

Multiple Identities and Agency in the Narratives of Japanese Secondary English Teachers

Takaharu Saito

Keywords: language teacher identity (LTI), language teacher agency (LTA), content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

Introduction

The ‘social turn’ (Block, 2003), a paradigm shift from cognitive to social approaches in the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics, has encouraged researchers to focus on issues of language teacher identity (LTI), which are heavily influenced by language teachers’ social contexts (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017; Cheung, Said, & Park, 2015; Gray & Morton, 2018; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). According to Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005), LTI research emerged from the recognition of teacher identity as “a crucial component in determining how language teaching is played out” in complex classroom contexts, and “a critical component in the sociocultural and sociopolitical landscape of the language classroom” (p. 22).

In addition, some LTI research has examined the decision-making process of language teachers, along with their agentic actions, suggesting further investigation into the connection between LTI and language teacher agency (LTA) (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015b, 2019a, 2019b). Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate (2016) maintain that identity research should include identity’s link to an individual’s professional agency within a community, instead of exploring identity as an isolated concept, in order to understand the relationship between identity development and the social context. Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust (2015) argue that “professional agency is connected to the professional identity through teachers’ ideals, goals, commitments, and ethical standards related to

their teaching and pupils' well-being"; and that "the construction of professional agency is clearly understood as a complex, continuous and future-oriented negotiation process between identity and contexts where they work" (p. 619). However, the connection between LTI and LTA has yet to be adequately addressed.

In order to investigate the relationship between LTI and LTA in the Japanese context, the present study investigated, through narrative inquiry¹, how Makoto and Shigeru (both pseudonyms), Japanese secondary school English teachers, constructed and negotiated their identity in relation to their agency across time and space. The aim was to understand, through exploration of their life experiences, how their identity construction and negotiation interacted with their agency, their ability to perform agentic action; and how and why their English teaching practice at Japanese secondary schools evolved. Their narrations reveal the complex and dynamic interplay among their past experience, current teaching practice, support networks, and imagined future, in the process of identity construction in relation to their agency in the social context.

Language Teacher Identity

The paradigm shift from structuralism to poststructuralism has had a huge impact on LTI research in the field of SLA and applied linguistics. Pavlenko (2002) notes that poststructuralist approaches attempt to theorize the role of language in the construction and reproduction of social relations, and the role of social dynamics in the process of language use. The central principle of identity in poststructuralism is understood to be multifaceted, dynamic, multiple, shifting, and shaped by power relations between agentic individuals and others, across time and space, in relation to the social context (e.g., Norton Peirce, 1995; Weedon, 1987). Sociocultural approaches indebted to poststructural views have also played a significant role in LTI research; among them, the community of practice (e.g., Tsui, 2007), positioning theory (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2019d), and Vygotskian sociocultural theory (e.g., Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995). In light of poststructuralist thought, a wealth of LTI research has been generated (see the LTI studies timeline constructed by Kayi-Aydar, 2019c).

Similar to the thought of poststructuralism, Varghese et al. (2005) insist on the importance of agency in the process of identity construction, "a movement away from a structurally deterministic view of the fashioning of individuals to understanding individuals as intentional beings" (p. 23). In a similar way, Aneja (2016) argues that "individuals' identities are dynamic and encompass individual agency and the

local community context, as well as connections to global discourses and ways of making sense of the world” (p. 574). Kayi-Aydar (2015a) defines identity as “multiple presentations of self which are (re)constructed across social contexts and demonstrated through actions and emotions” (p. 138), while De Costa and Norton (2017) stress the primacy of agency (as mediated through innovative pedagogical practices) in the process of identity construction. The LTI studies mentioned above support the link among identity, agency, and emotions, in relation to the social context.

Drawing extensively on Weedon’s (1987) poststructuralist theories of subjectivity in language use, Norton’s (2013) influential study demonstrates that language serves to construct our sense of ourselves, and that identity is multiple, a site of struggle, and changing over time and space; defining identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands the possibility for the future” (p. 4). In addition, Norton (2017) argues that “language teacher identity indexes both social structure and human agency, which shift over historical time and social context” (p. 81), and stresses that “while identity is conceptualized as multiple, changing, and a site of struggle, the very multiplicity of identity can be productively harnessed in the interests of more productive language teaching” (p. 81).

Developing Norton’s definition of identity in the context of language teaching, Barkhuizen (2016) proposes the following theorization:

I theorize language teacher identity as cognitive, sociohistorical, and ideological. In other words, they are constructed both inside the teacher and outside in the social and material world. They are also imagined in future worlds. Language teacher identities are multiple, and they change, short-term and over time – discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, other teachers, administrators, and the broader community, and in material interaction with spaces, places, and objects in classrooms and institutions (p. 659).

