

The Relationship between Language, Culture and Society: Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Positioning in Society¹

La Relación entre Lenguaje, Cultura y Sociedad: El
Posicionamiento de los Profesores de Inglés como
Lengua Extranjera en la Sociedad

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Abstract

This paper reports on EFL teachers' career choices and societal positioning in different regions of the world. The researchers conducted a qualitative narrative study to analyze, understand and interpret the relationship that exists between language, culture and society in the positioning identified by international EFL teachers. Positioning theory and narrative research were used as the study's theoretical framework, and data collection tools included reflections, narratives and counter-narratives. Teachers' personal narratives show their strength in the illocutionary force through which they demonstrate their positions of agency, authority and empowerment.

Key words: EFL teachers, career choices, societal positioning, narratives, counter-narratives, qualitative research

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Resumen

Este artículo presenta un análisis de las opciones profesionales de los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera y su posicionamiento social en diferentes regiones del mundo. Las investigadoras realizaron una investigación cualitativa basada en narrativas con el propósito de analizar, comprender e interpretar la relación que existe entre lenguaje, cultura y sociedad en el posicionamiento identificado por los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera en el mundo. La teoría del posicionamiento y la investigación narrativa fueron usadas como marco teórico para el estudio, y las herramientas de recolección de datos incluyeron reflexiones, narrativas y contranarrativas. Las narrativas personales de los profesores reflejan su fuerza ilocucionaria a través de la cual expresan su posicionamiento como agentes con autoridad y empoderamiento.

Palabras clave: Profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera, opciones profesionales, posicionamiento social, narrativa, contranarrativa, investigación cualitativa

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta uma análise das opções profissionais dos professores de inglês como língua estrangeira e seu posicionamento social em diferentes regiões do mundo. As pesquisadoras realizaram uma pesquisa qualitativa baseada em narrativas com o propósito de analisar, compreender e interpretar a relação que existe entre linguagem, cultura e sociedade no posicionamento identificado pelos professores de inglês como língua estrangeira no mundo. A teoria do posicionamento e a pesquisa narrativa foram usadas como marco teórico para o estudo, e as ferramentas de coleta de dados incluíram reflexões, narrativas e contra-narrativas. As narrativas pessoais dos professores refletem sua força ilocucionária através da qual expressam seu posicionamento como agentes com autoridade e empoderamento.

Palavras chave: Professores de inglês como língua estrangeira, opções profissionais, posicionamento social, narrativa, contra-narrativa, pesquisa qualitativa

Introduction

Scholars have agreed on the expansion of English as an international language (McKay, 2002; Pennycook, 2010, 2014; Phan, 2008; Phillipson 1992, 2009). As Troike argues (in Phillipson, 1992), English developed its leadership in international communication between the 17th and 19th centuries, while Great Britain was leading in territorial conquest, colonization, and international trade. The influence of the English language increased after World War II when the United States of America became the world's most powerful military and technological power. During the postcolonial era, governments and private agents have been investing money to expand English in an international market that was looking for international commerce, development and communication (Pakir, 2009).

The expansion of the English language came with the promotion of English language teaching and learning worldwide (Graddol, 1997; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Yano, 2001), and this scenario favored the proliferation of professional teacher development programs in different institutions around the world. The population, which is interested in attending these methods courses, are mainly composed of EFL in-service teachers, and in certain cases in-service teachers of English as a second language (ESL). Consequently, the researchers expect that this narrative study designed to analyze and understand EFL in-service teachers' reflections, narratives and counter-narratives about their career paths, career choices and beliefs about the relationship between language, culture and society can serve as a basis for improving teacher programs to develop the professional careers of teachers with varied backgrounds and expertise around the world.

Both researchers in this study have a special interest in teachers' professional development as well as in the education of future teachers who attend teacher education courses in international settings. They work in teacher development and research within different areas of knowledge related to the development of teacher education programs and teacher professional development.

