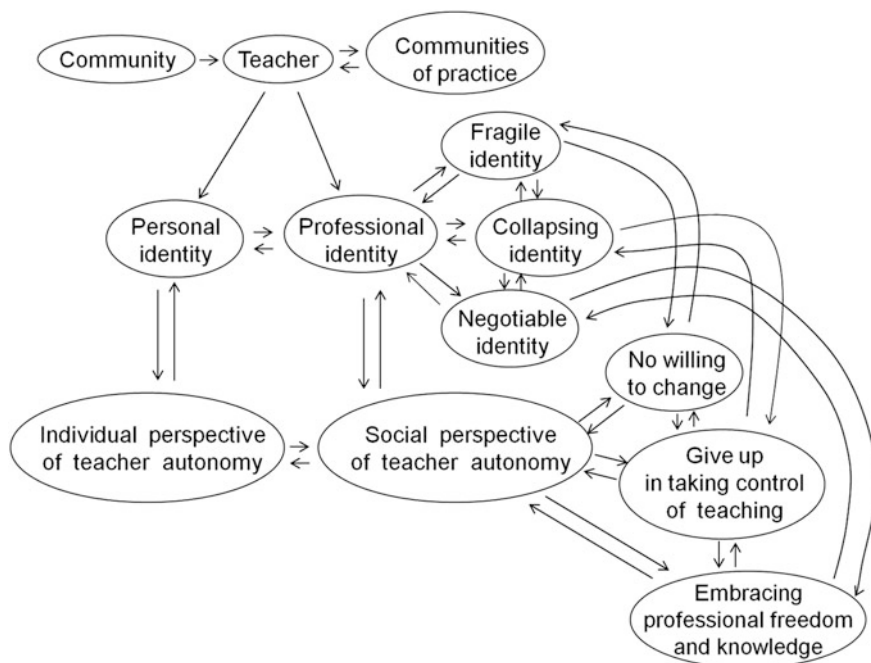


Fig. 2 The interrelationship between teacher identity and teacher autonomy

of teacher identity positively impacts the teachers' autonomous behaviors in reflecting critically on their own teaching practices, making classroom decisions and taking responsibility for independent actions within the contextual and structural conditions (Fig. 3).

For example, a teacher who has a sense of agency may develop autonomous behaviors in being a self-determined, technically responsible, and critically reflective member of the teaching community. Therefore, exercise of personal agency and establishment of a robust personal agenda play an important role in fostering teachers' positive autonomous behaviors. Teachers with a sense of agency may enhance their ability in taking control of their teaching. When they gradually attain motivation and confidence in being autonomous in their teaching, this feeling of empowerment may lead them to conduct more agentic work. Therefore, teacher autonomy is a socio-cognitive system and a precondition for teacher agency because it enables innovation in the teaching practice and leads to agentic behaviors beyond the classroom (Menezes, 2011).

In addition, awareness of expectations and visions in teaching may enable the teachers to take control of their teaching, enhance confidence, recognize achievement, and sense authority in teaching. This impacts the construction and reconstruction of their identity as a teacher. For example, teachers who feel an immense sense of pride due to students' recognition of their work and progress in teaching

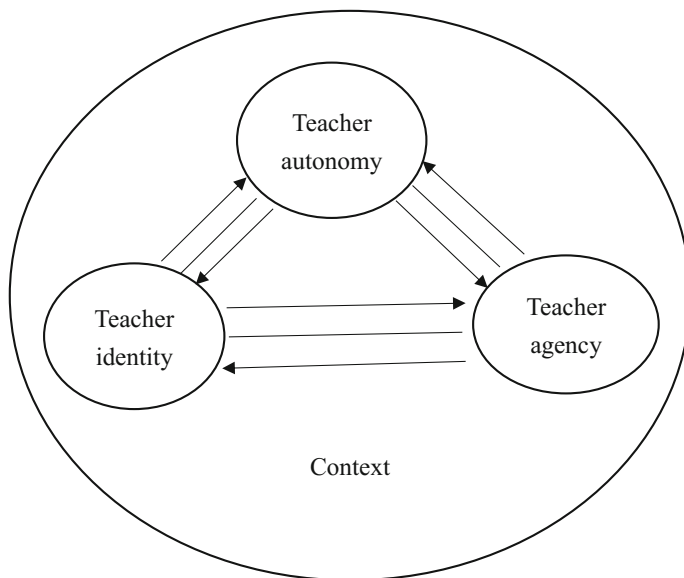


Fig. 3 An interconnection between teacher autonomy, teacher agency, and teacher identity

may exert efforts in overcoming prior negative emotions and reconstruct identity as a supportive and caring teacher. The enactment of professional identity may also increase their involvement as a member of teaching communities. This initiates the potential of conducting autonomous work and enables them to organize more meaningful and effective activities in the classroom and beyond. This is in line with Paiva and Braga's (2008) argument that autonomy is not a linear process and at least three states—instability, adaptability, and variability—co-exist within autonomy. Thus, this dynamic nature of teacher autonomy is influenced by the teachers' identity formation.

Therefore, there is a very faint boundary between teacher autonomy and teacher agency. This indicates that both teacher agency and teacher autonomy impact a teacher's capacity to initiate an intentional act. However, the two notions are also distinct. Agency might relate to taking conscious actions for a certain purpose while not being in a state of autonomy, i.e., having a controlling capacity. Teacher autonomy is a precondition for the development of teacher agency (*ibid.*). In terms of autonomy and identity, the two notions are interrelated. The ability to construct a well-grounded identity may have a positive role in the development of autonomy. On the other hand, the development of teacher autonomy intensifies the self-identification as a professional teacher. The development of teacher autonomy evolves in tandem with the construction of teacher identity. In terms of teacher agency and teacher identity, teacher agency plays an essential role in constructing

teacher identity and the formation of teacher identity is a prerequisite for enhancing teacher agency. In terms of the interrelationship between teacher agency, teacher identity, and teacher autonomy, identity conceptualization and construction may help teachers find a proper direction for the development of autonomy. This constitutes the guiding force for further agentic work in teaching practice. In addition, teacher agency facilitates the development of teacher autonomy, which results in teacher identity formation, as one of the most important outcomes. Teachers' adaptive preferences and internalized oppression in autonomy may also affect teacher agency, resulting in the (re)construction of professional identities.

In the field of teacher education, the relationship between teacher autonomy, teacher agency, and teacher identity has remained an under-researched area. There is a need for a detailed conceptualization of how EFL teachers negotiate their professional identities, adopt their agentic behaviors for teaching, and respond to the constraints on autonomy in teaching. Most importantly, structural and system-wide teaching communities with underlain rules could negatively impact the actualization of teacher autonomy, teacher agency, and teacher identity. Such understanding can provide insights into the complexities of affordances to teachers in achieving autonomy by taking the centrality of teacher identity and agency into account.

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Chapter 7

To Be or not to Be an ‘Old English Lecturer’: A Social Identity Theory Perspective



Abstract While recent education reform across the globe has increasingly focused on the professional practices of lecturers (Teng in *Front Educ China* 12:113–132, 2017a; Tian & Lu in *Teach High Educ* 22:957–974, 2017), the identity development of lecturers—who play a pivotal part in the development of teaching, research, and teacher education—becomes an emerging topic in higher education. China is the largest country involved with teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and university English teachers are the largest group of teachers in university. In China, a lecturer is an academic rank below associate professor. University English lecturers, particularly those who have taught English in universities for a long time but have not been promoted to associate professor due to the fierce competition in the academic promotion system, has become a common but serious phenomenon in China (Wen & Zhang in *Foreign Lang Educ* 38:67–72, 2017). However, there is a lack of systematic research into how university English lecturers engage in various aspects of their professional development, including teaching, research, and academic service. In addition, there is a lack of understanding of what challenges they may encounter, how they navigate the challenges to enhance their teaching and research work, and how they respond to constraints in fostering changes to their work. This chapter aims to bridge these gaps, with a focus on using identity as an analytical lens to examine the identity construction experiences of one group of university English lecturers in the contested and ever-shifting contexts of teacher education and higher education in mainland China.

Keywords Lecturers • Identity • Social identity theory

Introduction

China is in a phase of industrial, scientific and commercial expansion and the world’s largest EFL market. Over the past few decades, along with an increase in the volume of students and courses offered in higher education institutions in China, a continual wave of reform and change has been introduced in EFL teaching in

higher education. The growth of enrollment in higher education influenced teachers' attitudes towards teaching, and simultaneously, teaching has become more complex, more problematized, and less manageable. The challenges involved in teaching directed attention to the research of teacher identity, which emerged in the late 1980s and flourished during the last two decades. The focus of this line of research has been on teachers' professionalism, teachers' work and life, as well as various mediating factors related to the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of their work settings. Scholarship in relation to university teacher identity has increased due to the fact that university teachers need to strike a balance between teaching and research and simultaneously match their personal imagination of how it should be with the reality while being subject to the powerful socializing forces of embedded rules in the practiced communities (Nevgi & Löfström, 2015). Thus, exploration of the identity formation of university teachers who need to bear responsibilities for teaching and research has become appealing.

A substantive body of work on university teacher identity has been conducted (e.g., Hockings, Cooke, Yamashita, McGinty, & Bowl, 2009; Nevgi & Löfström, 2015). However, studies focusing on lecturers' identities are scarce. Different from lecturers in other countries or regions, lecturer in China is an academic rank (Professor/associate professor/lecturer/assistant lecturer). To be considered for promotion to associate professor, lecturers in China are expected to bear the responsibility of supporting teacher excellence through course development and innovation, lecturing, conducting seminars and supervising undergraduate and/or graduate students and contributing to excellence in research through publication of research findings. A recent study (Wen & Zhang, 2017) proposed that lecturers, particularly who have taught English at a university for a long time but have not been promoted to associate professor, undergone struggles in personal and professional development. Given the drive towards professionalizing and enhancing practices in higher education and the limited studies on exploring identities of university English lecturers in China, it has become crucial to examine their teaching and learning, and to assess how the context of practice influences the way they conceptualize and approach teaching and research.