His characterization of LTI rejects any categorization of a singular, essential teacher self, and instead highlights the self’s multidimensional nature with dynamics within the framework of contextual, cultural, and sociopolitical issues. This theoretical stance also informs the participants’ understanding of identity construction in this study, because they consider themselves to possess multiple identities influenced by their agentic actions, in relation to the social and material, world over time and space.

Language Teacher Agency

Kayi-Aydar (2019b) presents an overview of the three theoretical frameworks that have informed the contemporary notion of agency: social cognitive theory, an ecological approach, and positioning theory.

Indebted to social cognitive theory, Bandura (2000) suggests an agentic perspective in which “people are partly the products of their environments, but by selecting, creating, and transforming their environmental circumstances they are producers of environments as well” (p. 75); and claims that perceived efficacy plays a core role in human agency because of its influence on factors affecting human behavior, such as goals, aspirations, outcome expectations, and courses of action to take. Bandura (2001) claims that core features of human agency include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness, and distinguishes three forms of agency, by means of which individuals can exert control over the nature and quality of their lives: “direct personal agency, proxy agency that relies on others to act on one’s behest to secure desired outcomes, and collective agency exercised through socially coordinate and interdependent effort” (p. 1).

Reflecting an ecological approach to the educational context, Biesta and Tedder (2006) claim that teacher agency is understood as teachers’ ability to critically shape their responses to problematic situations, while Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust (2015) argue that “teachers’ professional agency is not a fixed disposition of an individual teacher, but rather constructed situationally in relation to the current context and past personal experiences” (p. 616). Priestly, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) state that teacher agency is a situational achievement, and focus on the interaction between the “iterational (life and professional histories),” “practical-evaluative (cultural, structural, and material features),” and “projective (short and long term orientations of action)” dimensions of teacher agency (p. 30). Kayi-Aydar (2019b), then, claims that “teacher agency is a situated achievement whose existence is not only dependent on individual abilities and capability but cultures and structures” (p. 13).

Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Kayi-Aydar, 2019d) examines “how rights, duties, and obligations are distributed among interlocutors or characters in and through conversations and narratives,” in order to “understand how those rights, duties, and obligations shape social structures while being shaped by them” (Kayi-Aydar, 2019d, P. 1). The assignment of positions to and by individuals is called positioning, which provides a useful means of understanding the nature of agency and an individual’s agentic expressions. Kayi-Aydar (2019b) argues for a strong link

between positioning/ positions and agency, which is complex, mutually shaped, and unpredictable; a connection typical of the complexity of power relations in poststructuralism. Thus, she defines teacher agency as a form of authorship that is established by means of teachers' access to the subject positions available to them, demonstrating that certain positions may enable individuals to exert (or prevent them from exerting) agency in certain contexts.

In light of the highlights and similarities among the three theoretical frameworks discussed above, Kayi-Aydar (2019b) defines language teacher agency as “a language teacher’s intentional authority to make choices and act accordingly in his or her local context” (p. 15), and suggests the following conceptualization: (1) LTA is both individual and collective; (2) LTA is context dependent and influenced by the environment, as language teachers’ context and discourse may promote or prevent their agentic actions; (3) language teachers’ teaching and linguistic competencies shape their LTA in relation to the power dynamics of discourse; (4) LTA is shaped by teachers’ past language learning experience, contemporary practice, and future goals; and (5) the complexity of LTA is expressed through actions, emotions, identities, and discourse.

The societal and context-dependent aspect of LTI and LTA can be expressed in terms of the transdisciplinary framework developed by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), in an effort to capture the complexity of second language acquisition (SLA). This framework recognizes language learning and teaching as a complex and multifaceted entity distinguished by three highly interrelated dimensions of social activity: micro contexts of social action and interaction, meso contexts of sociocultural institutions and communities, and macro levels of ideological structures. The literature on LTI and LTA (e.g., De Costa and Norton, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2019b, Norton, 2017) argues for the effectiveness of this framework in understanding the multifaceted and transdisciplinary nature of LTI and LTA research in an increasingly multilingual and globalized context.

Methods

Participants

The participants in the present study were two Japanese secondary English teachers, Makoto and Shigeru (both pseudonyms). Merriam (1998) states that a subject case is typically chosen based on its typicality, uniqueness, success, and other attributes; suggesting further that such a case “might also be selected because it is intrinsically interesting; a researcher could study it to achieve as full an understanding

of the phenomenon as possible” (p. 28), and thereby “uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 29). Given the findings of the study, Makoto and Shigeru’s outstanding practical English abilities and teaching skills, and their active engagement in executing CLIL open classes, stood out as “unique” and “intrinsically interesting.” Thus, case-based descriptions of “the interaction of significant factors characteristic” of their identity and agency would, I conjectured, deepen our understanding of the conception of language teacher identity and agency.

