Understanding Language Teacher Identities in L2 Teaching

Junyuan Chen
University of Arizona

As a Chinese native speaker who is pursuing a PhD degree in Japanese linguistics in the United States, as well as a PhD student who is teaching Japanese in the classroom, how to deal with my various professional identities (e.g., a female student, a PhD candidate, a Japanese learner/user, a Japanese teacher, etc.) is an unavoidable topic in my daily life. I have gradually realized that how I perceive myself as a professional profoundly influences my pedagogical choices. Furthermore, Varghese, et. al. (2005) also underscores the significance of language teacher identities (LTIs) by identifying this topic as "an emerging subject of interest in research on language teacher education and teacher development" (p. 21). Thus, as a Japanese language learner/teacher in an English-speaking country, and as an assistant editor of this journal, I firmly believe that research on LTIs is essential for teachers' professional development.

The Increasingly Recognized Significance of Language Teacher Identities

In the last two decades, the number of studies of LTIs has actually increased substantially because of the rapid expansion of research on identities in general (Barkhuizen, 2016; Kayi-Aydar, 2019). The existing literature has revealed several aspects of teaching activities that intersect with "identity work" (De Costa & Norton, 2017, p. 7), namely, self-perception (Kanno & Stuart, 2011), teachers' teaching beliefs (Oda, 2017), and understanding "identity as pedagogy" (Morgan, 2004). Varghese et al. (2005) suggests that "language teacher identity is an emerging subject of interest in research on language teacher education and teacher development" (p. 21). They highlight the link between LTIs and their professional development in terms of language teacher education, and they note that promoting teachers' professional development will ultimately benefit language teaching. For teachers, learning to teach involves not only acquiring new knowledge and skills but also forming and adopting a "teacher identity" as an ongoing process of "becoming" (Clarke, 2008). The process of input (learning new teaching strategies), transition (consuming this knowledge), and output (practicing teaching with this new knowledge), is indeed a development of one's professional identity. Varghese et al. (2016) also suggests that researching LTIs helps teacher candidates understand themselves, increases their ability to exercise agency as language teachers, and connects their teaching knowledge and teaching practice.

Previous research largely examined the relationship between teachers' development and their emotions and cognitions (Barcelos, 2017; Golombek, 2017; Hargreaves, 1998; Kubanyiova, 2017; Nias, 1996; Yazan, 2018). In these works, the authors emphasize that language teachers' emotions, cognitions, feelings and beliefs have a fundamental impact on their actions within classroom activities (Golombek, 2017) and their support for students' engagement (Kubanyiova, 2017). According to Barcelos (2017), "the more central a belief and more connected to their emotions, the more influential it is to their identities" (p. 147). Since the action of teaching is essentially constituted "of human interaction by nature" (Yazan, 2018, p. 38), teachers' emotions, as the "most dynamic qualities" (Hargreaves, 1998), inevitably impact their teaching (Nias, 1996). Therefore, understanding LTIs in terms of their associated emotional states is valuable for teacher-student interactions

within dynamic teaching contexts, and it promotes teachers' professional development and eventually benefits their language teaching.

According to Barkhuizen (2017), language teachers "work towards understanding who they are and who they desire or fear to be" (p. 4) and choose to "enact different aspects of who they are as teachers in different discursive encounters" (p. 7). In other words, language teachers repetitively negotiate with two issues through their teaching: "Who am I at this moment?" and "Who do I want to become?" (Yazan, 2018, p. 25). Matsuda (2017) also reflected on how his professional identity "plays an important role" (p. 241) in his teaching through both how he teaches and how he presents himself. Therefore, language teachers' viewpoints, their feelings, and how they position or identify themselves as professionals (Yazan, 2018) are complexly intertwined with their beliefs, conceptions, philosophies, and "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, p. 296). In this sense, it is reasonable to argue that LTIs determine and are determined by language teachers' experiences of teacher learning and teaching practice. Since teachers' self-cognition and beliefs about the future constantly impact their actions in the present, LTIs ultimately and significantly impact their second/foreign language teaching practices.