For many university lecturers, the process of forging teaching and research identities is challenging because the external messages they receive concerning who they should be are unclear, varying, and inconsistent. These messages may also conflict with the conception of who they should be that was deeply rooted in both their prior and ongoing personal life experiences (Fanghanel, 2007). Seeking an understanding of how lecturers perceive, experience, and respond to such a complex array of external and internal messages is an important goal in view of both scholarship and practice. How do they determine who to be? What do they decide to mull over, sort out, clarify, contemplate, weigh-up, judge, and make their minds up about? And, how may they respond to the requirements for research? In this chapter, the ways in which university English lecturers conceptualize and approach their teaching and research will be examined with reference to the context of practice, and their responses to that context.

The present study seeks to explore the formation of identities of university English lecturers by examining their professional experiences. Inspired by how different contexts play a decisive role in shaping individual identities (Gu & Benson, 2015), the present study will investigate how university English lecturers talk about their identities as lecturers and researchers in the context of mainland China. Although previous research has touched upon the experiences of identity construction among English teachers, including pre-service teachers (Teng, 2017b; Timoštšuk & Ugaste, 2010), and language teacher educators (Yuan, 2017; Yuan & Lee, 2014), young lecturers (Tian & Lu, 2017), part-time lecturers (Teng, 2017a), more research on the work of lecturers is needed, particularly in relation to how they enhance competency in teaching and respond to the challenges of conducting research and publishing. This may provide insights into the structures and communities that influence the way individual lecturers conceive of and approach teaching and research. This exploration may also shed lights on how this impact can be moderated by agentic/ideological responses to structures and communities or aggravated due to deviant ideological beliefs, including how lecturers perceive their discipline and the powerlessness when being constrained by structures (e.g., the research-teaching nexus, academic labor).

Identity

Identity, a notion in exploring “who I am”, can be interpreted from individuals’ social roles in various social settings. For example, a teacher can simultaneously occupy the role as a father or a mother while acting as a member of the academic community. It seems that some components of identities are subjective and are organized hierarchically. This suggests that identities high on the hierarchy are more salient while identities low on the hierarchy are less salient (Teng, 2017a, b). It is argued that the development of identity is a process of how an individual behaves in agreement with the most salient identity.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT), developed by Tajfel (1981), opened up a wide variety of concepts for research, including: the structure of social identities, the motivations behind identification, the fluidity between different social identities, self-categorization as part of a cognitive system, and the role of identity for individuals, groups, organizations, and wider social collectives. SIT attached importance to the collective membership and its role on members’ behaviors, which included positive feelings toward members of the in-group, preferential treatment toward the in-group, and stereotypic judgments toward out-group members. According to this theory, members in a community defined their own identities with

respect to social groups and such identifications worked to protect or bolster self-identity (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). A social group comprised of people who felt and perceived themselves as belonging to this group or said to be belonged to this group by others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Inter-member interaction was by no means a presupposition for the perception of its members as belonging to the same group. Inter-member interaction also affects group-based self-definitions and out-group categorizations affects a member's motive to protect or enhance the self in the group, which was described as the in-group-out-group relationship (Islam, 2014). Individuals express their belongings to the community through social interactions. Communicative acts with community members affect their ability to navigate their lives. For example, individuals seek out activities that favor their in-group, and even establish a sharp line to distinguish themselves from out-group members. Hence, a focus on individuals' interaction and relationships with others or their affiliations with particular social groups provide nuanced insights into individuals' beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes towards their work or life. One part of self-concept was determined by the people's belongings to social groups, for which they categorize themselves and others as belonging to different social groups and evaluate these categorizations.

SIT deals with not only the protection and enhancement of self-concepts, but also the threat to the self-concept. For example, when individuals are exposed to a threat in a group, they form negative self-categorization. Hence, the preference for particular identity management partly depends on the members' perception of the situation in the group. This includes the sociostructural characteristics of intergroup relations such as stability, legitimacy, and permeability. It is suggested that members are more or less identified with their group based on their perception of status inferiority as being legitimate or illegitimate, stable or unstable, and the boundaries between groups as being permeable or impermeable (Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, Mielke, & Insko, 1999). For example, teachers who identified with a particular group would value and emulate the characteristic attributes of the group, thus linking their group membership to concrete group-approved behaviors and display greater job involvement. On the other hand, those who were not able to strongly identify with workgroups would be more likely to resign and display less positive behaviors (Barkhuizen, 2017).

Tajfel (1982) proposed that SIT included three components, which typically constituted the "identification" stage: (a) a cognitive component (i.e., the sense of awareness of group memberships), (b) an evaluative component (i.e., positive or negative evaluations of belonging to that group), and (c) an emotional component (i.e., positive and negative emotions involved with the group membership and its evaluations). Moreover, the identification process of "who I am" is a psychological state of perceiving, feeling, observing, and valuing one's belongingness to a new community. This suggests that understanding the complex practices and processes of teacher socialization and identity construction is intimately associated with the emotions. For example, teacher's value-laden content, lack of time and energy for grading student essays, stresses caused by high-stakes testing, and the requirement for culturally responsive pedagogies were determined to increase English teachers'

emotional burdens, tensions and challenges (Loh & Liew, 2016). In addition, the process of identity construction was found to be related to the given social context, including relations between salient social groups. This process provides understanding of how social identity can be constructed in a specific way, through considering the four main principles of SIT: social categorization, social comparison, awareness of social identity, and search for psychological distinctiveness (Tajfel, 1981).

Social categorizations function as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and through this, individuals are able to undertake many forms of social action and subsequently, create and define their positions in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This suggests that social categorizations shared by group members may become social stereotypes that help interpret, explain and even justify the group members' behavior. According to SIT, group members categorize themselves and others, and subsequently evaluate the groups. To gain a sense of the superiority or inferiority of the group that individuals are in, or how reasonable and adequate their belonging to it is, they might compare it with other groups, enacting "social comparison". The closer the other groups are to the individual in terms of the dimensions in which they compete, the more relevant the social comparison becomes and the more they need and want a positive outcome. Awareness of social identity, in this standpoint, is determined by the outcome of social comparison. In addition, it is restricted by the perceived characteristics, group boundaries, strength of objections, and sanctions of the groups. Finally, self-esteem becomes enhanced if social comparison leads to social identity.

However, it has been suggested that the four principles could be questioned or contested (Tajfel, 1981). For example, the stage of searching for self-esteem may also appear in other states. Indeed, individuals may search for their distinctiveness while they categorize themselves into a social group, become aware of their identity in that special group, and compare themselves to others in that group. Therefore, to understand SIT better, the four main processes of SIT could be assumed to co-exist as four synchronous processes, rather than four discreet step-by-step stages. One of the factors that led to the synchronous processes include the power relations (Tajfel, 1981). The society individuals are situated in comprises various power relations, linking the processes of comparison and categorization and the related identity that individuals take on. This demonstrates the impact of the situational characteristics on the construction of identity. Given that the referenced society contains diversified contexts or categorization, it is likely for an individual to possess multiple identities. This is because the identity that an individual takes on is dependent on the situation that he/she is in and the people he/she interacts with in that situation. Hence, according to SIT, context is a key factor to be considered when exploring identity.

SIT was later discussed from the perspective of self-categorization, which, according to Turner and Reynolds (2010), was regarded as the process that changes interpersonal and inter-group behavior. This suggests that personal and social identity is actually a process of exhibiting different levels of self-categorization rather than the poles of one continuum. For example, it was the "relative" salience

of different levels of self-categorization, documented by Turner (1999), that determined the degree to which individuals' behavior represented differences or similarities. Hence, a connection between SIT and self-categorization was found. Based on varying levels of abstraction and inclusiveness, three types of self categorization were discussed (Haslam, 2001). The lowest level of abstraction is a personal self, for which the perceiver self categorizes as "I". A higher level of abstraction refers to a social self, which the perceiver self categorizes as "we" in comparison to a salient outgroup (them). The highest level of abstraction corresponds to "we humans", where the salient outgroup is excluded. However, there were innumerable self categories that a perceiver may exhibit, and there were a myriad of different personal and social identities that a perceiver may invoke in his or her day-to-day context (Reynolds & Turner, 2006). This suggests a need to explore a group of lecturers' identities from the angle of social identity theory.

In addition to the social context, SIT also attached immense importance to the language (Islam, 2014). Language is neither positive or negative. However, language becomes a representative notion of the group as well the people in that group once it is used by or belongs to them. Language may also become a part of their behaviors, values, standards, and lives. Then, based on the power relations of groups, language becomes value-laden. For example, language used by high-status groups carry positive connotations while the language of low-status groups carries powerless characteristics. Hence, while examining social identity, exploring the group difference due to the language difference is needed, as well as how identity forms due to the interplay with the power relations of the groups. Therefore, language plays a salient role in formulating group membership and social identity, through which people are empowered by their distinctive group membership and identity. In addition, when individuals from a particular group try to change their social identity to another group considered more positive in mainstream society, they may undergo a process of language adaptation. Language, in this perspective, is a conspicuous label that can uncover peoples' social identities and establish distinctions among groups of people.

In summary, examination of SIT and self-categorization suggests that people categorize themselves as belonging to certain groups, e.g., a group of university English lecturers in the present study. SIT focuses on how group membership guides intergroup behavior and how an individual's self-concept can be influenced by SIT. Following this, individuals may evaluate the in-group and form their self-categorization. According to Trepte and Loy (2017), individuals in a group engaged in processes of social comparison, and deviated from the out-group to enhance their self-esteem, depending on the dynamic interplay of social identity and intergroup behavior. In addition, individuals categorized themselves along a continuum ranging from a completely personal and idiosyncratic identity—e.g., focusing on the aspects that make us distinct from others—to a completely social or group identity—e.g., highlighting the common aspects shared by ingroup members (Hodson & Earle, 2017). From this perspective, SIT espouses the concept of identity based on the social categories created by society that were relational in power and status. Individuals derive their identities (i.e., understanding more about

themselves) based on the social categories to which they belonged (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). In this dynamic, temporally and contextually determined, and continually changing process, individuals' self-esteem was likely influenced (Sherman, Hamilton, & Lewis, 1999). Thus, the membership of individuals in one group might at times be more salient than membership in another. The role of SIT for bringing understanding to the complex questions of language-teacher identity has been documented by Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005). However, teacher identity is individual and psychological, and it involves self-image and other images of particular teachers. Despite numerous published literature on teacher identity, an exploration of "lecturer identity" in the present study is a major gap to be bridged. In addition, in purview of the complexity of identity, an equally complex theoretical response, e.g., from the perspective of SIT, is required for interpreting the way identities are discursively constructed, and the social pressures being brought to bear on the lecturers themselves. Therefore, the concept of knowledge and perceptions as socially constructed that SIT include are necessary, along with the various ways of conceptualizing individual psychological states that are offered by SIT. SIT is a valuable theoretical framework for exploring the real-world complexity of this study's participants, university English lecturers.