The researchers designed a longitudinal international study to inquire into the lives and work of in- and pre-service teachers working and living in different regions of the world. During the first stage, participant in-service teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) were granted a non-threatening space and produced written reflections, narratives and counter-narratives about their career paths, specifically referring to the factors that influenced their career choices and their relationships with EFL, the culture and the society in various regions

of the world. Expanding to more teachers around the world, the study also contemplated the gathering of narrative data from EFL pre-service teachers, as well as data from pre- and in-service English language arts teachers from the U.S.

The first stage of the study involved data collection from EFL in-service teachers from different countries in the world, through both face-to-face encounters and via internet. These data consisted of written reflections, life stories and histories triggered by a semi-structured questionnaire, to which participants could refer freely. The second and third stages included the gathering of data from EFL pre-service teachers, as well as from in- and pre- service English language arts teachers in the U.S. Invitations were sent throughout the world and to local teacher education programs and schools.

The study was conducted with EFL in-service teachers from different regions in the world. The research questions that guided this study are:

- 1- How do EFL teachers in developing countries reflect about their positioning with language in culture and society?
- 2- How do EFL teachers' reflections, narratives and counter-narratives reflect their career choice and beliefs about language, culture and society?

The researchers conducted a qualitative narrative study to analyze, understand and interpret the relationship that exists between language, culture and society in the positioning identified by international EFL teachers. Positioning theory and narrative research were used as the study's theoretical framework, and data collection tools included reflections, narratives and counter-narratives. The researchers used Reissman's (2008) thematic analysis to analyze twenty-five EFL in-service teachers' narratives, counter-narratives and reflections. The researchers recognized 107 significant statements, which were clustered in 13 themes where EFL in-service teachers express their positioning within language, culture and society in diverse regions in the world. Teachers' personal narratives show their strength in the illocutionary force through which they demonstrate their positions of agency, authority and empowerment.

Literature Review

The International Growth of English

In the last 45 years, English has been recognized as the most widespread foreign language in the world. There are 115 million English learners added to 275 million native English speakers in the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and some 'Anglophone' countries in Asia and Africa in the 1970's (Gage & Ohannessian, 1974). The Central and Eastern European countries expected 30 million English learners during the 1990's (1989/90 British Council Annual Report, as cited in Phillipson, 1992). Further, by 1995, there were 1,400 million people living in countries where English was the official language, and it was calculated that one out of five of the world's population spoke English at a certain level of proficiency (press release on British Council's English 2000 Project, as cited in Graddol, 1997). In the 2000's, the number of English learners (ELs) in China reached 300 million (Ragan & Jones, 2013).

Along this continuous growth in numbers of speakers and learners, English has reached a dominant position within a myriad of domains as varied as science, medicine and technology, international business, diplomacy, mass media, entertainment, journalism and education (Graddol, 1997; Kachru, 2006; Phillipson, 1992; Yano, 2001). English dominance has been established by its functional importance, its outreach and extent of influence, especially closing language barriers in situations of international communication (Kachru, 2006; Phillipson, 1992; Yano, 2001). Undoubtedly, English has been used as a means of mutual understanding in an era of multilateral and multicultural relations. Nevertheless, the unprecedented linguistic expansion of English has been considered problematic. Minor languages have been menaced with extinction, and a monolingual, monocultural understanding of English-speaking countries and their values and beliefs about the world have been imposed (Kachru, 2006; Yano, 2001).

Specialists have analyzed the historical dissemination of English in the world according to patterns of acquisition and functionality in which the language is used across different cultures and in contact with other languages. Phillipson (1992) refers to them as the *core* and *periphery* (p. 17). Kachru (1985, 2006) analyzes English expansion using three concentric circles: the *inner*, *outer (or extended)*, and the *expanding circles*. Yano (2001) explains further that within the inner circle, English is spoken as a native language (ENL), within the outer circle it is a second language (ESL), and in the expanding circle, it is a foreign language (EFL). Yano (2001) proposes some modifications to

Kachru (1985)'s concentric circles, especially between the inner and the outer circles. In this view, some ESL varieties are under a process of becoming more established as a result of the English language's functional and extensive penetration in diverse social, educational, administrative and academic domains in society. Consequently, more ESL speakers portray themselves as native, or "functional" native speakers, relying on their intuition to produce and/or judge grammatical and appropriate linguistic forms applicable to different situations (Graddol, 1997; Kachru, 1985, 2006; Yano, 2001).