Based on the understanding of LTIs, this literature review paper offers possible directions for exploring Japanese language teacher identities, as well as their implications for Japanese language teacher education in the future. However, since English is still a global dominant language, previous literature has heavily relied on investigating the LTIs of English language teachers, while the identities of Japanese foreign language teachers are lamentedly understudied. Although Japanese has been widely regarded as a less commonly taught language (see https://ncolctl.org) in the United States, it actually ranked sixth (following Spanish, French, American Sign Language, German, Italian) in terms of languages other than English studied since 2009 (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010; Goldberg, Looney, & Lusin, 2015). Furthermore, Japanese even replaced Italian as the fifth "in the ranking of the fifteen most commonly taught languages" (Looney & Lusin, 2019, p. 4) studied by American students in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education. More importantly, this report specifically points out that although enrollment in foreign language courses other than English dropped by 9.2% overall nationwide, "only Japanese and Korean showed gains in enrollments," and "Japanese enrollments increased by 3.1%, from 66,771 in 2013 to 68,810 in 2016" (Looney & Lusin, 2019, p. 4). That is to say, despite a national drop in enrollment in foreign language courses overall, the number of students choosing to study Japanese still increased steadily. The survey report on Japanese-language education abroad from the Japan Foundation (2018) also confirms this growth in terms of university-level Japanese learners (Japan Foundation, 2018; Looney & Lusin, 2019). Given this increased enrollment of university-level Japanese language learners, the need for Japanese language teachers at the university level will increase predictably and consequentially. Therefore, for Japanese language teachers, especially for pre-service teachers or novice teachers, it would be meaningful for their professional development, and ultimately their practice of teaching Japanese as a second/foreign language, if they are provided with the chance to explore "who I am" and "whom I want to be".

Therefore, this exploration of the literature on LTIs sheds light on how this theoretical and scholarly work relates to practical L2 teaching concerns, especially regarding the significance of researching LTIs for teachers of Japanese. In this article, I put this literature into conversation with my own

teaching experience and identity work to suggest potential resonances for other language educators.

Identity Within the Poststructural Viewpoint

Language teacher identity is, to begin with, a sort of identity. Traditionally, identity was viewed as fixed, unitary, and categorized by sources of power from nature, institutions, individuals, or groups (Gee, 2000). Poststructuralists, however, challenge the notion of fixed and stable identity and regard identity as fluid, dynamic, and continuously shifting (Antaki, 1998; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006). In poststructural viewpoints, identity is "capable of both reproducing and destabilising the discursive order" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 34), and identity work is able to be "analysed in talk" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 34) within "multiple and changing contexts" (Steadman, 2020, p. 31). Additionally, identity ascription is "occasioned by the specifics of the interactions" and "is part of the dynamically emerging trajectory of the conversation" (Antaki, 1998, p. 85). Zimmerman (1998) also underscores the connection between identity and discourse by specifically treating identity as "an element of context for talk-in-interaction" (p. 87). According to Zimmerman (1998), identity is an element that (1) constitutes an interlocutor's utilization of linguistic or discourse devices, (2) indicates and theorizes about self and others, and (3) displays a categorization of membership (e.g., Sacks, 1972). In other words, identity should be regarded as a part of context, and it can be practiced and observed through conversational interactions. Based on this view, Zimmerman (1998) suggests that with regard to both proximal context at the interactional level and the distal context for social activities beyond interactions, identities could be examined at three levels: discourse identities integrated "in the moment-by-moment organization of the interaction" (p. 90), situated identities that are employed "within the precincts of particular types of situation" (p. 90), and transportable identities that "travel with individuals across situations and are potentially relevant in and for any situation and in and for any spate of interaction" (p. 90). Take my case as an example. If I ask a question to my students in a Japanese language class, how I phrase this question could be affected by my discourse identity as an asker, my situated identity as a Japanese language teacher, and my transportable identity as a female and a foreigner. From this example, one can see that a teacher's pedagogical choice is not isolated or comes from nowhere. A teacher's classroom practice is highly contextual and strongly influenced by their cognition of "who I am" at the particular moment in the specific occasion.

Language Teacher Identities

With the growth of research on identity, poststructuralists have also reinforced conceptions of identity in the field of the second/foreign language acquisition and teaching (Block, 2007; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Duff & Uchida, 1997; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Morgan, 2004; Norton, 2013).

After the concept of identity was introduced into the field of second/foreign language acquisition and teaching, it took two directions. One direction focuses on learners' identities in terms of language learning (e.g., Firth and Wagner, 1997; Norton, 2013). Firth and Wagner (1997) problematized some fundamental notions such as "learner, nonnative, native speaker, and interlanguage" (p. 286). They suggest that the notion of nonnative/native speaker lacks regard for emic dimension, and nonnative/native speaker is "only one identity from a multitude of social identities" (p. 292), since language learners also hold other identities (e.g., male, father, husband, friend, colleague, teacher, etc.) and many of these identities "can be relevant simultaneously, and all of which are motile"

(Firth and Wagner, 1997, p. 292). Their study is "symptomatic of a general trend to open up SLA to social theory and sociological and sociolinguistic research" (Block, 2007, p. 863) and explore connections between identity and second language learning. The other direction of identity theorizing within the study of language teaching and learning pays closer attention to language teachers (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997; Varghese et. al., 2005; Kanno & Stuart, 2011), examining how LTIs impact their pedagogical choices inside the classroom (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997), their interactions with colleagues outside the classroom (e.g., Kayi-Aydar, 2015), and their professional development in the future (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Liu & Xu, 2011).