Makoto is a Japanese English teacher in the Kantō Region of Japan. He is in his late 50s, with more than 30 years of experience teaching English at prefectural high schools in this region, where he was born and grew up. His first language is Japanese, and he began learning English when he was in junior high school. After completing a BA in linguistics, with a teacher’s certificate, he passed a prefectural employment examination for high school English teachers, and formally joined the teaching profession. He gained his first overseas experience around 30 years of age, as an exchange-program teacher in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for a month and a half. Currently, as a prefectural high school teacher, he is a member of the Institute for Research in Language Teaching, the Japan CLIL Pedagogy Association, and the Institute of International Education.

Like Makoto, Shigeru is a Japanese English teacher in the Kantō Region of Japan. He is in his early 30s, with eight years of experience teaching English at a private girls’ junior and senior high school in this region, where he was born and grew up. His first language is Japanese, and he began learning English when he was in junior high school. After completing a BA in economics, with a teacher’s certificate, he formally joined the teaching profession. He gained his overseas experience when he was in college, as a language school student in New York for two weeks and then in Canada for two months. Currently teaching English at the private girls’ high school, he is an active member of Japan’s CLIL Pedagogy Association, and a member of Team Kimutatsu, a study group for English teaching under the auspices of Tatsuya Kimura, a well-known specialist in English education.

Data Collection and Analysis

The oral narrative data in the study was gathered from three iterative in-depth interviews with the participants. Seidman (2013) developed a series of three in-depth phenomenological interviews, each with a specific purpose, in order to understand the lived experiences of a small number of people. The first asks the participant to

narrate as much as possible about him or herself, related to the topic area, up to the present time (focused life history). The second asks the participant to reconstruct details of their present lived experience in the topic area (contemporary experience). The third asks the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experience (reflection on the meaning), investigating “the intellectual and emotional connections between the participant’s work and life” (p. 22).

After obtaining permission, I visited Makoto and Shigeru’s schools three times in 2019, in order to conduct the interviews. In the same year, I attended their open English classes to observe their CLIL lesson practice, which observation complemented the data gained in the three interviews. Each interview was conducted in Japanese, lasted roughly 50 to 70 minutes, and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In the analysis, I first I read each transcript without coding, in order to gain a holistic view of their past and present experience, future goals, and narrative elements relevant to their identity construction and expression of agency. Next, I coded all the interview data, extracting and identifying instances of identity construction, negotiation, and agentic action related to identity, in order to create categories. In this stage, I also relied on positioning analysis, which attempts to answer the major guiding question: “who positions whom and what happens as a result of such positioning” (Kayi-Aydar, 2019b, p. 18). Through this process, I considered how they positioned themselves in relation to their environment and myself, their interlocutor, in order to understand the identity positions they constructed for themselves and others in their narrative accounts, and how these positions supported or limited their ability to act in their narratives.

Through continuous comparison, refinement, and revision of the categories, with multiple layers of analysis, I eventually grouped the former in terms of several case-based themes, which are described in the following section. Finally, in writing up the study, I translated particularly salient parts of the interviews into English.

Findings

This section is organized around the three themes that emerged from the logical analysis: (1) becoming a secondary school English teacher, (2) becoming an English teaching practitioner, and (3) becoming a CLIL practitioner. Each section will illustrate how Makoto and Shigeru respectively constructed and negotiated their identity in relation to their agency across time and space.

Becoming a secondary school English teacher

Makoto is a prefectural high school teacher (i.e., an educational civil servant) in the Kantō Region in Japan. Over his 35 years in the profession, Makoto first worked for 11 years at a newly established high school for students of the lowest academic ability. Then, he transferred to a municipal high school for students of average academic ability, where he worked for 12 years. Then, he applied to a high school with a foreign language curriculum, where he had worked for 12 years at the time of the interviews. He remarked, “I am the type who works at one school for a long time” (first interview), and “I’ve enjoyed working at each school and have never thought of transferring to another for negative reasons” (second interview). He thus positioned himself as a teacher working for one school for a long time, gradually adapting to each teaching environment and not leaving it easily; and as a result of such positioning, was able to construct a positive and solid sense of teacher identity, positioned as a reliable person by his colleagues.