This analysis is directed towards the removal of the concentricity model proposed by Kachru (1995, 2006) in favor of a parallel, comparative disposition of all English varieties, those spoken by native speakers, by "functional" native speakers and by nonnative speakers. Moreover, some EFL speakers can also become "functionally ESL speakers" because of their intensive and extensive exposure to and use of English. The rationale behind this is to overcome the monocultural and monolingual position British, American and other well-accepted standards of English have traditionally had as the model of language correctness. The tendency is to consider each "one of the varieties of English" as valuable means of communication within communities (Kachru, 2006; Yano, 2001).

The promotion of English language teaching and learning.

Seldom does English pedagogy look into the political, economic and military relationships existing between the English language dominance and its educational promotion. English Language Teaching (ELT) has mainly developed a focus on linguistic or pedagogical matters, whereas in its core concept it is an activity with international political, economic, military and cultural implications (Graddol, 1997; Phillipson, 1992, 2009; Yano, 2001).

As discussed above, market demands on English as the language for progress and prosperity influenced English-speaking countries' language policies. English-speaking countries have been investing funds in promoting the teaching and learning of English worldwide. Consequently, English has been traditionally taught to support opposing objectives, on the one hand the development of specific scientific areas and education, and on the other hand, to spread a flavor for the institutional organizations and ways of thinking developed by English the cultures of speaking countries (Phillipson, 1992, Yano, 2001).

ELT in different regions of the world. According to Okushima (1995), and Pakir (1999), English has become a "glocal" language which has an international outreach, i.e. it affords global communication, but

at the same time favors local self-identity meaning within a social group among speakers in the outer circle (as cited in Yano, 2001; Graddol 1997; Kachru, 2006). Other scholars (Canagarajah, 2006; Pakir, 2009; Seidhofer, 2004) have described a different situation for speakers in the expanding circle (Kachru, 2006), who make use of English more as a 'lingua franca' (ELF) (Canagarajah, 2006; Pakir, 2009; Seidhofer, 2004). Seidhofer (2004) defines ELF as a language that serves as a means of communication among people who do not share a common L1 and/or a common cultural background. Consequently, the paradigm of English as an international language has been challenged in the 21st century by new alternatives of language use or appropriation, as well as innovative ways of teaching, learning and researching the English language and EFL teachers (Pakir, 2009).

When analyzing the reflections, narratives and counter-narratives elaborated by EFL in-service teachers, these alternative and innovative ways of teaching, learning and communicating in English open the door to new understandings of teachers' discourses and positionality in regards to EFL, culture and society. Post-colonial theory scholars (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006, Canagarajah, 1999; 2006; Menezes Jordao, 2008) have analyzed both linguistic and personal issues emanating from previous situations of domination in the ex-colonies. Postcolonial theory has discussed experience in diverse areas including hybridity, migration, slavery, resistance, agency, representation, difference, race, gender, and place, in the midst of historical, philosophical and linguistic studies that follow English monocultural, monolingual traditions (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006; Menezes Jordao, 2008).

In opposition to these monopolistic discourses, post-colonial theory has discussed the concept of hybridity, which has influenced linguistics (Canagarajah, 1999), as well as other areas of social life. Menezes Jordao (2008) discusses hybridity by means of explaining the concept of *difference*, which is a process of identification constructed discursively. The subject is also constructed and determined by means of discourse and at the same time, the subject determines discourse. Consequently, the individual is fragmented, contradictory and subject to change, exactly as the process of meaning-making, which fluctuates from moments of fixation but never becomes permanently fixed. These movements and fluctuations leave spaces in-between in which meanings can be created before becoming fixed and changed again (Menezes Jordao, 2008).