As the foregoing demonstrated, from the poststructural perspective, identity is viewed as fluid and dynamic (e.g., Antaki, 1998; Bamberg, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Zimmermann (1998) also highlights the relationship between identity and context by regarding identity as "an element of context for talk-in-interaction" (p. 87). In other words, identity should be regarded as a part of the context, and it can be practiced and observed in conversational interactions. Similar to identity research in general, LTIs are also not context-free but crucially contextualized (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Barkhuizen, 2016; Duff & Uchida, 1997). However, standing out from identity research in general, the specialty of LTI research, as pointed out by Duff and Uchida (1997), lies in contextual elements that are constantly negotiated with language teachers, such as "classroom/institutional culture, instructional materials, and reactions from students and colleagues" (p. 460).

Barkhuizen (2017) theorizes LTIs as "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" (p. 4). Based on Barkhuizen (2017)'s theory, LTIs are (1) performed rather than possessed by language teachers (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Watson, 2007; Zhang & Jensen, 2013), (2) could be but are not always limited to the "here-and-now" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 6), and (3) are capable of being narrated through language teachers making sense of their own experiences (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Leigh, 2019; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013).

LTIs in Relation to Performance, Emotion, Belief and Narration

First, teachers perform being teachers rather than possess their identities as objects. It is normal for language teachers like me to make detailed lesson plans before teaching. We actively design our behaviors, gestures, and even what to say during the class. We "perform" being teachers based on our "beliefs and theories of and about teaching [and] are guided by [our] previous experience and identities as a learner and as a teacher" (Mok, 1994, p. 109). However, situations in the classroom do not always follow our imagination, thus our performative displays are always "dialogic and negotiated, suggesting possibilities rather than certainties" (Morgan, 2017, p. 206), since language teachers actively choose to "enact different aspects of who they are as teachers in different discursive encounters" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 7). Mok (1994) studied the written reflections (journals and practicum reports) of 12 ESL teachers, including experienced and inexperienced ones. Thus, to summarize, how teachers perform being teachers at a given moment is affected and determined by their assumptions and beliefs about what teachers should be. In addition, their viewpoints, assumptions, and beliefs constantly shape and are being shaped by their choices to perform.

Second, LTIs are strongly influenced by teachers' emotion and belief. They are constantly "negotiated and [language teachers] construct different changeable identities in the process of interacting with others and with things in different contextual spaces" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 8). Namely, LTIs are affected by teachers' feelings about "what is going on" between their inner

thoughts and their surrounding materials and environments. When I teach in a real class, I always encounter something that I didn't predict, such as emergencies, students violating academic integrities, or just simple unexpected questions from students. These unpredicted situations could also affect my teaching emotionally at the exact moment. Therefore, LTIs are affected by teachers' feelings, which are related to both inside teachers themselves and outside in the surrounding world (Barkhuizen, 2017). Additionally, teachers generally have their own ideas "of what excellence in teaching means and what their imagined self as a mature, fully-developed teacher would look like" (Richards, 2017, p. 142), with these future-oriented "possible selves" also affecting LTIs and playing central roles in guiding language teachers' actions (Kubanyiova, 2017). Exemplified, it's similar to a question that I ask myself frequently – "What kind of language teacher do I want to become?" Of course, this kind of teacher could be an imagined one that possesses important characteristics of a "good teacher". However, for me, the "possible self" is a real person that I want to learn from: the chair of my PhD dissertation committee. I would like to be a teacher like her: knowledgeable, passionate about teaching and doing research, and always patient with students. This belief of a "possible self" also acts as a guide for my choices and practices in the present context. Thus, LTIs are a form of imagining, and it is important to explore "the language teacher's hopes and desires for the future, and their imagined identities" (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2017).