At his first school, with weak students, Makoto confronted educational challenges such as students fights and high dropout rates, joined his colleagues in addressing such problems, and developed good working relationships with them, demonstrating his collective agency. At the time, he regarded English teaching as just one of his many teacher duties, including academic affairs, student guidance, and homeroom/club activities. However, he was nonetheless able to develop a constructive outlook as a teacher at this first school. As he put it:

I learned that establishing a good relationship with students is important for good lessons. [...] Teaching is a living thing. Even if I teach the same content, it changes according to the respective class. So I need to consider the relationship with students at every moment of the lesson. This consideration applies to every student level. [...] I need to make lessons according to the students. [...] I’ve always felt that teaching is a living thing since I began in the teaching profession. (second interview)

“Establishing a good relationship with students,” he learned, is a fundamental requirement for designing good lessons at every student level. The metaphorical expression, “teaching is a living thing,” indicates that classrooms are complex places where simplistic and static cause-effect teaching methods are likely to be of little use, and that even the teaching of the same material will vary with each moment of

interaction with the students in the respective class. Makoto's teaching outlook thus appears to conceive of identity as a site of struggle (Norton, 2013).

Given the harsh reality of the pedagogical difficulties, limited opportunities, and constraints in his first work place, as well as the move toward internationalization in the 1980s, which required communicative English lessons he had never experienced in his own education, Makoto's agency had every reason to be compromised or restrained. However, he exerted his agency by positioning himself as a seeker of extra-curricular opportunities to develop his teaching skills, attending associations and study groups for English education. His passion for developing his teaching skills, along with his love of research in language teaching, are described in the following terms:

Speaking of who I am as an English teacher, I like research in language teaching. I like to observe people's lessons in order to learn and improve my teaching skills with their help. I also like them to watch my lessons to improve my teaching skills. This is my favorite part of being an English teacher, and also the reason why I continue in this profession. That's it. (second interview)

Makoto's agentic action in participating in numerous study groups in English education outside his school paid off when he finally found an association devoted to English education, called the Institute for Research in Language Teaching, which was the ideal place to construct his professional identity as an English teaching practitioner.

Shigeru is an English teacher with eight years of English teaching experience at a private Japanese girls' junior and senior high school based on Christian principles. His educational background was unusually interesting, as he majored in economics at college. After intensive study for his high school entrance examination, Shigeru was able to position himself as a high school student affiliated with one of the most prestigious private universities in Japan, which enabled him to enter the university directly, with no need to be concerned about university entrance examinations. He then majored in economics at college, simply because he wanted to be wealthy and live a comfortable life. However, in the economics classes, he was given an opportunity to learn economics in English from a representative of the IMF (International Monetary

Fund). He says of this experience:

I really enjoyed learning economics in English, and this experience has remained in my mind. (second interview)

I really enjoyed learning the application of theories to real world situations, and learning this in English at the same time. (third interview)

Unlike the majority of Shigeru's economics courses, which focused mostly on economic theories, the IMF representative explored how to apply such theories to situations in the real world, and in English, which gave Shigeru the pleasure of learning the course content in his second language.

In his second year at college, Shigeru did an internship at a personnel placement agency, and performed well. He recalled:

At that time, I kept thinking about what career was worth doing when it came to working for a long period of time through my life. As a result, pursuing a teaching career came to my mind. So, I began to take classes at the teaching certificate center of the department of literature, in order to obtain a teaching certificate, while majoring in economics. I was at a loss whether to gain a teaching certificate in social studies or English. [...] But I wanted to teach English because I liked English and never forgot the experience of learning economics in English. [...] I thought I would be able to use my academic background knowledge in my English classes. (first interview)

His narrative presents his identity negotiation in light of his future career choice. As a student at a top-ranked university that has produced a large number of business elites working at leading firms in Japan, he could easily have followed the same life course. However, he resisted this by following his inner voice, and took the agentic step of obtaining credits for a teaching certificate in English because of his love of English study and the IMF experience in learning economics in English. After this identity negotiation, he positioned himself as an economics major taking credits to gain a teaching certificate in English. His positioning also illustrates "positioning by distancing" (Kayi-Aydar, 2019d, p.135); through his agentic action, he was able to position himself in ways that empowered him, by distancing himself from certain kinds of behavior, ideas, and activities that his economics major valued. His energetic effort

to devote himself to studying English paid off when he obtained a full-time teaching position after graduation.