The in-between spaces mentioned above allow the development of concepts like resistance and agency (Bhabha, 1985; 1994; Menezes Jordao, 2008), which can be defined as systems developed from individuals' personal positioning in a 'bordering place' or 'third space'.

These new spaces, also called ‘hybrid spaces’, allow individuals to develop counter-narratives that challenge totalizing discourses, to express the in-stability of meanings and to reflect about their conflicting representations (Bhabha, 1995; 1994). Hybridity allows diverse forms of knowing and the development of agency and resistance that include uncertainty, ambivalence and doubt about former coherent discourses. Agency introduces different forms of representation (of self and others) and transformation through discourse. Individuals develop agency in their process of meaning-making, when producing discourses through which they define their ideas, kinds of knowledge and forms of knowing (Bhabha, 1985; 1994; Costa, 2006; Menezes Jordao, 2008).

The previous discussion explains the researchers’ decision to use positioning theory as framework in this study. The career choice of EFL in-service teachers had been analyzed taking into account the teachers’ cultural contexts, countries and regions of origin, as well as the socio-political and economical systems in which they live and in which they have made their professional decisions (Olan & Belló, 2016). However, the exploration of positioning theory to analyze the emergent themes in EFL teachers’ narratives in regions of the world, the expanding circle according to Yano (2001) and Kachru (2006), can shed more light to the understanding of this population’s career choices, career development and professional needs.

Positioning Theory

In order to develop the concept of positioning theory, Harré and van Langenhove (1999) pay attention to the local moral order as well as to the local system of rights, duties and obligations valid within different social groups. Such a system of local moral order is in a continuous process of change in which mutual and contestable rights and obligations come to life through the individuals’ acting and speaking. Positioning allows us to: a) conduct a discursive analysis of personal stories that become comprehensible as social acts within which narrators have positioned themselves and, b) analyze new theoretical developments within the psychology of interpersonal encounters (Harré, 1998; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009; van Langenhove & Harré, 1999).

Harré (1998) defines “positioning theory” and compares the concept with that of the older framework of *role theory*. He describes roles as relatively fixed and long lasting in comparison to the more changeable and transitory *positions* in which individuals usually show a struggle for victory between opposing forces or interests.

The concept of *position* receives a specific meaning in the analysis of people's interactions, which are mediated by symbols that demonstrate their personal positions as individuals and as representatives of their groups. The technical meaning of position includes a collection of personal attributes, which dominate interpersonal, intergroup and intrapersonal actions led by individuals. Individuals act according to the assignment of rights, duties and obligations in which they have been positioned or in which they have positioned themselves (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999).

Methodology

Research Design

Narrative research analyzes experiences in the form of stories lived and told by individuals, both in oral and written form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). Personal EFL in-service teachers' reflections, narratives and counter-narratives are used as a tool in educational research and professional development. Narratives afford individuals, in this case, teachers, the opportunity to analyze their past and present experiences, re-analyze their positions within the social contexts in which they live, and express their individual and subjective interpretation of the circumstances in which they live (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hale, Snow-Geron, & Morales, 2008; Nieto, 2003).

Riesman (2008) argues in favor of narratives that provide stories with more power than resistant subversive acts. New interest is being devoted to telling the story, which "makes the moment live beyond the moment" (Riesman, 2008, p. 11). Recently, researchers, teacher educators and scholars interested in teacher development are turning to narratives to foster meta-cognitive reflections, re-examination of assumptions, and shed light on implicit beliefs about teaching and learning. Hinchman and Hinchman's (1997) definition of narrative is used when depicting teachers' stories:

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Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offers insights about the world and/ or the people's experiences of it. (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xvi)