Method

A Multiple Case Study

The present study employed a qualitative multiple case study methodology, which allows a researcher to closely examine a phenomenon within a specific context. Case studies is widely recognized in education studies especially when in-depth explanations, high degree of completeness, and depth of analysis of a social behavior are sought after (Duff, 2008).

Selection of Participants

The participants were university English lecturers who had been working in the department of university English teaching. Purposeful sampling was employed. Six university English lecturers at a university in Mainland China were selected. First, the participants were able to reflect, articulate and share their stories and join the study. Second, the participants were hospitable to the inquiry of this study and potentially manifest the willingness to be investigated intensively. Third, the participants did not miss the scheduled interviews or other requirements. Finally, the participants had worked as a university English lecturer for more than 10 years and presented different trajectories for personal development.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

The data collection lasted for an entire academic year for each participant. Data were triangulated through in-depth individual interviews, group discussions, narrative frame, and WeChat post. Discourse analysis were used to analyze naturally occurring speech (spoken interaction), with a focus on how the participants express themselves verbally in their work and social life (Jones, 2012). Differing from thematic analysis—which applies analytic procedures, including identification of codes and themes within a constructionist theoretical framework—discourse analysis identifies the codes, themes, discourses, and systems of meaning, while the analytic process might be more fluid and organic.

Data analysis were iterative with data collection (Merriam, 2009). For the present study, the “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches, commonly used in qualitative studies (e.g., Yuan, 2015), were adopted to analyze the data. These approaches provide insights into the researched theme from a holistic perspective. First, bottom-up analysis consists of analyzing various forms of data to find emerging patterns from the data. Second, following “bottom-up” analysis, a “top-down” analysis—informed by the integrated identity framework adopted in the present study—were performed to examine these themes within the data.

Research Questions

Research questions that guide the study included:

1. What makes the lecturers define themselves in terms of group membership?
2. What personal, institutional, and social factors influence their identity development?

Findings

Theme 1: Lecturer Identities Are Emerged from Different Contexts

In the process of becoming a university lecturer, different participants formed their identities in different ways. For example, having the opportunity to take a master degree and interact with teachers sparked Sabrina’s interest and made her realize the value in being a university lecturer (e.g., suggested by her use of positive words, such as “broaden my vision”, “happy”, “meaningful”, and “nice”). This also demonstrated her initial passion to become a teacher in higher education. Apple,

who used “long for”, “happy”, and “expectation”, expressed her envisions of belonging to the university teacher group. For example,

Extract 1

My initial encounter with the career of teacher was during the time I studied for my master degree. I had a talk with the lecturers there. The experience broadened my vision and I remembered how happy in my heart that the nature of their work was really meaningful and the environment of working in a university was really nice. (Sabrina, individual interview 1)

Extract 2

I longed for being a teacher when I was a child. I got a chance of being a lecturer in this university. Then I was happy to accept it, and full of expectation for it. (Apple, individual interview 1)

However, other participants expressed they were mostly forced to become a university lecturer or they regarded themselves as “accidental teachers”. It seems that when teacher participants encounter differences moving from one community (e.g., university education) to another community (e.g., teaching community), they formed boundaries while experiencing different ways of engaging with one another. Their prior experiences are sources for them to reflect on their identity and to explore possibilities. Take the following extracts as examples:

Extract 3

I became a teacher because of my parents. They expected me to do this job. (Sam, individual interview 1)

Extract 4

I consider myself as an “accidental” university lecturer. The year when I graduated was the period that there were few university graduates. I had many options. I could join the government, bank, or some national enterprises. After a talk with my parents at that time, I was persuaded to do my job as a university lecturer, which, according to them, was stable and rewarding. I was an ‘accidental’ teacher. (Becky, individual interview 1)

Extract 5

I did not plan to teach at tertiary level until my husband chose to work in that university. Then I sent in applications to that university. I was hired, as there was one policy in that university of ‘taking care of’ the employees’ family. (Melody, individual interview 1)

Extract 6

Before I joined the university, I worked as a translator for a private company. To look back, the reason for quitting my previous employment was because of my tiredness of being a translator. However, I did not have confidence that I would eventually settle down in tertiary education. (Cathy, individual interview 1)

Theme 2: Lecturer Identities Are Developed from Practice

When the teacher participants first entered their career, they positioned themselves and others as particular types of teachers in both practice and discourse. While the initial career is the first step in their identity trajectory in becoming a university lecturer, their interest and passion were turned into a form of “imagination” (Wenger, 1998), particularly during the period when they first became a lecturer. They attempted to build a set of possible scenarios to understand their options. Their positive imagination of themselves, the communities, and the society encouraged them to build a positive self-image. The self-image also affected their identity construction. For example, Becky perceives the identity of a lecturer should be ‘a caring teacher’. Melody regards a lecturer should be a ‘friend’ to students while Apple believes a lecturer as an ‘innovator’. These were shown in the following excerpts:

Extract 7

The first time when I went to this university. I had a terrible feeling about the school environment. However, I had a different feeling about the students. They are positive, friendly, and reliable. This helped me build a positive feeling about being a teacher, who should care for the students, not the environment. (Becky, individual interview 2)

Extract 8

Seeing those students who were almost the same age with me, I felt happy. I could not only be a guide for instructing them knowledge, but a friend in their life. (Melody, individual interview 1)

Extract 9

A university lecturer should be an innovator in teaching. However, doing research should not be included. (Apple, individual interview 1)

The participants’ identity as an ‘innovator’ in teaching or ‘a guide’ on the students’ study and life path direction, however, was continually challenged by the institutional requirements. This was particularly severe after several years they worked in the school. Several main factors include: First, the rigid school curriculum, for which the teachers were required to follow the predetermined syllabus and instruct the content of the prescribed textbooks for the final examinations. Second, the same textbooks are repeated year after year, and major benefit transmission was involved in changing a set of textbooks. Third, students’ decreased interests and English level after the expansion of enrollment in the 2000s. Fourth, the frequent changes of administrators in the school. Finally, the time pre-determined for teaching activities were always occupied due to the various kinds of activities administered by the department of student’s affair. For example, Becky felt constrained by the curriculum which diverged her endeavor to improve students’ spoken English. Cathy felt depressed by the changing policy of the institution. Apple expressed anger to the interference on her teaching activities from the department of student’s affair. Hence, from time to time, the teacher participants

were faced with organizational pressures, and they had to deal with the pressures with their own efforts. They felt it necessary to balance the need for creative teaching. This denotes the paradoxes involved in the teacher participants' location of alternate possibilities by provisionally assuming various identities, a 'bottom-line worker', 'a teaching machine', etc. It seems that discontinuities and uncertainties involved in their professional work were major triggers for their burnout at work and their well-being as individuals. Take the following extracts as examples:

Extract 10

The school mandates related to the curriculum require us to rigidly follow the syllabus. We were left for little time for improving students' spoken English. If you don't teach the content for the examination, the students may fall behind other classes and they may have complaints. (Becky, individual interview 3)

Extract 11

I asked for a change for a new textbook because it was too difficult for the students. Later I found out that the low-quality textbook was kept using because the leaders in the department of teaching affair can gain huge profits from the publishers in purchasing this set of textbooks. Changing for a new one is difficult because you may cut the leaders' profits. (Sabrina, individual interview 3)

Extract 12

The 2000s is a period concomitant with the expansion of enrollment for university students. It is very obvious that more and more students are not interested in learning English. It is a labor, not an interest, in teaching English. I am a teaching machine. (Sam, individual interview 3)

Extract 13

For one or two years, we will have new leaders. Like the Chinese old saying, 'a new sovereign, new courtiers; a new leader, a new leading body'. But I think the leaders never put their heart into the teaching affair. They came for earning money. They made a lot of policies. Even the policies were wrong, they never admitted their fault. I am just a bottom-line worker without having a right to speak out my voice. (Cathy, group discussion 1)

Extract 14

I was very annoyed about the department of students' affair. For example, one day, I went to the classroom, and waited for about 30 minutes, no students came. Finally, I asked the monitor of the class. I was told that the students were asked to take part in an activity organized by the department of students' affair. Nobody informed me of such change. This happened for many times. (Apple, individual interview 4)

Theme 3: The Interactional Forces of Social, Role, and Person Factors in Identity Development

Identity at the individual and organizational levels is comprised of multiple aspects; these aspects vary in accessibility and salience across situations; and certain aspects are more central and stable while other aspects are subject to ongoing interpretation and change. For example, identity is comprised of aspects of self that arise from the teacher participants’ personal characteristics, as well as the social categories in which each teacher participant claims membership. For example, the identity of being a teacher was more recalcitrant for Melody, while Becky’s identity was subject to ongoing interpretation and change. For Apple, due to heavy teaching workload, some aspects of her identity were incompatible. This creates a state of conflict to her professional work. Along with the process of moving across time and space, the six teacher participants created, dismantled, and/or maintained boundaries of varying permeability, and thus carved out different patterns in their work and life space. For example, Sam allows some aspects of his identity to be permeable to others. While he was actively teaching one day a week, he engaged in other practices of working in an office as an administrator. He perceived an incongruence between “assigned identity” and “claimed identity” (Tang, 2017). Take the following extracts as examples:

Extract 15

It is struggling to be a lecturer. But I chose this job, I needed to do it well. I always told myself about this. Be positive to your students, your work, and your school, you will like your job. (Melody, individual interview 4)

Extract 16

I started my job with 100 percent of passion, then 80 percent, then less than 50 percent. I was very puzzled with why I chose this job as a university lecturer. Is it because we have the winter vacation and summer vacation? No, we were assigned to a lot of duties during holidays. For teaching students? I could not sense the enjoyment as the school leaders want to put more students into one class for cutting cost. At first 50, now 100, may be 150 students in one class in the future. (Becky, narrative frame)

Extract 17

The more I teach classes, a higher salary I got. I often need to teach more than 20 hours one week. In addition, if I teach a repeated lesson, the class fee will be reduced because I don’t need to prepare it for a second time. But the fact is that students are different, repeated class does not mean the teaching is the same. I cannot see myself as a teacher. I am a factory-line worker. (Apple, individual interview 4)