Shigeru worked diligently as a new English teacher and coach of the school's basketball team. He greatly enjoyed the work, though he faced difficulties in managing his class as a homeroom teacher. Even in the midst of such difficulties, however, he was encouraged by student comments such as "I can understand your English lessons very well" and "I've learned a lot through your English classes." (first interview), which positioned him as an English teacher with excellent English teaching skills. He reflected on his early teaching experience:

Though I was not good at taking charge of my class as a homeroom teacher, I was supported by English lessons and the basketball team activity. [...] I was saved by my colleagues. (first interview)

It is often said that the teaching profession is very demanding due to the many duties of a teacher. [...] I once had extreme difficulty in fulfilling my duties as head of the English department. But, at the same time, I was much encouraged by some teachers who applauded my basketball instruction and the team's winning streak. [...] I now think that the multiplicity of teaching duties actually strengthens and enriches teachers. (first interview)

Shigeru thus has multiple identities, such as English teacher, homeroom teacher, basketball coach, member of study groups for improving teaching English skills, etc.; and his case suggests that when multiple identities are in play, a 'negative' identity may be offset by a 'positive' one. In other words, Shigeru's subjectivity is a site of struggle, with constant identity negotiation, in order to forge at least one viable identity in the context of others, in relation to complex school environments (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2017).

Becoming an English teaching practitioner

Makoto's discovery of the Institute for Research in Language Teaching marked the beginning of a fundamental shift in his teacher identity, toward prioritizing English education in order to improve his English teaching skills. The institute recommends the so-called Oral Method for teaching English in English, whose goal is to promote effective means for English teachers to use English in class, which will ultimately enhance their students' use of English in class. He described the institute as "a

group of skilled workers,” in contrast to other study groups, in which members were treated simply as guests or visitors. In time, Makoto was promoted from an ordinary member of the institute to a researcher. His agentic action thus positioned him as a member privileged to receive direct instruction from distinguished professors in English education, and as a model teacher who executed demonstration classes for pedagogical research at an annual institute convention. He expressed his experience in the following way:

As I have much experience in demonstration teaching of English and classes open to the public, I am always hard on myself in terms of the quality of everyday lessons. I always try to improve the quality of my teaching, not satisfied with my personal status quo. This has been my habit for 20 years now. Such experience has fundamentally changed me in terms of my attitude toward teaching English lessons. (third interview)

He thus positioned himself as a teaching professional who never does shoddy work in designing and delivering his lessons, demonstrating the transformation in his identity as an English teaching practitioner.

After working at his first school for 11 years, Makoto transferred to a municipal high school for students of average academic ability, without educational difficulties, where he worked for 12 years. As the students there had reasonable academic ability and motivation for learning, he was able, during this period, to employ the institute’s Oral Method for teaching English in English, and solidify the foundation and basic principles of his English teaching skills. He also exercised his agency collectively with the support of the professional community for English education, to develop his practical teaching skills, demonstrating the individual and collective nature of language teacher agency (Kayi-Aydar, 2019b).

In a similar manner, during his first three years of teaching, Shigeru attended as many study groups as possible in order to improve his English teaching skills; and in the second year, he became a member of Team Kimutatsu, an English teaching study group under the auspices of Tatsuya Kimura, a well-known specialist in English education. As he related, this study group has had an enormous impact on the development of his English teaching skills:

I am absolutely certain that I could not be thriving as I am without the sharing of English teaching skills with this group. [...] I really appreciate such an external community where I can connect with other English teachers. (first interview)

It's a community where they show me how to solve my teaching English problems in a very polite and practical way. [...] It is impossible to implement CLIL without their instruction. (second interview)

On a number of occasions, Shigeru invited a Team Kimutatsu member to his school and investigated the differences in their teaching skills, in order to improve his own skills. He also attended a summer seminar supported by the community, and conducted a demonstration English lesson to get rigorous feedback from the members. He is also an active member of Japan's CLIL Pedagogy Association to help him improve his CLIL practice through the reception of feedback from other CLIL members. Similar to Makoto's case, then, his agency is both individual and collective in the construction of his professional identity.

Becoming a CLIL practitioner

Makoto transferred to a high school with a foreign language curriculum, because he wished to administer such a curriculum as an English teacher, including teaching a class in intercultural understanding, and administering numerous international exchange programs. In terms of his practical English teaching skills, he was able to teach English in English, and successfully taught how to relate the content of lessons and write summaries of this content in English. In addition, he sometimes taught English classes open to the public, which displayed his outstanding agency in the construction of his professional identity. At the same time, however, he remained dissatisfied with his teaching, and sought means to teach more advanced skills than just retelling and summary-writing activities. His dissatisfaction was mitigated, however, when he encountered the CLIL approach, which is characterized by a holistic integration of content, communication, cognition, and culture, with core features that include lower- and higher-order thinking skills, scaffolding, and portfolio assessment. This encounter resulted in a further shift in his focus, from teaching English to teaching how to learn and think in English.