The previous definition includes three common features, temporality, meaning and social encounter, which are also referenced as the triadic nature of stories. Goodson & Gill (2011) further explicate

these features by noting that these qualities, temporality, meaning and social encounter, characterize the nature of narratives (stories) as used in this study. They share a common assumption that there is a connection between “life as it is lived and life as told in personal narratives” (p. 4). Goodson & Gill (2011) define temporality by establishing that (a) “all narratives encompass a sequence of events,” meaning is defined as (b) “all the personal significance and meaning[s] are externalized through the telling of lived experiences,” and social encounters because (c) “all narratives are told to an audience and will inevitably be shaped by the relationship between teller and the listener” (p. 4). These three features are salient in teachers’ stories and evidenced by our own examination of our participants’ process of self-discovery, inquiry and growth.

Narratives and counter-narratives. Milner and Howard (2013, p.542) consider narratives and counter-narratives as valuable research tools with teacher populations, as they provide a means of elaborating and sharing lived experiences. Especially noticeable is the presence of counter-narratives within teachers’ life stories and histories, defined as narrative spaces in which narrators share their experiences in ways they have never done before. Ladson-Billings (1998) argues in favor of counter-narratives as a means to study and define realities that are juxtaposed to prevalent narratives. Counter-narratives open doors to disruptions and re-interpretations of reality as expressed through pervasive, socially accepted stories.

Participants

Data were collected from different groups of EFL in-service teachers coming from different countries. Twelve of the participants were EFL in-service teachers from developing countries, namely Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Jordan, Argentina, Ivory Coast, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Egypt. They had received a scholarship from the US Department of State via the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) to attend professional development courses at the largest metropolitan public research university in a southern-eastern state in the USA for six weeks. These teachers participated in the Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA) organized by IREX, an international nonprofit organization that provides leadership and innovative programs to promote positive global lasting change (IREX, 2014). The majority of these in-service teachers (N = 25) are middle aged (M age) = 40.32, SD = 7.028), and consequently traversing the middle stage of their careers. The majority (80%) are females, and (20%) are males.

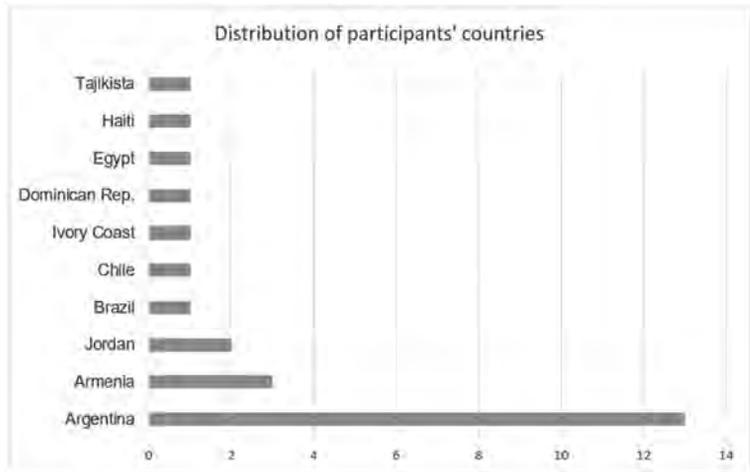


Figure 1. Participants' countries distribution

The other thirteen participants (mainly EFL teachers in Latin American countries) were contacted via e-mail. The first step consisted of sending an informed consent document, an introductory letter containing the study's general objectives, a semi-structured questionnaire and a demographic document. From the original large group that received the documents via e-mail, only thirteen EFL in-service teachers responded, eleven from Argentina and the other two from Brazil and Chile. The emic perspective of the participants was displayed by adding thorough description of their realities, not disregarding the limitations that might have existed during the process of data collection, as well as, within the participants' contexts (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 450).

Data Collection Instruments

The semi-structured questionnaire contained ten open-ended questions intended to elicit participants' written reflections, narratives and counter-narratives about their career paths, especially paying attention to their experiences surrounding their choice of career, their process of selection, the role of school and family among others. They provided relevant demographic data useful for the study's purposes (including nationality, age, gender, educational background, etc.).