Extract 18

A lecturer has no freedom in the work. Then I chose to be a school administrator. I did not expect myself to be this role when I joined this school. But I didn’t have a choice. I could only choose to control or being controlled. (Sam, individual interview 4)

Before doing this job, the lecturer participants held positive imagination about their job. Positive recognition of being a lecturer includes 'a caring teacher', 'a friend to students', 'an innovator in teaching'. In terms of the accumulated threats exerted by the school environments, some participants were positive. However, most of them sensed conflicts were a major dimension for their identities. After teaching for a long time, the lecturer participants felt that they were no longer a guide or an innovator, but simply a 'fisherman', who should be happy at completing the school requirements. Their basic purposes were to transmit knowledge through self-directing and self-acting any teaching activities in the class. Classroom interaction, according to them, is 'luxurious' and 'unrealistic'. They were unable to foster changes in the school requirements, but to accept them, and maneuver to find a comfort zone through 'spoon-feeding' the students. Take the following accounts as examples:

Extract 19

I wanted my students to take more responsibilities for their own learning instead of waiting for me to 'feed' them. I realized that my students were very upset of doing this. They were very passive, and reliant on me for everything. The students were passive in learning, then I was also passive in teaching. (Apple, individual interview 4)

Extract 20

To be a lecturer was my choice. I thought the school and the students need me. The fact is that the school does not need me. The school only wants to have several buildings, a school name, and some administrators. Teachers, including lecturers, are just one of the tools for their reining. However, the saddest thing is that the students do not need me. They only need a 'pass', a certificate, and a degree. (Cathy, individual interview 5)

Extract 21

I have instructed my students the content that would be selected for examination, but two thirds of students still failed the test. I was confused at that time. Should I take it strictly and let those students fail or should I fangshui (close my eyes and let them pass)? I chose the former, the result was that the students, peer teachers, and school administrators gave me very bad comments and described me as 'geeks' or 'crazy man'. I was 'rewarded' as an awful teacher. (Melody, group discussion 3)

Extract 22

My teaching has become my monologue now. It made me feel like a fisherman who should simply complete the school requirement through catching the 'fish' and 'feeding' the fish to the students. (Sabrina, group discussion 3)

After teaching for more than 10 years, only Cathy was not merely a passive recipient of identities assigned to them by social entities. She formed positive identity. She even responded to identity pressures and proactively initiate identity dynamics. Identity seems to be established in the interface of identity boundaries. For example, in the case of Cathy, the 'recalcitrant' aspects of her identity can be strongly maintained even when encountering strong academic, normative and cultural constraints in the institution. For example:

Extract 23

The happiest moment is to take graduation photos with my students. Seeing those happy smiles reminds me that I need to do better as a teacher. The school leaders may not need me. The students may not need me. Even through working in a highly controlled institution, what I do should be worthy of my heart because I am a teacher. (Cathy, WeChat post)

However, the other teacher participants got used to this type of teaching practices. In the cases of Becky and other participants, instability in inter-identity boundaries could trigger identity flux. For example, when they experienced identity intrusion or distance, or a challenge to their existing identity boundaries, they found it difficult to foster change in teaching but to maintain what it was like as before. Take the following excerpts as examples:

Extract 24

I have taught in this school for about 20 years. My heart was numb with the current higher education teaching system. As a 'social worker' who was separated with the society for 20 years, what I could do was to continue my job. It is time for me to rethink whether I am qualified to be a university lecturer. (Becky, narrative frame)

Extract 25

We are often forced to listen to those stupid administrators brag as a 'scholar'. Teachers could only sigh and hold the tail and curl up. It is no longer a place where knowledge is respected, and it is meaningless to seek for change in teaching. (Apple, individual interview 5)

The lecturer participants experienced a 'bottleneck' in their professional development, for which they needed a strong impetus to seek further improvement in their research work. However, as a novice lecturer who just put her feet into research community, Melody described she was 'scared' by the concept of research. This concept of research, according to her, is 'owned by the scholars'. This seemed to create the psychological barriers for her to conduct research. The lecturer participants encountered great difficulties in developing his identity as an academic researcher. For example, publishing in international journals. Although the teachers admitted that publications in standard international journals have been increasingly used as indicators of the quality of research productivity, they still had concerns about publications in international journals. Cathy expressed that a sole focus on SSCI journal is a challenge to her, other international journals should also be recognized. Sabrina expressed one of the difficulties is the fear of writing in English. Take the following quotes as example:

Extract 26

The bottleneck that hinders my professional development is my lack of research output. I was always very scared when I heard the word of research. It seems to be owned by those scholars. We are just ordinary lecturers. Doing research is something abstract and challenging. (Melody, individual interview 3)

Extract 27

There is an increasingly important value of publishing articles in SSCI and CSSCI journals. I agree with the importance of publishing for being an academic, including lecturers. However, other non-ssci and non-cssci journals should be recognized. (Cathy, individual interview 5)

Extract 28

I used more Chinese than English in teaching. The more I teach, the lower level of English I had. In view of my decreasing English level, it is normal for me to have a fear in writing in English. How can I write an article in a SSCI journal? (Sabrina, individual interview 5)

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings illustrate the multiple, dynamic, complex, multi-dimensional, and conflicting processes of the university English lecturers' identity construction (i.e., the first research question) and document the various personal, institutional, and social factors that influenced their identity work (i.e., the second research question). This provides knowledge into how university English lecturers' identities are discursively and practically enacted, modified, transformed, and reconstructed within and across their communities against the various internal and external contextual forces in higher education.

To the university English lecturers in the present study, a poor public image is a major source of stress to their work commitment. Even for those lecturers who positively chose this job because of personal love (e.g., Apple), personal experiences (e.g., Sabrina), or family's expectations (e.g., Sam), a poor public image has greatly diminished their self-esteem. They felt insecure of their position as professionals. In addition, the institutional constraints augment the lecturers' doubts. However, mobilizing interactional competences within situational routines, the lecturers presented an image of themselves to seek for acceptance from others. This is the internal moment of the dialectic of identification with respect to public image. The lecturers positively imagined themselves, the communities, and the society, and imagined a positive self-image. For example, Becky perceives the identity of a teacher should be 'a caring teacher'. Melody regards a teacher should be a 'friend' to students while Apple regards a teacher as an 'innovator'. However, when it comes to the external moment, particularly when the lecturers' self-perception is not accepted. Their positive self-image was turned into negative ones, including "a lower-paid slave labor", "a bottom-line worker", "a teaching machine", "a factory-line worker", and "a fisherman". Hence, the lecturer participants' identities were modified, transformed, and generated in the relationship between self-image and public-image and is struck between the two elements.

The internal-external dialectic of individual identification influences the lecturer participants' professional experiences. The lecturers feel that they were thrown 'in

at the deep end', especially in teaching and supporting students. They also feel 'in the dark' partly with regard to teaching content and strategies but even more so in terms of the specialist language, procedures, relationships, line management responsibilities and level of autonomy within higher education. The lecturers expressed reluctance to 'keep on asking' for advice; partly they explain this as heavy workload of those experienced colleagues. The lecturers seem to feel a tension between appearing as credible and requesting additional nonformal support. The lecturers did not appear to be very pro-active in terms of managing their own professional learning. For example, although they value nonformal opportunities to shadow workplace visits and to observe experienced colleagues teaching, they do not always feel able to make these arrangements themselves.

Difficulties in surviving the 'publishing' game reflected the lecturers' vulnerability and powerlessness as an inexperienced researcher and writer in the academic community. This also brings the lecturers a sense of uncertainty towards future professional learning and identity construction. As suggested by some researchers (Mayer, Mitchell, Santoro, & White, 2011), the ongoing higher education might turn teacher identity into a site of contestation and conflicts where their agency can be curbed and the balance between their personal and institutional identities can be overturned.

The present study provides implications for teacher education and understanding of teacher identity. First, the group in which an individual was situated plays a role in forming identities and linking that individual to the group (Tajfel, 1982). A key assumption is that individuals are likely to establish their social identity from the groups they are attached to or they belong to, e.g., lecturers who work in a supportive institution are likely to form an identity as a lecturer. However, the identity carries for the self is subject to how one individual conceives of oneself with respect to his/her memberships of a specific group (Tajfel, 1982). Hence, identity is not static, but dynamic and continuously changing. For instance, the competing needs for inclusiveness and uniqueness and the possible distinctiveness that a lecturer aspires to seek are factors in affecting his/her motivation to claim group membership. Lecturer identity is dependent on situational cues that a lecturer regards as appropriate for his/her own priorities. This would make an identity salient.

Second, although the dynamic nature of identities has received much attention, empirical studies conducted on examining long-term irreversible changes or even identity loss from the social identity framework were scarce. A contribution of using a longitudinal approach in the present study may allow us to explore the dynamic nature of the identity in an in-depth way, as well as get a sense of in what way or to what degree self or group identifications affect individuals' long-term adjustment to change. Although restructures are often implemented by administrators in a school to make the functioning of the school smooth, success is dependent on the extent to which lecturers are likely to relinquish old identities and establish new identifications. When lecturers in a teaching community are not willing to relinquish their old identities, they would evaluate the new identity imposed to them and linger on their old identities. Hence, the present study was to

investigate the dynamics of change and possible adjustment to the change and how one identity was relatively preferred over the other, during a long period of lecturers' work and life.