Makoto then positioned himself as the first practitioner of CLIL at a public upper-secondary school in Japan, in cooperation with a university well-known for its English education. Professor I. of this university and Professor S. of another university

had initiated the CLIL program at the university level, and wished to extend it to the lower- and upper-secondary public school level. In this way, Makoto's agency in implementing CLIL began. In order to improve Makoto's CLIL skills, Professor I. visited Makoto's school, observed his CLIL practice, and noted missing elements, such as cognitive and cultural components, which Makoto had not learned at the Institute for Research in Language Teaching. One of the major achievements of this initiative was the publication of a CLIL textbook for Japanese high school students, in collaboration with the university and other high schools with foreign language curriculums, which was a product of their collective agency.

In his attempt to improve the CLIL approach, Makoto benefitted from a top-down project aimed at collaborative learning, launched by the prefectural board of education in cooperation with a university consortium for educational reform. This project involved a pedagogical approach to active learning, which he thought would support CLIL in enhancing English thinking skills. He attempted to employ collaborative learning in English within the CLIL framework, and was able to create a collaborative learning lesson plan of jigsaw activities, in which each student in a group exchanged a different piece of information needed to complete a group task in English. He reflected on the design process, saying, "I was not the only one, but teachers who were involved in the top-down project at my school and other schools could work together to develop active learning" (second interview). This collaborative process shows the teachers' collective agency in supporting each other as resources in the creation of enhanced lessons plans, in order to succeed in such an ambitious project in response to the government's educational policy initiative.

Makoto's teacher identities now include being an English teacher, a head teacher for the second-year students, an advisor for student teachers, an assistant advisor for the English drama club, a committee member for several school administration issues, and an official in charge of student enrollment. However, he positions himself in a way that prioritizes his English teacher identity as one who loves pedagogical research to develop his practical English teaching skills, in relation to his individual and collective agency exerted in his professional life. Of this identity he noted:

In terms of one's identity as a teacher, in order to enjoy teaching jobs, or to understand what is important as a teacher, I think three things are important: a desire to improve yourself, originality and ingenuity, and a sense of the best timing for different actions. Without these traits, you cannot enjoy teaching

creative lessons. You always need to create new materials for upcoming lessons with a desire to improve yourself. (second interview)

These three traits summarize his approach as an English teacher. With them in mind, and led by his belief that “teaching is a living thing”, his evolution as an English teaching professional will no doubt continue in the future, as he seeks new and innovative ways to improve his practical English teaching skills.

Shigeru was appointed as head of his English department in his fourth year of teaching, and was thus positioned as an English teacher with discretionary power, who could make decisions regarding the overall management plans for English language teaching. As a result of such positioning, his identity as department head was expressed in his agentic action in executing the CLIL approach in English lessons, in order to realize his idea of teaching course content in English. The principal of his school also supported the idea of implementing CLIL, though Shigeru’s colleagues showed no interest in CLIL at first. In this situation, he was bold enough to ask Professor M., a well-known CLIL theorist in Japan, to visit his school and observe his CLIL lessons in order to provide expert feedback; and has since periodically received similar feedback on his videoed CLIL lessons.

In the interviews, he repeated the phrase, “I am the type who pushes extra hard” (first interview), illustrating part of his identity as an agent who runs at full speed toward achieving a goal. He exerted his identity and agentic action in “pushing extra hard” for his CLIL practice:

I also pushed very hard in order to implement the CLIL approach. Though some might have disliked my attitude, I had some followers to help me, in response to my struggles and respectable results in the CLIL activities. (first interview)

I sometimes hear that some English teachers hesitate to employ CLIL because it is difficult at the secondary level. But I am the type to accept a worthy challenge, with no second thoughts. This is why I was able to pursue the implementation of CLIL. Luckily, as a result of my exceptional drive, some teachers, including Professor M., applauded my CLIL practice. I’ve greatly appreciated and been encouraged by the steady increase in the number of those who are with me. (second interview)

These narratives illustrate his individual and collective agency, and suggest that individuals are both the producers and products of their environment (e.g., Bandura, 2000). As Shigeru is partly the production of his school environment, including his followers, so he can challenge and transform the school environment through his agentic action. For the material of his CLIL practice, he used the content of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) sponsored by UNESCO, which addresses sustainable development issues such as biodiversity, multiculturalism, and energy resources. Through CLIL practice, he was able to see dramatic improvement in his students' speaking and writing in English.

Shigeru's agentic action as head of the English department also made a significant contribution to increasing the student enrollment at his school in trying circumstances:

I worked as desperately as I could, because, at that time, the school had a tense atmosphere, facing closure due to enrollment issues. Now the student enrollment is gradually increasing. (first interview)

Shigeru made great efforts to introduce to the public, at open campuses, the concept of CLIL as the most advanced English teaching method, and invited them to observe CLIL open lessons. As a result, many participants became interested in CLIL and wished to enroll their daughters in his school. In the second year of CLIL implementation, the student enrollment began to gradually increase.