Both groups, the one that answered the semi-structured interview during the face-to-face meeting and the one that responded via e-mail, were granted a non-threatening space, plus the necessary time to compose

narratives, counter-narratives and reflections about their previous and present lived experiences, thus providing the researchers with deep insight into the factors that influenced their career decision-making process. Researchers examined data produced by the participants taking an emic position and drawing from their own experiences as former teachers (Munro, 1998; Smith, 2012).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researchers decided on a thematic analysis (Riesman, 2008) to provide an analysis according to the research questions that had been established to guide the study. After analyzing twenty-five EFL in-service teachers' narratives, counter-narratives and reflections, the researchers recognized thirteen themes in which EFL in-service teachers express their positioning within language, culture and society. A total of 107 statements were analyzed and 13 themes identified in the reflections, narratives and counter-narratives produced by the teachers.

Findings and discussions are fundamental to draw important implications to influence necessary changes in teacher education programs and professional development programs. The following analysis addresses the first research question: *How do EFL teachers from different regions in the world reflect about their positioning with language in culture and society?*

Table 1. EFL teachers' positioning within language, culture and society

Lack of reference to students/teaching-learning process	22
Express their own decision in career choice/agency not asking for help	19
Authority in their position as teachers	17
Satisfaction with career	11
Pride in skill in the English language/long time dedication	11

The table below shows the main themes analyzed and their frequency as per the second research question: *How do EFL teachers' reflections, narratives and counter-narratives reflect their career choice and beliefs about language, culture and society?*

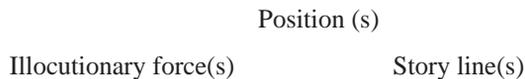
Table 2. EFL teachers’ reflection about their career choice and beliefs about language, culture and society. There are nine (N= 9) themes and 91 sentences analyzed (N = 91).

I have liked / loved English since childhood	14
Family happiness	12
Possibility to study at university	10
Skills for other professions (of better hierarchy)	9
Poor salary	9
Skills for teaching	6

The Positioning Triangle

The following below depict the three background conditions that guarantee the meanings of symbolic interactions that determine each other: a) an illocutionary force of discourse and acts, i.e. the social significance of what is being said and done at a specific place and time (Austin, 1959); b) pre-existing, socially accepted positions individuals use; and c) human episodes shaped by one or more story lines on which the participants agree (Harré, 1998).

The schematic representation is as follows:



EFL teachers’ reflections, narratives and counter-narratives represent their interpersonal relationships, need to find a job, to establish a teaching career and demonstrate language mastery. Tables 3 a) and b) explain the thematic analysis corresponding to the illocutionary discursive force and the pre-existing socially accepted positions developed along EFL teachers’ lives.

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Table 3a. EFL teachers demonstrate language mastery by referring to their pride in their knowledge of EFL and the power with which there are endowed

Pride in skill in the English language/long time dedication	11
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Table 3b. Category 1: EFL teachers represent interpersonal relationships

Influence of family/near family (positive)	24
Influence of family/near family (negative)	10
Follow models in family/society	9
Encouragement/motivation from family	7

Table 3b. Category 2: EFL teachers need to find a job/establish a teaching career

Pride in skill in the English language/long time dedication	11
Job opportunities (studying English Language Teaching)	7
Teaching not first choice	6
Skills for teaching	6
English to work on tourism/travelling/translation	3
Develop studs. skills/abilities	1

Results

Positioning and Pedagogical Storylines

Data analysis provided examples of reflections, narratives and counter-narratives in which participants follow different story lines (Harré, 1998) to refer to their positioning in relationship to language, culture and society. Maria's narrative reflection forcefully explains her position of authority in the career decision she had made, establishes how important the analysis of her past experiences are and shows a clear story line in which different actors played a role, at the same time as they defined their own positions.