Finally, self-presentation, an attempt to produce particular self-images or convey some information about oneself, may be quite fluid (Schlenker, 2003). However, some researchers argued that the self-concept is generally stable across time, for which individuals not only view themselves and others in consistent terms, but also actively create social situations that support their views of themselves (e.g., Guan & So, 2016). Across the life span, however, there are transitions that can have significant effects on self-definition, for which individuals may find it necessary to adapt to changes in environmental opportunities and demands (Renkema, Stapel, & Van Yperen, 2008). These adaptations may involve more than momentary responses to situational pressures; rather, the new situation may elicit fundamental changes in the sense-making process. However, it is also argued that threat to personal existence can turn individuals into biased advocates of what they consider as appropriate in their identity development, and categorizing others into outgroups and the self into ingroups. Hence, depending on the different social categories, an aspect of identity that become salient will define one's social self (e.g., a lecturer or a researcher, or both, or neither). Different categories imply different answers to the question of 'who is similar' and 'who is different'. This is assumed to affect 'who I should be'. Bearing this in mind, depending on the salient level of self-categorization, lecturers behaved differently. For example, lecturers who did not form an identity as a researcher may lack a sense of agency towards doing research. This may be subjected to various contextual obstacles including the institutional policy, the 'publish-or-perish' culture, and the potential bias against practice-oriented research (Yuan, 2017). However, beyond exploring what is considered appropriate, self-categorization also influences who is considered similar or different, i.e., what kind of ingroup and outgroup treatment people consider appropriate. One common query in the lecturers presented in the present study is "whether I should work hard for research and get promotion or continue my job as a lecturer?" The research reported in this chapter represents an attempt to advance a social identity perspective in transcending previous work on the root of identity conflicts for long-serviced English lecturers from both individual level and socio-structural level.

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Chapter 8

How EFL Students Learn English: From the Perspective of Identity Continuity and Identity Change



Abstract Existing research on learner identity had paid limited attention to the mutual relationship between identity continuity and change and learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This gap is bridged by this qualitative research that uses triangulation of data collection to explore the manner in which three Chinese college English major students negotiate and navigate identities in the process of learning English. The findings show that the learners displayed identity continuity and change in the process of building a new sense of belonging to a new learning community, and their identity continuity and change positively and negatively impacted their English learning, and vice versa. This study also discusses relevant implications for teaching and learning English in the EFL context.

Keywords Identity continuity • Identity change • English language learning

Introduction

Identity, a notion in social psychological research on language learning and use, has emerged as an independent research area in the field of education. Likewise, with the recognition of identity as a key driver for foreign language education, identity construction and reconstruction have become central concerns. Identity is defined as ‘the self’ (Taylor, 1989, p. 5). In a broader sense, identity may be conceptualized as ‘who one is’ (Gao, Li, & Li, 2002, p. 95), or, ‘who we are’ (Kanno, 2003, p. 3). It is a continuous and multi-layered process involving questions such as “who am I” as a learner.

The nature of identity includes two dimensions: identity continuity and identity change. According to Bluck and Alea (2008), identity continuity refers to an individual’s knowledge and feeling of self-continuity or being the same person over time. It is suggested that the autobiographical memory allow individuals to remember autobiographical facts and experiences, thereby enabling them to maintain a sense of identity continuity. Addis and Tippett (2008) suggested two kinds of continuity—phenomenological continuity and narrative continuity. While the

recollection of past events and experiences, and expectations about future events give rise to phenomenological continuity, narrative continuity is established through the integration of personal events, experiences, developments and changes into a coherent story. In this sense, identity is established by continuing with the same state of affairs or course.

However, both identity and community are fluid, dynamic, hybrid, multiple, fragmented, and contradictory in nature, and this nature allows identity to influence community, and vice versa (Wenger, 1998). Identity is related to the process of negotiating the self. This is because identity covers interpersonal relationships, as well as the relationship that is established between people and their social environment (Dolby & Cornbleth, 2001). The movement of people from one community to another, formation of new relationships, and change or development in social relationships are a few factors that contribute towards evolution and change in a person's identity. Therefore, identity can be shaped and reshaped in the process of learning and social interactions. Identity is not fixed, but dynamic in nature. Owing to this nature, identity changes across time and space, and is reproduced through social interactions. In an empirical study (Gao, Cheng, Yuan, & Yan, 2005), EFL learners in China undergo six categories of self-identity change. These categories include self-confidence, subtractive bilingualism, additive bilingualism, productive bilingualism, identity split, and zero change.

The research-worthiness of identity in the context of foreign language education has increased since Huang's (2013) findings on the subject. The findings revealed the potential of EFL students in China to extricate themselves from psychological constraints and go beyond the level of instrumental language skills to construct their self-identity. This finding gives a basis for rephrasing the question "who am I" in a range of discourse styles, which include selection or construction of a social role, self-perceptions of learning competencies, inner pursuits, etc. In this connection, both context of culture and context situation has an influence on the individuals' selection of selfhood. In the foreign language situation, the immediate learning context may play a dominant role in the formation or construction of learner identity (see discussion on Chap. 3).

There are also some other notable studies conducted in the context of foreign language education (e.g., Gao & Lamb, 2011; Lamb, 2011; Murray & Kojima, 2007). These studies highlight the reciprocal relationship between language and identity. Firstly, language learning has an impact on the development of learner identity. For example, Murray and Kojima (2007) adopted a life history research method (telling the story of a Japanese female adult learner of English and German), and explored the manner wherein learning a foreign language in an out-of-class setting can play an important role in evolving learners' identity. The study concluded that learners realize a sense of self when they learn a foreign language in their own cultural context. Additionally, a learner's experience as a language learner and speaker provides personal fulfillment, and this fulfillment strengthens the learner's identity. Identity, in this regard, is related to personal pursuit and fulfillment, and self-perception. Day (2002) documents that learner identities are shaped when learners are engaged in classroom activities or learn a

language in socially shaped classrooms. Likewise, Toohey (2000) suggests that learners' identities are negotiated, constructed, and shaped while learning a language. Studies discussed above show that language learning is not purely a cognitive academic activity, but a socialization process in which learner identities are constructed.

In addition, learner identity has an impact on language learning. A language learner is not a unitary and fixed personality, but an individual with a complex and changing identity, who constantly interacts with the society. The elusive and fragmentary nature of identity affects learners' investment in language learning. Hence, identity can negatively or positively impact language learning. Learners with a low sense of learner identity might show resistance to language learning, or become a non-participant during the learning process. On the other hand, those with a high sense of learner identity might invest additional efforts in language learning. Hirst (2007) further added that a disconnect between the learners' desired learning community and actual learning community causes the learner to resist language learning.

The aforementioned philosophies and findings suggest the existence of an interrelationship between language learning and the construction of learner identity. As stated earlier, the nature of identity is multifaceted, contradictory, fragmented, elusive, and changing, and identity can be constructed, reconstructed, maintained, and negotiated to a significant extent. As pointed out by Phan (2008), identity contains "stability within changes or changes that take place along the lines of continuity" (p. 56). Therefore, an exclusive focus on identity continuity or identity change would fail to create a complete picture of identity. The present study aims to build knowledge in the area of identity and language learning by investigating both identity continuity and change and EFL learning through three cases. To that end, two research questions are addressed:

1. Do EFL learners display identity continuity and change? If yes, what continuity and change do they display?
2. How are EFL learners' identity continuity and change related to their EFL learning?

Method

Informants and Their Learning Contexts

The informants reported in the present study comprised three second-year English major students, who were part of a three-year diploma program in a non-prestigious private university in southwestern part of China. This study was conducted in a private university, and the selection is driven by an interest to explore challenging environments for EFL learning. First, this university is located in an economically

backward area. Second, most students that are rejected from a public university are accepted into a private university. Third, general public do not prefer private universities due to their inherent limitations. Finally, findings by the National College Entrance Examination in China showed that the attainment levels at private universities are below the national average.

This study was conducted at a time when the number of privately-run universities in China had snowballed. A large number of private universities and colleges were established to absorb the college enrollment expansion. Although non-governmental higher education has gained popularity, there are still many drawbacks compared to the government universities. For example, students prefer public universities due to better infrastructure and facilities, low tuition fee, etc. It is observed that government schools can attract students with better qualification and academic performance. On the other hand, a few private universities find it difficult to attract average students, let alone qualified students. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has been motivating university graduates to establish a business, with an aim of alleviating stress related to job-hunting after graduation.

Supervised by the Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, a few private universities and colleges formed an organization named as the Association of Universities (Colleges) of Applied Science. The university selected for the study is a member of that association. The mission of this association is to build practically-oriented higher education. This association aims to nurture graduates with problem solving and entrepreneurial abilities. To this end, the syllabus for every major subject was modified in the year 2015. This modification witnessed the inclusion of a few practical courses that could equip aspiring business professionals with practical competencies. The courses comprised Business English Speaking, International Marketing, and English for International Expositions and Trade Fairs. However, the participants' context of situation was still characterized by a traditional and humanistic curriculum. Put simply, although curriculum for English major should be positioned as a field among the "practical sciences," it was still situated within a rather rigid administrative framework of this university. Owing to this framework, the students received many traditional courses related to politics, and were offered restricted opportunities during course selection. Additionally, it was mandatory for students to pass various kinds of exams. Although there has been an emphasis on reforms that can facilitate quality-oriented education, the university education system still puts too much emphasis on test-taking skills. The test scores of students are used to evaluate teachers' performance, and hence traditional curriculum emphasized on tests for improving both student and teacher performance.

Data Collection and Analysis

With an aim of developing a thorough understanding of learner identity, the present study collected multiple sources of evidence. These evidences are obtained by

employing a range of common qualitative techniques including autobiographical accounts, face-to-face interviews (semi-structured), observations, and informal interactions. Benson and Nunan (2005) suggested the efficacy of investigating learners' autobiographical accounts (first-person accounts of the long-term process of learning a second/foreign language). Designed to examine the rich, intricate dynamics of an issue, interviews also comprised a vital part of primary data collection technique in this study. The author also observed participants' class performance, and communicated with the participants through emails, phone calls, and informal meetings. Although this type of data collection was not submitted for systematic analysis, it generated insights for the interpretation of participants' learning experiences and identity construction. This type of informal interaction also helped the researcher to build a rapport with the participants, thereby enhancing the reliability of information shared by the participants. Data triangulation has been advocated as an effective way of enhancing internal validity of a study. It is assumed that data collected in different ways should lead to similar conclusions, and exploring the same issue from different angles can provide a holistic perspective.

There was no word limit for the autobiographical accounts, and students were encouraged to write according to their capacities. Students were allowed to complete their autobiographical assignments and interviews in Chinese, with an aim of enhancing ease in expressing opinions and comprehension. Autobiographical assignments and interviews were completed over a period of four months, from February 2015 to May 2015. The participants were interviewed for about two hours, sometimes in two different sessions. With the participants' consent, entire interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis was also conducted on an ongoing, iterative, cyclical basis along with data collection. The procedures for data analysis mainly included grouping verbal or written responses into categories according to the emerging themes, and comparing category judgments that are obtained at different times. In this connection, thematic analysis was adopted in the present study. As suggested in King and Horrocks (2010), thematic analysis aims to explore patterns and themes, and locate cross-cases and within-cases similarities and differences. In line with this, two sets of data were prepared. The first set of data was organized by type (e.g., autobiographical accounts and interviews), which revealed the common and different patterns in participants. The second set of data was organized by case, which aimed at within-case analysis. Self-reflections on the interview relations and continual observation during the data collection was made for establishing research credibility.