Shigeru seeks to broaden his students' future possibilities, and believes that CLIL can give his students the confidence to broaden their global awareness and future career choices. He sees CLIL as one of various approaches to encourage his students' growth, and asserted that "CLIL is a significant approach for sustaining my identity as an English teacher." (third interview). Therefore, he considers his teaching philosophy to be based on a student-first approach, and continually strives to give his students exciting opportunities to learn from various perspectives, to broaden their future possibilities. He realizes that he is a more practice-oriented than theory-oriented teacher, but has become aware of the importance of the theoretical aspects of language teaching, and would like to learn more, hoping to teach in teacher training programs in the future. His journey as an English teaching practitioner continues.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated how Makoto and Shigeru, Japanese secondary school

English teachers, constructed and negotiated their identity in relation to their agency across time and space. Their identity construction and agency were multifaceted and context-dependent in complex ways that are well expressed within the DFG framework (2016). For instance, Makoto's innovative CLIL practice (micro level) at his school (meso level) attempted to integrate CLIL and active learning in the form of jigsaw activities, and eventually met the expectations of a top-down project under the aegis of the government's educational policy initiative (macro level). Shigeru's CLIL practice (micro level) included teaching the Bible in English (macro level of religion), in collaboration with the chaplain at his school and in the context of his school's Christian principles (meso level). In each case, the micro, meso, and macro levels are highly interrelated, with each giving shape to and shaped by the others.

Overall, their teaching history reveals that their identity construction interacted with their agency, which was both individual and collective (Bandura, 2000, 2001; Kayi-Aydar's, 2019b; Toom et al, 2015): individual in their love for learning and teaching English, their strong desire to improve their English teaching skills, and their philosophical outlooks and beliefs; and collective in their interaction with the available support networks, such as those of their colleagues and the specialists from societies for English education. In particular, their teacher agency seems clearly to have been informed by their past language-learning experiences and contemporary practice, given Shigeru's IMF experience at college and Makoto's long-term commitment to a society for English education, each of which is currently reflected in their respective CLIL practice. In each case, the synthesis of individual and collective agency is the driving force in constructing their professional identity.

Their narratives also illustrate "positioning by distancing" (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015b; SØreide, 2006; Sosa & Gomez, 2012), whereby individuals distance themselves through rejection of available subject positions, and thereby claim the right to position themselves in ways that empower them to construct their own identity. This positioning by distancing is demonstrated both in Makoto's agency in seeking an external study group to improve his teaching skills, even in the face of the significant pedagogical difficulties at his first school, and in his positioning as the first CLIL practitioner at the public high school level in Japan, in collaboration with university CLIL theorists, at his third school. It is also illustrated by Shigeru's agency, in his college days, in distancing himself from the common goals of economics majors, and in his English teacher agency in implementing CLIL, which his colleagues showed no interest in at first. In both cases, their agentic action illustrates the construction and negotiation of their professional

identity through positioning by distancing.

Makoto and Shigeru's current English teacher identities are multiple, including a CLIL practitioner in English lessons, head of the English department, advisor for student English teachers, active member of the CLIL association, etc.; and their teaching practice is a site of struggle, reflecting Makoto's belief that "teaching is a living thing" defined in relation to his students, and Shigeru's agentic action of "pushing extra hard" to achieve his goals. They are continually constructing and reconstructing who they are, at each moment in their interaction with their students in the complex school environment. Their teaching practice, too, continually evolves over time, through their individual and collective agentic actions, while their identity and agency are multifaceted and context-dependent. In sum, the study's findings support the theoretical stances of Norton (2013) and Barkhuizen (2016), in demonstrating the multiplicity of teacher identity that can facilitate productive language teaching (Norton, 2017).

The study has several implications for language teachers and language teacher educators. First, teacher education programs should provide teachers with opportunities to share experienced language teachers' narratives, because the narrated experiences can be used as resources for teacher development. Second, language teachers and educators should understand language teaching from the perspective of the overall teaching environment, because language teachers can optimize their language teaching when their semiotic resources at the level of classroom interaction (micro) are valued by the school (meso) and society (macro). Third, it would be desirable for language teachers and educators to belong to language teaching societies that provide them with opportunities to improve their practical teaching skills.

Finally, my intention in the study was not to generalize its findings to other individuals or settings, but to gain an in-depth understanding of Makoto and Shigeru's teacher life stories, and offer meaningful insights for language teachers and educators. Further research on language teacher identity and agency in different Japanese contexts is needed.