When I graduated, I was confused as to what career I wanted to pursue. I was in between Psychology and English. Either road I decided to take, I knew I was going to be working with people, which I have always thought it fit my personality. In many ways, a teacher sometimes plays the role of a counselor in her students' lives, so my choices were not too far apart. In the end, I picked English. My choice was influenced by my naïve impression the English I had taken for over ten years at a local school in my hometown was more than enough to afford me outstanding grades in the English program. Little did I know about the difficulties I would face in not just dealing with the complexity of the language but also the meanness of some of my professors. My decision was also

influenced by my mother's insistence. I was usually too sensitive and too sympathetic to people's feelings to become a professional, emotionally detached therapist. I do not know if I would have made a good therapist or not. My mother was probably right about her assessment of my character and suitability (or lack of) for a career in Psychology. Even then, I feel that my capacity for compassion has proved to be a great asset in my teaching career. However, at the time I started the English program I was not thrilled about teaching. I had yet to discover my passion for it. (Maria, Argentina).

Language – Thought and Language – Action Relationships

Thinking has an intrapersonal dimension as well as an interpersonal scope because it can be both a private and a social – public activity. Examples from the present data set include episodes in which thinking spreads out and covers the individual and the public domains, especially when teachers reflect on their career choice decision-making process privately, but they also seek to discuss it publicly seeking for advice on the best course of action from their families and friends. Indirect influences from these opinions show in their actions and declarations (Harré, 1998). An example provided by Silvia shows the intermingle between thinking being a private and social activity:

A couple of times I needed help because I felt confused as regards my career. I doubted, I didn't know if I was competent enough in the foreign language. My teacher helped every time I needed.

I remember that I had failed an exam, something that surprised her very much since I was doing it very well and I studied very hard. She called me and had a few words with me. Those words made me changed my mind. Since I felt frustrated I wanted to quit the career. She didn't know anything about it but she talked to me at the right time. She said that learning a language was like learning a musical instrument, you need to have the ability, your hearing is essential. She also told me that she could observe -according to her vast teaching experience-that some students didn't have that capacity, they insisted on learning English and in the end they failed. She concluded by saying "You can play a musical instrument, I bet you can. After this conversation I decided to continue with my studies and I finished my career."(Silvia, Argentina).

Positioning, Selfhood and Discourse

Harré & van Langenhove (1999) develop the concept of identity as a conjunction of the personal identity evidenced in the word "self" or in each individual's personal agency and the "selves" presented in

public interpersonal interactions in the everyday world, sometimes called “personas.” Individuals display their particular selfhood by using discursive devices as the first person pronoun “I” with which they indicate their ownership of their sayings and acts, as well as their commitment to the contents and consequences expressed in their discursive acts. These authors discuss that indexicals, like “I”, “you”, “we”, “this” and “now” express each individual’s personal identity and agency. The meanings implied in the use of indexicals can only be completed with the knowledge of the speaker or narrator that used them, as well as of the place and time in which they were used (Harré, 1998; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p.7). The following examples from the data set provide us with a clearer idea:

Usually in Jordan we go to the university according to our grade in a standardized exam and because English, and foreign language, are the best opportunity to find a good job, that is why I choosed it. (Hanadi, Jordan).

This is what I have been doing since 2003 and I love it. I love being amongst teachers, sharing and learning with them. I had the chance to work with teachers for the last 10 years and I can say this is really fulfilling for me. (Daniela, Brazil).

Individuals display their “personas” in discursive acts including declarations and written narrations. In the specific case of written narrations, narrators introduce themselves and others as characters and choose the needed vocabulary to tell their stories. The indexicals “I”, “me”, “myself”, “my” and “mine” are used to tell publicly the lived experiences of the individual “self” (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p.8). Consider the following examples:

May be my dad had once mentioned the fact that I could have travelled abroad to study politics. I thought about that for a while but could not see myself anywhere else but teaching and learning from my students!!! (Guadalupe, Argentina).

I make decisions by myself but sometimes with my family. (Ruslan, Uzbekistan).