At the outset of the study, 40 second-year English major students were invited to participate in this research. The participants were given clear guidelines about their contribution to the research which included conducting in-depth interviews, communicating with researcher on a regular basis, and maintaining a record of personal critical reflections on their learning experience. Eight students responded to the invitation and agreed to take part in this study. However, only three students presented cases that had considerable depth, and hence were reported in this study.

Pseudonyms were used for participant confidentiality. In terms of data interpretation, researcher triangulation was achieved by employing two experienced teachers to code the data sources independently and then arrive at a consensus on the emerging categories. The consensus coding resulted in four emerging themes: pre-university orientation, coping in college, positioning in college, and future direction.

The author conducted an in-depth re-examination of each theme following the identification of the four themes. This reexamination was conducted by rereading the original data and composing mini stories in relation to specific time, space, and characters involved (Benson, Chik & Barkhuizen, 2014). The process of writing mini stories with reference to the identified themes involved deconstructing, constructing, and reconstructing the social meanings, which facilitated the development of storyline of the three participants (Liu & Xu, 2011). Additionally, a process of member checking was also integrated to enhance and enrich data interpretation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Member checking involved sharing the constructed storylines with the participants, wherein the participants reviewed the stories and clarified interpretations or added additional comments on issues.

Findings

The Story of June

Pre-university Orientation: Exam-Oriented Learning

As a student in an examination-oriented context, June did not try to find methods that were relevant to her capabilities. June started learning English in primary school and attended many extra-curricular English classes during the period, wherein she learnt English by rote. However, June attempted to improve her English skills after entering middle school, wherein she focused on finishing all kinds of tests. The high likelihood of getting rejected by a university due to poor English skills pressurized June to improve her English proficiency after entering high school. The reflections of June on her English learning experience is given below.

I have learned English for about 11 years. It was really fun when I was exposed to English, as a third-year student, in my primary school. I set a goal to speak English well. My parents accompanied me to many extra-curricular English training courses. Although sometimes it was tedious to recite words after words, which was the main requirement of those courses, I managed to finish all the assignments. When it came to my middle school, my teacher told me about the importance of getting a good grade in the English test. I invested a lot of efforts into practicing these English tests. After I entered high school, I practiced as many English tests as possible. I set a goal to achieve at least 120 out of 150 points in the national college entrance examination. I finally achieved 122 points, which was really good.

June was not struggling with choosing a major for her study. Teachers and parents supported her ideas, and June selected English as her major because she was not confident in performing well in other subjects. As June puts in the following lines:

I was not hesitant in choosing English as my major because my performance in other subjects were extremely unsatisfactory. English was my only hope. Teachers and parents also supported my decision. My poor results in other subjects kept me from getting an admission into a famous university. But, I think it is acceptable as long as I have a university to enter.

Coping in College: An Interplay Between Adaption and Reluctance to Changes in a New Learning Community

As a student who learned English for many years in an exam-oriented context, June reveals an interplay between reluctance to changes and adaption to university learning. The discrepancy between the desired and actual learning community made it difficult for June to adapt to university learning. Adaption to exam-oriented learning and resistance to autonomous learning seem to work together in the dynamics of her choice. In college, June had to cope with the discomfoting identity of an autonomous learner. As June puts in the following lines:

When I came to university, I realized that I still need to invest extra efforts towards improving my English skills. I never missed a lesson. I invested time for self-access learning in the library. However, I managed to do this for the first semester. There was a national college English test in the second semester, and I needed to pass that exam. It was mandatory to pass the exam for getting a certificate. It was important to obtain the certification for getting the job. I changed my direction of learning to perform well in the exam. I practiced many English tests again, just like I did in my high school. I felt that practicing tests would immensely help me to pass the exam. However, many classmates around me seldom spent time in learning. This made it difficult for me to concentrate on my studies. Unlike my high school teachers, who compelled me to learn every day and monitored our learning progress regularly, university teachers never forced me to learn.

Although she was distressed due to the discrepancy between the desired and actual learning environment, June realized the importance of autonomous learning. However, she held herself back from any real actions due to contextual factors and institutional factors. She also withdrew from participation from the fear of investing the much needed coping efforts. June's reflection on the matter is recorded below:

I am already in my second year now, and I know the importance of self-learning. The knowledge we learned is far from what we need when we graduate. It is impossible for us to explore any matter in-depth and gain knowledge within only 40 minutes of classroom instruction. So, independent learning should account for at least 70% of my total learning. Although teachers encouraged us to invest most of our free time for English reading and speaking activities, they also prepared a lot of tests for us to take. For example, we had a middle test and a final test for every course, and poor performance in these tests led to low grades. In addition, the school has various kinds of conferences, big and small, and we were forced to attend all conferences and activities. We were deprived of our time. I may have time in the weekend, but thinking of spending time for self-learning could make me paralyzed.

June sometimes devoted efforts to make the best of her situation. She attempted to construct the identity of being a successful English major. Although she wanted to spare no efforts to improve her English proficiency, she failed to acquire the desired identity due to her lack of individual agency, motivation, and perseverance.

While I attempted to devote myself to improving my English proficiency, I lacked the power to take actions. For example, we finally had a foreign teacher in this semester, and I got an opportunity to listen to a native speaker for the first time. She encouraged us to talk and present ourselves by assigning different topics. I was actively participating in her lessons. I even thought I have improved a lot in my spoken English. However, may be due to the difference in culture, I lost patience and motivation in this mode of learning.

Positioning in College: Pressures of Conforming to Social Expectations

Hailing from different social relational contexts, students always feel the pressure to conform to contradictory social expectations. Additionally, familial expectations to perform well in studies intensify the pressure on students. June also faced these pressures, as her family had similar expectations with regards to her performance in English language learning. June received financial assistance from parents for her education, which she wanted to repay through good academic performance. As she quotes in the following lines:

When I almost gave up my English study, it is my parents who ignited my energy. My parents provide monthly financial support for my education, and this motivates me to perform well in English. I felt hesitant to ask money from them. I told myself to study hard, each time I received money from my parents. I told myself that hard work and good performance would be the best paybacks for my parent's financial contribution. Whenever my energy faded, I forced myself to work hard, especially during times that I needed financial assistance. It was the struggle of being trapped in a vicious cycle, for which I often blamed myself. I have to say that my English learning standards deteriorated in university, which was worse compared to the standards I had acquired in middle school. I changed from a good learner to a common learner.

In the classroom context, the pressure to engage with the classroom teaching was low. Additionally, the traits that June displayed in this context almost bore no relation with what she believed of herself as a learner of English. An achievement in learning and being appreciated by the teacher are qualities that motivated her learning. As June states in the following lines:

Having opted English as the major subject, I knew that I had to be a good English speaker. Although teachers often encouraged us to learn and speak English, we seldom practiced English speaking, including me. It is probable that my laziness kept me from continually persevering. Therefore, most of the time I was not active in the class. However, I became positive and active whenever I got a higher score in my test or received a compliment from my teacher. I wanted to put every effort into learning English, but then I gave up until some scenario helped me to regain confidence. This is the vicious cycle that I am trapped in, currently.

Selection of Future Directions: Aiming to Become an English Teacher

Inspired by her parents, June aims to be an English teacher after graduation. June's social relationship, relationship with parents, and willingness have driven her to construct her future identity as a teacher. As June quotes in the following lines:

My parents told me that teaching is a suitable career for a girl, and I agreed with their opinion on the matter. In addition, I long to be a part of the teaching realm. I will work hard to become a part of that realm, irrespective of my current English proficiency level. I think the main factor that discourages me from self-learning is attributed to the focus of my teachers on the test results. I want to change this situation. I do not want my future students to be in the same situation as I am at this moment.

Social requirements might have also influenced June's decision about her future identity. In addition, the learning process might have also contributed towards shaping and constructing her future career decisions. June states about these influences in the following lines:

I have learned English for many years. I experienced fear, confusion, anxiety, happiness, as well as positive and negative emotions in the process of learning English. I want to help my future students avoid harmful learning habits and adopt productive methods of learning English. In addition, there is not a job as stable as the job of English teacher in this society.

The above quotes reveal that June's core identity is hinged upon being an English learner and English teacher. She managed to associate with the deeper levels of her inner self, despite the anxiety, struggles, and feelings of uncertainty in her positioning. This association with the inner self helped her conduct self-appraisal and critical self-evaluation. It is with such behavior that she was able to perceive the potential of her selfhood; regain the sense of optimism, and willingness to tackle difficulties in future work; shape future identity of being an English teacher, and come to terms with the price that has to be paid for constructing own identity.

The Story of Rick

Pre-university Orientation: Bizarre Experience and Lack of Confidence

Rick was always identified as a learner lacking confidence. Rick carried this identity even before his admission into the university. Rick was exposed to English very early in his life, and he had adopted a peculiar way of learning the language. Rick started losing confidence as a learner upon realizing the impracticability of his learning methods. As he quotes in the following lines:

I was born in a countryside. I have learned English for over 12 years. I still remember the first time that our English teacher taught us the letters. The letters sounded like the basic Pinyin that we learned in Chinese. I thought the use of Chinese Pinyin would make it convenient for me to pronounce and memorize English words. After a few years or so, many classmates laughed at me when I pronounced English with a Pinyin accent. I began to

lose confidence when learning English. I still remember the time when my English teacher read aloud my English assignment to the class. I felt that my essay was picked because it was the worst written essay in the entire class. This feeling led me to skip that lesson. However, I had misunderstood the reason behind the selection of my essay. I later learned that my essay was read aloud as the teacher thought it was a well-written article.