Third, LTIs are storying because "being a language teacher is an ongoing, narrated process" which integrates one's "experiences in the past and present, as well as those anticipated in the future" (Block, 2017, p. 34). Through narration, language teachers are able to make sense of, and then reshape, their experiences. Aiming to underscore the significance of narrative research for understanding LTIs, Hayes (2017) presented his narrative data collected in Sri Lanka and Thailand, concluding that LTIs should not be "solely bound up with expertise in the language and proficiency in teaching methods" (p. 56), since teachers have their own concerns and preoccupations. Hence "teachers exercise their own agency" and "have their own strongly held views of themselves as teachers" (Hayes, 2017, p. 57). As a Japanese language teacher, I usually choose to show my professional side in my Japanese classes. However, since almost none of my students are from Japan, I sometimes intentionally choose to tell stories about me, as a foreigner, encountering some difficulties or experiencing some embarrassments when I was living in Japan. I want my students to know that I understand them and their feelings by telling those stories. Through these narrations, I also make sense of an aspect of my LTIs as a non-native Japanese language teacher.

LTIs Are Historical, Contemporary, and Future-Oriented

Moreover, LTIs are historical, contemporary, and future-oriented (Block, 2017; Norton, 2017; Oda, 2017). As noted previously, Block (2017) regards LTIs as bringing "together experiences in the past and present, as well as those anticipated in the future" (p. 34). Oda (2017) also suggests that LTIs are teachers' perceptions of what resources they have "accumulated through past experiences inside and outside the classroom in order to respond by taking action in teaching at the present time and in the future" (p. 225). In other words, LTIs are determined by what language teachers have experienced previously, are influenced by teachers' feelings about "what is going on" currently, and are guided by teachers' beliefs about "who I want to be" in the future. In addition, LTIs are related to both teachers' inner thoughts and feelings, as well as the surrounding world. Moreover, the

negotiation between individual and social/cultural dimensions constantly happens (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Tsui, 2007; Xu, 2017). Therefore, given the continuous negotiation process, LTIs are widely viewed as dynamic, relational, multiple, and constructed (Barkhuizen 2016; Ennser-Kananen & Wang, 2016; Hadfield, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Mercer, 2017).

My Understanding of Language Teacher Identities

Although Varghese, et. al (2005) proposed that LTIs could be analyzed through two notions of "identity-in-discourse" and "identity-in-practice" (p. 39), it is still unclear how the line should be drawn. As demonstrated, identities are fluid and dynamic, and it is completely reasonable to regard languages or narratives in particular contexts as consequences of language teachers' practices. As Kanno and Stuart (2011) point out, discursively constructed identities could be viewed as part of the identities-in-practice, as "discursively constructed identities are verbal expressions of the ongoing mutual relationship between the self and the practice of a teacher" (p. 240). As Bamberg (2006) suggests that language use could also be regarded as an action, especially in the "contexts in which narratives take place" (p. 139), language teachers' utilization of language and narratives could also be regarded as practices instead of considering their narrations or stories strictly and merely within the notion of discourse. In this sense, teachers' narratives and interactions with their peers and colleagues in professional settings (conferences, instructors' weekly meetings, etc.) could be reasonably regarded as practices. With complicated identities such as being a female, a Chinese, a wife, a daughter, a Japanese learner, a Japanese language teacher, a PhD candidate and a researcher, it is impossible for me to present all my identities at one single moment. To my supervisors, I am a graduate student who is working on my dissertation; to the ETD editorial board, I am an associate editor and a Japanese linguistic researcher; to my students, I am a Japanese instructor. I actively choose to present some of my identities over others in various contexts.

Thus, in light of the complexities of LTIs, I view LTIs as a dynamic, fluid, and negotiated entity with features of "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 4) and as discursively constructed through historical, contemporary, and future-oriented perspectives within changing contexts.

Conclusion

This article reviewed studies of identity in general and the development process of identity research in the field of L2 teaching from the poststructural perspective. Based upon integrating the existing scholarly literature with my personal experiences, especially Barkhuizen's (2017) notions of LTIs as "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" (p. 4), I understand LTIs as dynamic, fluid, negotiated, and discursively constructed, all of which are determined by past experiences, affected contemporarily by momentary feelings, and guided by future-oriented beliefs within changing contexts.

By linking my teaching practices with my understanding of LTIs, I have gradually built several pictures about "how I came to this point", "who I am now" and "whom I want to become in the future" over the past few years. This has helped me in terms of not only classroom practices and pedagogical choices inside the classroom but also in my interaction and communication with my colleagues and students outside of the classroom. Through this literature review article, I hope to have emphasized the significance of LTI research, as well as to have demonstrated the importance of language teachers' self-recognition for better language education.

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About the Author
Junyuan Chen is a PhD candidate at the University of Arizona, with focuses on Japanese linguistics and Second Language Acquisition & Teaching. Her current research interests include Japanese sociolinguistics and foreign language teaching, especially language teacher identities.