Notes

- 1 The narrative data in this study was drawn from Saito (2020, 2021).

References

- Aneja, G. A. (2016). (Non)native speakered: Rethinking (non)nativeness and teacher identity in TESOL teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 572-596. doi:10.1002/tesq.315

- Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(3), p. 75-78.
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), p. 1-26.
- Barkhuizen, G. (2016). A short story approach to analyzing teacher (imagined) identity over time. *TESOL Quarterly*, 50(3), 655-683. doi:10.1002/tesq.311
- Barkhuizen, G. (Ed.). (2017). *Reflections on language teacher identity research*. New York: Routledge.
- Biesta, G. & Tedder, M. (2006). *How is agency possible? Towards an Ecological Understanding of Agency-as-achievement. Working Paper 5*, Exeter: The Learning Lives project.
- Block, D. (2003). *The social turn in second language acquisition*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Cheung, Y. L., Said, S. B., & Park, K. (2015). *Advances and current trends in language teacher identity research*. New York: Routledge.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20(1), 43-63. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5914.1990.tb00174.x
- De Costa, P. I., & Norton, B. (2017). Introduction: Identity, transdisciplinarity, and the good language teacher. *Modern Language Journal*, 101 (Supplement 2017), 3-14. doi: 10.1111/modl.12368
- Douglas Fir Group. (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *Modern Language Journal*, 100 (Supplement 2016), 19-47. doi:10.1111/modl.12301
- Gray, J., & Morton, T. (2018). *Social interaction and English language teacher identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015a). Multiple identities, negotiations, and agency across time and space: A narrative inquiry of a foreign language teacher candidate. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 12(2), 137-160. doi:10.1080/15427587.2015.1032076
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015b). Teacher agency, positioning, and English language learners: Voices of pre-service classroom teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 45, 94-103. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.09.009
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019a). A language teacher's agency in the development of her professional identities: A narrative case study. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(1), 4-18. doi:10.1080/15348431.2017.1406360
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019b). Language teacher agency: Major theoretical considerations, conceptualizations and methodological choices. In Kayi-Aydar, H., Gao, X., Miller, E. R., Varghese, M., & Vitanova, G. (Eds.), *Theorizing and analyzing language teacher agency* (pp. 10-21). Bristol:

Multilingual Matters.

- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019c). Language teacher identity. *Language Teaching*, 52, 281-295. doi:10.1017/S0261444819000223
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019d). *Positioning theory in applied linguistics: Research design and applications*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Pavlenko, A. (1995). Sociocultural theory and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 15, 108-124. doi:10.1017/S0267190500002646
- McKay, S. L., & Wong, S. L. C. (1996). Multiple discourses, multiple identities: Investment and agency in second-language learning among Chinese adolescent immigrant student. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(3), 577-608.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Norton, B. (2017). Learner investment and language teacher identity. In G. Barkhuizen (Ed.), *Reflections on language teacher identity research* (p. 80-86). New York: Routledge.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9-31. doi:10.2307/3587803
- Pavlenko, A. (2002). Poststructuralist approaches to the study of social factors in second language learning and use. In V. Cook (Ed.), *Portraits of the L2 user* (p. 277-302). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Priestly, M., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ruohotie-Lyhty, M., & Moate, J. (2016). Who and how? Preservice teachers as active agents developing professional identities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 55, 318-327. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2016.01.022
- Saito, T. (2020). Exploring language teacher agency: The case of a high school CLIL teacher. *The Journal of Ry Keizai University*, 55(1), 81-98.
- Saito, T. (2021). Exploring multiple identities and agency: A narrative case study of a Japanese secondary English teacher. *English Literature* 107, 1-23. Waseda University English Literature Society.
- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sørensen, G. E. (2006). Narrative construction of teacher identity: Positioning and negotiation. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 12(5), 527-547. doi:10.1080/13540600600832247

- Sosa, T., & Gomez, K. (2012). Positioning urban teachers as effective: Their discourse on students. *Education and Urban Society*, 44(5), 590-608. doi:10.1177/0013124511403995
- Toom, A., Pyhältö, K., & Rust, F. O. (2015). Teachers' professional agency in contradictory times. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 615-623. doi:10.1080/13540602.2015.1044334
- Tsui, A. B. M. (2007). Complexities of identity formation: A narrative inquiry of an EFL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(4), 657-680. doi:10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb0098.x
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(1), 21-44. doi:10.1207/s1532770jlie0401_2
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Yazan, B., & Rudolph, N. (Eds.). (2018). *Criticality, teacher identity, and (in)equity in English language teaching: Issues and implications*. Dordrecht: Springer.