Rick was also identified as a lover of martial art fiction novels. In his high school years, he even tried to write a martial art fiction novel. It seemed perfectly reasonable for him to set a goal of becoming a writer of martial art fiction novels. Rick's parents forced him to believe that proficiency in English language would guarantee him a more practical and a better future. Rick finally accepted English as a major after several arguments with his parents. He searched online information about the department of English. Although he still felt regretful, he made up his mind to select English as his major subject and did not want to retract his decision. In this context, it can be stated that Rick's parents and convincing online information compelled Rick to change his identity. Stating his experience, Rick says:

I have spent a lot of time reading martial art fiction novels. It was really fantastic. I just loved reading them, and I even set a goal to write my own martial art fiction novel. However, my parents kept telling me that reading and writing novels are unrealistic, and learning English would help me get a practical job. I started searching information about the future benefits of choosing English as a major. According to the online information provided by the English department of a university, English majors possess the potential of becoming translators, tourist guide, teachers with great cross-cultural foresight. I felt that being an English major would give me a new and broader horizon.

The above quote implied that Rick perceived two sides of his future identity as an English major student. The first one is associated with becoming a "translator, tourist guide, or a teacher with great cross-cultural foresight." Rick, as per his parent's wishes, would acquire a second identity through a practical job. This two-fold identity, according to Rick, can help him either forge ahead for advances or lean back for defense. However, any one of these identities can pose an obstacle to Rick's previous aim of earning an identity by penning martial art novels. As Rick puts it:

It is impossible for me to give up my dream. Learning English can help me find a job, but I will try my best to write a martial art novel in my free time. I believe I can write a popular book about Chinese martial art.

Coping in College: Inability to Overcome Contextual and Personal Constraints

Rick aimed at improving his English proficiency level upon starting his academic study at the university. However, Rick's new identity seemed to clash with his previous identity. He could not detach himself from the old learning methods, which he regarded as harmful. Although he wanted to improve his learning through new methods by avoiding the unproductive old methods, he failed in his attempts to

completely shift to new methods of learning. This led him to a struggle with the learning process. Rick quotes his experience in the following lines:

I really wanted to improve my English, especially when I entered university. I longed for a new beginning. I listened to teachers' lectures, and wanted to find a new method for my study. However, it was too difficult. I found it difficult to remember any new words. I recited the words, but it did not help me to remember the words. After two months, I resorted to my old method of adding Chinese Pinyin beneath difficult English words. Although I knew that the practice was harmful for my pronunciation, it seemed better than remembering nothing.

Rick's self-perception of a poor English learner goes stronger after the second semester. He attributed his poor performance to the contextual factors, poor English background, and slow progress. Rick's identity as a poor English learner also had consequences in his class performance, which in turn led him to struggle through the process of learning English. In Rick's words:

I began to lose interest in English after the second semester. If I learn English in the appropriate context, then I am sure I can improve as an English learner. Additionally, I feel my English would have been better if my teacher had taught useful methods of learning English when I was introduced to the language. Besides, good performance in the university would also help me regain my confidence. However, teachers prefer active students, who perform well in the class. Having invested a lot of efforts towards English learning, the lack of progress is demotivating. This scenario has made learning English a struggling process, and resulted in my current non-participation in the classroom. Therefore, I feel that it would be better for students like me to sit and listen quietly.

The above quotes reveal that Rick labels himself as a poor learner persistently. This attitude has negatively impacted his classroom performance, causing him to withdraw from investing more time and energy in learning English. Rick's stubborn and unchanging self-perception has slowed his progress in learning and led to identity continuity, thereby impacting Rick's performance in English learning.

Positioning in College: Responding to Constraints Negatively

Rick's identity was impacted by many external factors, which include his background, lack of support from teacher, and the lack of resources. Although he had tried to take some control over these constraints, he finally succumbed to the external constraints. Excessive examinations, inflexible curriculum, and impractical textbooks increasingly eroded his identity. Rick puts his experience in the following quote:

I was born in a small village, whereby nobody spoke Mandarin, let alone English. We spoke a local language, which was dramatically different from Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, my Chinese learning methods had a very strong influence on my English pronunciation. My village school was small, and lacked basic infrastructure like computers or English learning resources. Furthermore, the English teacher at that time used Chinese as a tool to teach English. Although now I want to improve my English learning standards, the learning atmosphere in this university does not support my pursuit of improvement. In addition, I had to take a number of tests, and was under constant pressure to perform well in

these exams. It was compulsory to score well in these exams for avoiding poor grades or failing in the class. Therefore, I had to exert all my efforts in taking exams, and learning from those impractical textbooks.

Rick's identity was also impacted by his negative self-perception of talents and competencies, which made him easily succumb to the external environment. The amount of efforts that he invested might not only be due to the contextual constraints, but also his self-perception of individual agency and potential power. As Rick states in the following lines:

I always thought of different ways to improve my English. Now, I think that I am neither not good at speaking and using English nor gifted to learn the language.

Selection of Future Directions: Avoid English Learning and Establish a Small Business

Inspired by the national policy, Rick decided to start a new business on his own. He put in a lot of efforts to lay the groundwork for his business—investigating the market potential, making plans, and even thinking of availing a bank loan. This preparation clearly implies that Rick was attempting to construct his new future identity. Rick quotes about the change of plans in the following lines:

My original goal was to find an English-related job after graduation. So I studied a lot to achieve this goal. However, hailing from an underdeveloped community, I feel there are very limited opportunities in the English language domain. I also thought of becoming an English teacher in a government school. However, it is necessary to have good contacts with government officials in order to get a job in any government organization. Furthermore, my English is poor. Besides this, I realized that becoming a martial arts novel writer would not award me monetarily. Therefore, I gave up all my previous dreams. I think building a new business, for example, opening a very small restaurant or a shop would be a better choice. I have done the requisite research for opening a small business, and I think there is a huge potential for start-ups in my hometown. I can apply for a bank loan after graduation.

Rick made several other preparations for laying the foundation to his mission of establishing a business. He became actively engaged in various part-time jobs. Although he was satisfied with these experiences, he regretted allocating the time set for English learning. As per Rick:

My decision to start a business after graduation led me to actively participate in different activities. I wanted to get the requisite experience in business planning, decision-making, and problem-solving by participating in these activities. In addition, I also took many part-time jobs, which included selling clothes in the *bazaar*, selling some products through internet, etc. However, I sometimes become unsure about these activities as they limit my time for learning English. Additionally, I sometimes feel that I am an English major, but I have opted to do something entirely different with my career.

The above quotes reveal that Rick's identity revolved around his self-perception of being a poor learner. The constant push and pull between his two opposing targets

—learning English or establishing a business—caused a lot of inner conflict. He finally gave up his original plan and decided to start a business. His final positioning was congruent with the educational policy, wherein establishing a business is strongly advocated after graduation. However, Rick's final positioning was incongruent with his personal inner pursuit.

The Story of Mary

Pre-university Positioning: Escaping the Treadmill

Mary did not like the way English was taught. She hated the idea of memorizing English words by rote. She believed that the main purpose of learning English is to use the language for oral communication. As stated by Mary in the following lines:

I was born in a city. When I was still a primary school student, my parents bought me many English cassettes. Following instructions in the audio cassettes to learn English became my daily routine. My parents forced me to recite the words repeatedly, which caused a lot of irritation. I think the whole purpose of learning English is to use it while speaking, and should not be about routine recitation of words.

However, Mary became aware of the contextual constraints in learning English, and realized that she must take full responsibility of her learning progress. As she quoted in the following lines:

When I entered middle school, I began to learn English formally. I realized that formal English education is, more or less, similar to the English learning instructions given by my parents. This is when I realized that I must take responsibilities of my learning process.

Mary believed that it would be critical for her to take control of her learning to achieve desired results. She regarded control over learning strategies, independent learning, and learning content essential to her learning process. Mary states in the following lines:

The more I learned English in class, the worse I felt. The more words I recited, the more I forgot. I sometimes questioned the value of reciting words. Therefore, I feel that it would be a better strategy to read some simple books or magazines for learning English words. When I had time, I would read some simple English books by myself. I still believe that it is a good approach for me.

Mary's proficiency in English improved as she put her confidence in the new learning approach. Her belief in the new learning approach led her to select English as a major unhesitatingly. Mary puts it below in the following words:

My English improved after reading a lot of books. Having understood the method of exploiting contextual clues for learning new words, it became easier to memorize words. I did not spend much time in English exams, but I always got satisfactory result in most of the English exams. However, my results in other subjects were unsatisfactory, and I did not know the best way of improving my performance in those subjects. This led me to choose English as a major.

Coping in College: Anxiety and Frustrations

Mary became increasingly anxious, even frustrated, after opting for multiple courses in the university. According to her, many courses were useless. She expresses this anxiety in the following quote:

I opted for English as my major, and therefore could not understand the need to study so many other courses like politics, moral education, and history. These courses are not related to English learning, and account for almost 60% of the total course. It was really annoying.

While Mary actively participated in most of the activities organized by various associations, she finally realized that such activities did not contribute towards improving her practical English skills. Mary says in the following lines:

Our mentor told us that we should participate in most of the activities to improve learning and problem-solving skills. However, participation in these activities made me realize that the activities took a lot of the time, which I could have invested in learning.

Mary's following statement also reveals that she was dissatisfied with the English courses and the bad learning atmosphere. External attempts to push the students of her class through the examinations further increased her frustration. She was also dissatisfied with the teaching method adopted in the class, which exclusively focused on delivering linguistic rules and structures in language learning.

We had very limited English courses. We should get more opportunities to learn English from the available courses. However, almost every English teacher focused on explaining some language structures. In addition, my classmates did not speak English. The bad learning atmosphere just decreased my zeal. I was also annoyed with the examination set for each course. The teacher gave us some important contents for the exam, which I memorized for the purpose of the tests. What is the point of doing this? I have discussed such issues with many teachers, but nobody listened. I wanted to skip the lessons, but the teachers often checked our attendance, and hence I had to continue attending lessons.

Positioning in College: Be Optimistic

Mary gradually regained confidence in her ability to improve, which helped her to get rid of the haunting experiences or contextual threats. It also reinstated her identity as an English learner having a strong connection with the learning community. She had the courage to see herself in a positive light as an English user, and her renewed self-confidence contributed towards lessening her anxieties. Mary states in the following words:

As I practiced reading daily, I noticed a gradual improvement in my English proficiency. This improvement encouraged me to further explore language learning possibilities, and I actively participated in English forums and online English chat room. The confidence that I have gained through my learning progress has composed me as a learner, and this confidence is reflected through my English communication.