There is a singularity of the “self,” but a multiplicity of “personas” dependent on the social context. The present data analysis expresses different positioning of the teachers, for example: their decision to leave out direct references about students and the teaching-learning process, their agency in the process of decision-making, their authority in the

position as teachers, their satisfaction with their careers and pride in their command of the English language. For example, Sana states the following:

I selected my career following the career of my father and my English teacher. I liked the language the way it sounded and the power it endowed me with. (Sana, Jordan).

In each different position, the “persona” and his/her behavior are different given the exigencies of the social situation. Each particular case of “self” is constructed according to the constant exchange and interrelationship with the environment. The meaning implied by the narrator will be understood depending on the storyline created and on how coherent is the public “self” that has been developed in the situation (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p.9).

Caring

Following the construct of positioning we would like to discuss the concept of the caring relation in which there is a person who is the carer and another who is the cared-for (Noddings, 2012). Noddings (2012) notes that the carer is in a sense “feeling with” the cared-for by attending to his or her needs; however, the cared-for plays an extremely important role, i.e. responds to the carer and acknowledges that the act of care has taken place. Both parties need to recognize the response in order for it to be a true caring relation. The author distinguishes virtue-caring as the relationship in which there is no response from the cared-for versus the relationship in which carer and cared-for play an important role. Noddings (2012) refers to this mutual recognition of the response as reciprocity. In order for the carer to continue the caring relation with the cared-for, he or she needs the support of a caring community. This caring community may or may not contribute to this reciprocity. Noddings (2012) also points out that caregiving activities supported by people who are genuine carers tend to promote the development of a caring attitude or disposition.

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In this particular study, the relationship between carer and cared-for is demonstrated through language mastery and language learning. This creates distinction between what Noddings (2012) refers to as virtue-caring in which there is no response from the cared-for and the relation in which both parties play an important role. The in-service teachers’ reflections, narratives and counter-narratives afforded the researchers a different perspective to caregiver-student relationship.

Cultures of care are important to understanding the purpose of this study. These teachers had opportunities to express in written form their career choice process, the relationship language, culture and society play and how caring is situated in their teaching and learning.

Conclusions

Drawing from the past discussion, we consider that more research is necessary as regards the factors that influence EFL teachers' career choices. Positioning theory has provided an excellent framework to demonstrate the positions of agency and authority in which participants identify themselves. Participants move away from the "carer" role society has traditionally endowed them with, towards a more movable and challenging position of self-assurance and empowerment. Mastery of EFL grants them a privileged position in society.

This study has provided participants with a framework for reflection, a nonthreatening space and a valid opportunity to express their own voice. The concept of narrative pedagogy (Goodson & Gill, 2011) has been introduced as a facilitating framework within which individuals can reflect deeply, re-visit their own selves, collaborate with meaningful others in their process of self re-definition and provide meaning to their past experiences and lives through the lenses of their present historical reality. Thus the value of narrative pedagogy in education, especially in helping the individual shape learning experiences from within (pp. xi-xii).

Even when Goodson & Gill (2011) have analyzed different areas related to narrative pedagogy, a deeper understanding of this construct can favor its application in teacher education and professional development programs. Further research is necessary to collaborate with a more general process of pedagogical innovation conducive towards the application of narrativity in the macro spectrum of education (Goodson & Gill, 2011).

It is the researchers' hope to draw pedagogical and institutional implications from the present study. In-service teachers demonstrate that they can revisit and reflect on their lived experiences, collaborate with others in dialogic interactions and develop a reflective stance when guided through inquiry driven activities to formulate narratives, counter-narratives and written reflections. In-service teachers would benefit from specially designed professional development methods courses in which they are afforded non-threatening spaces to elaborate on the experiences that surrounded their career choice for them to approach new learning and practical experiences more effectively.

Further research is necessary to analyze EFL teachers' process of identity re-definition, levels of sustained motivation and satisfaction and the needs they have while traversing the middle stage of their professional lives. More in depth discourse analysis can shed light on how language plays a paramount role in the development of their professional identities.

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