In addition to language skills, Mary developed active learning skills. She developed this skill by working independently and at her own pace. Mary was aware of the need for self-management, which drove her to take control of her learning. Her willingness, capacity, and responsibility to work effectively were enhanced by her clear and detailed understanding of the goal to bring language learning in line with her personal needs and purposes. As Mary states in the following lines:

English learning has equipped me with self-management skills. I set learning goals as per my needs. For example, if I want to speak good English and be a translator, then I will have to sharpen my speaking and translating skills. I have not only improved my English skills, but also developed the ability to take control of my studies.

Mary's positive learning experiences led her to assume more active roles in her EFL learning. Mary's decision to take control of her learning helped her to grow as a learner, despite the challenging scenario. These developments contributed towards her positive actions and learning behaviors.

Future Directions: Aiming to Become a Strong and Self-determined Language User Against All Odds

Mary was determined to become a proficient English language user after graduation. Mary's new identity as a language user seems to be shaped by her own internal motivation, and her ability to overcome the external institutional and sociocultural threats. As Mary puts it:

I want to find a job related to English use after graduation. For example, a translator, tourist guide, or English trainer. I have a strong determination, which stays firm even in challenging situations.

Mary also wants to change her identity as a student, with a diploma. Her pursuit of a new identity seems to be reshaped due to her learning achievement. She wants to demonstrate her ability, and getting a BA degree would be a manifestation of her ability. Speaking about her desired identity, Mary says:

Employers feel that diploma holders are not qualified to do a job, which requires advanced English communication skills. However, I think my English is better than most of the BA students. I want to get a BA degree to showcase my ability as a proficient English language user.

Mary has built her future mission and ambition, and is working very hard for getting selected into a BA program. She often visits a library for self-access learning. She is reading a lot of books to improve her English. As Mary says in the following lines:

I am reading more books, and learning more in a library than I did previously. I hope I can enter a BA program. I want to compete with those outstanding students in the BA program.

Discussion and Conclusion

The story of each participant served as a baseline through which their respective identities as an English learner was shaped and reshaped in connection with their internal emotional struggle and conflicts as well as the external constraints. The learners in the three narratives displayed identity continuity and change in the process of building up a sense of belonging to a new learning community. In this context, it is important to remember that identity is fluid, dynamic, multiple, and fragmented, and identity continuity and change have a positive and negative relationship with English learning.

Learners construct their identity as a foreign language learner during their first encounter with the English language. Having constructed this identity, as in the case of Mary, learners focus on connecting with the learning communities in the university, set ambitious career goals, and strive towards achieving those goals. However, in case of June, there was a deterioration in her identity as an EFL learner. This deterioration led June from being a good English learner to a common English learner. The reluctance to adapt to a new community led to identity change. June was determined to achieve her future goal of becoming an English teacher, and she persevered in this direction. She improved existing English proficiency levels, despite her struggles with learning English. This demonstrates her identity continuity. Rick, on the other hand, stuck to his EFL learner identity as a poor English learner throughout his learning process. He dropped the plans of building a career with an English degree, and discovered a totally new future identity as a businessman. Overall, the three learners varied in the extent of exercising agency in the construction and reconstruction of their identities. While June and Mary took actions to shape their context in the pursuit of their goals, Rick was more willing to be shaped by the context. Echoing previous research findings (e.g., Gao et al., 2002; Huang, 2013), identity is a multiple, fluid, competitive and changing notion, while it may remain stable for a certain time period. Additionally, learners can display continuity in one identity feature while displaying change in another identity feature.

Identity continuity and change affect learners' efforts in learning English. June changed from a good English learner in middle school to a common English learner in university (*ibid.*). However, she gradually realized that her changed identity has increased the distance between her current English proficiency level and her imagined future identity as an English teacher. This awareness led her to work hard towards improving her language proficiency. Rick's continual identity as a poor English learner made him feel marginalized, which resulted in his non-participation in the classroom. This scenario ultimately led him to give up on his identity as an English learner and reshaped his imagined future social identity as a businessman, and this future identity did not have any place for English learning. Contrarily, Mary's continual identity as a good English learner drove her to invest more efforts, time and energy in her English learning. She chose to take charge of her learning and denied to withdraw from the learning community, which is replete with

constraints. Likewise, identity continuity and change are also impacted by learners' English learning outcomes. June's case shows that her connection with the university's learning communities was strengthened after she achieved a desirable result in the English examination. This achievement upgraded her position in this new community and impacted her self-perception (e.g., June became a confident learner again). Rick's poor English learning performance made him withdraw from the new community, instead of helping him to adapt to the environment. Mary's outstanding learning performance contributed to the growth, maintenance and strengthening of her sense of belonging to the new learning communities in the university.

In the field of learner identity, continuity and change of identity have remained under-researched areas. This study attempts to provide a detailed account of how three EFL learners negotiated and navigated identity continuity, and changed the process of learning English. Most importantly, it reveals that the structural learning contexts and learners' conventional practices could considerably impact identity construction and reconstruction. Students need emotional support, social acceptance, and the sense of belonging to a new learning community. An awareness of student's needs, and consideration of identity continuity and change can deepen our existing knowledge on the complexities of learner identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011). In this context, a number of factors, such as emotions, achievements, conventions, skills, satisfaction, and frustration should be incorporated into a unit of analysis. Finally, identity is multiple, and students may have overlapping goals and desires at the same time when going through transitional phases (Bluck & Alea, 2008).

Some limitations still exist in this study. First, the findings derived from the data of three EFL students in a university of China cannot be generalized to other contexts. Second, the short time span of the study made it difficult to collect richer data and revisit the informants from time to time. Thus, the findings can be regarded as tentative.

Nevertheless, this study provides a number of implications for teaching and learning English for EFL students. First, as identity is historically and socially formed, the development and construction of learner identity, whether or not the actual communities and identities are congruent with the imagined communities and identities, influence EFL learning. Therefore, constructing an imagined identity can promote a learner's engagement with language learning. In this regard, an understanding of students' needs and their imagined worlds is critical for developing appropriate curriculum or choosing English pedagogy tailored for students with diverse background, different language proficiency level, goals, and expectations.

Second, the power issues inherent in the teacher-student relationship should be taken into consideration. It is important to build an open and democratic relationship between teacher and students for facilitating a smooth transitioning of learning from the old community to a new one. This kind of a relationship will not only equip teachers with the right methods to teach students, but will also help teachers to monitor the various emotional episodes their students encounter in school. This relationship also lays foundation for initiating changes and reforms and forming a

strong professional organizational climate in the school. In this connection, teachers, administrators, curriculum designers and policy makers should be willing to create a platform that would make students' voices heard.

Finally, teachers might need to focus on issues that students face while adapting to a new learning community. Teachers must equip students to monitor and reflect on their emotional flux and develop a strong professional identity. Students must develop emotional intelligence to manage, mediate, control their emotions for accepting, modifying, or rejecting discourse practices embedded in a new learning community, and finally build a connection with this new learning community. To that end, teachers can model ways in which they coped with their emotions during their student life. In addition, some concrete strategies such as 'emotional diaries' (Zembylas, 2005), and 'emotional support' (Protheroe, 2007), can be applied for providing students with the opportunities to manage their own emotions.

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Epilogue

During the last decade, many publications with a focus on autonomy, agency, or identity appeared. The three notions have become major topics of discussion among language educators. Theoretical debate has drawn on a variety of disciplines to explore the factors that impact autonomous learning and identity development, and the sense of agency in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Each of these strands of discussion has yielded an increasing stream of publications: journal articles, book chapters, and monographs. What is more, the issues that gather around the concept of autonomy—especially those related to learners’ agentive behaviors in all aspects of the learning process and how they perceive themselves during the language learning process—have been widely acknowledged as significant to the field of EFL education. In addition, learner autonomy has widely been adopted as a major goal of school curricula around the world. Language educators have called for a greater understanding of autonomous learning and teaching. Despite recent publications and educational practices, a lack of discussions or debate on the interconnection of autonomy, agency, and identity have been found. What is more, the implementation of learner autonomy in the EFL contexts remains a minority achievement, possibly due to the lack of awareness of the interacted forces of agency and/or identity.

This book could be seen as a set of chapters which complement one another and produce a clearer picture of three distinct notions: autonomy, agency, and identity. The chapters could be seen as overlapping discussions which look at autonomy, agency, and/or identity from different perspectives. This book is an attempt to explore the theory and practice of autonomy from roles (teachers, lecturers, students), agency (capacity of an actor to act in a given environment), and identity (who or what a person is). Learners in EFL contexts may take their first step towards autonomy when they recognize they are responsible for their learning and exercise that responsibility by being involved in all aspects of the learning process. This can also begin in the same for teachers, who may initiate autonomy in teaching when they recognize they are teachers who assume responsibility for teaching and display agentive behaviors when realizing their pre-determined goals.

Autonomous EFL teaching or learning requires the understanding of agency and identity, which is the main theme of this book.

However, autonomy, agency, and identity are complex concepts. The discussions in this book may not absolutely provide convincing theoretical arguments, effective practice, or well-established models. Instead, this book is an initial attempt at understanding and synthesizing autonomy, agency, and identity. These eight chapters may not be sufficient to review all aspects involved with the introduced notions in terms of wider research perspectives. Finally, on a more general level, an exploration of the fundamental plurality and variability of all pedagogical endeavors is likely to become the driving force behind future research on autonomy, agency, and identity. There is no one single answer or pedagogical procedure for realizing autonomy, agency, and identity. Nevertheless, this book suggests a number of new lines of enquiry which are useful for future research.

Overall, this book introduces and conceptualizes the interconnected concepts of autonomy, agency, and identity. It synthesizes the three notions based on discussions of research studies. It goes beyond merely providing a map to existing discussions. The material presented in this book contributes to EFL learning and teaching. There is increasing demand worldwide for competent English learners and users and for more effective approaches to EFL teaching and learning. Findings are presented to understand EFL learners' autonomy, agency, and identity development. In addition, key issues and debates in teacher education for EFL teachers are brought together. The field of EFL education has been shaped in its development by its response to two distinct issues. One issue is internally initiated change; in other words, the teaching profession gradually evolves a change in its own essential knowledge base and associated instructional practices. EFL teaching has also been affected by another issue: external pressures, for example, by national or institutional educational policy. Through synthesizing current practice, providing provoking theoretical insights, and offering future directions, this book is a reference for research in the field of EFL teaching and learning.