

**CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN
LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TAIWAN:
AN INTRODUCTION**

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In the last two decades, the importance of identity research has been recognized in Applied Linguistics, TESOL and SLA. More specifically, identity has been investigated in response to globalization. For instance, the 2016 special issue of *TESOL Quarterly* features “Language Teacher Identity in (Multi)lingual Educational Contexts” (Varghese, Motha, Park, Reeves, & Trent), and De Costa and Norton (2017) highlight a transdisciplinary approach to language teacher identity in a recent special issue of *The Modern Language Journal*. Indeed, identity has become a significant research area in the globalized age.

Globalization has diversified student and teacher populations and presented challenges for language learners as well as teachers. In the globalized world, the salience of identity-based education has been underscored for social justice and equity (cf. De Costa & Norton, 2017; Varghese et al., 2016); that is, language practice should recognize the multi-faceted lives of language learners and teachers and thus maximize their identity options, thereby increasing learner and teacher agency. Concepts concerned with privileges, access to resources, nativeness, investment, conflicts, agency, and power have been widely discussed in relation to identity categories (e.g., race, gender, social, and class). Such discussions propel theoretical and methodological advancement.

It is against this bedrock that this special issue seeks to understand how language teachers and learners in Taiwan construct their identities to better facilitate language education in our changing times. The four research articles herein support identity-based language education by unpacking the English-learning/teaching histories and stories of Taiwanese English teachers, preservice teachers, and learners, underscoring the significance of agency in identity (re-)construction.

“Taiwan-educated Teachers of English: Their Linguistic Capital, Agency, and Perspectives on Their Identities as Legitimate English

Language Teachers” illustrates the interrelation of capital, agency, and contexts and the complexity of self-positioning as legitimate NNESTs through a qualitative case study of two Taiwan-educated university instructors in Taiwan. Teacher agency is shown when these teachers claim English-teaching legitimacy through acquiring respected linguistic capital and transforming these experiences into pedagogical resources. As such, a strength-based approach to language teacher education is proposed for NNESTs to capitalize on teachers’ assets and increase their resources.

“Exploring Taiwanese Preservice EFL Teachers’ Identity Construction in the Context of Service-Learning: Conflicts and Negotiations” exemplifies the tensions and reconciliation attempts of eight Taiwanese preservice teachers exploring identity construction when they collaborated with American students to teach English in primary school in Taiwan. Drawing on identity-in-discourse and identity-in-practice, this qualitative case study shows that preservice teachers experienced and gradually resolved identity conflicts by recontextualizing, dichotomizing, and critically examining the discourses associated with American culture and Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC). Participation in this service-learning project widened identity options available for preservice teachers and helped them understand how to bridge the gap between the ideal and the real.

“From EAP to ESP: A Teacher’s Identity Development” unearths the identity formation of an ESP teacher in Taiwan and elucidates the identity options unique to ESP teaching or seemingly similar to EAP teaching. Drawing on reflection, learning and teaching journals, face-to-face meetings, and interviews, this inquiry explores the becoming process of an EAP teacher, Rachel, who offered Engineering English to in-service engineers at a company in Taiwan. As the article illustrates, this process is full of identity conflicts and reconciliation. Rachel has to make sense of her ESP teaching by being a learner, a collaborator, a multi-tasker, and a problem-solver. Among these identities, the first three require the most reconciliation. This research underscores the importance of raising EAP teachers’ awareness of the teaching challenges resulting from identity conflicts in ESP teaching.

“Imagined Identities and Investment in L2 Learning: A Case Study of Three English Learners” uncovers the English-learning histories of three EFL learners in Taiwan, highlights the primacy of extending imagined identity options, and cautions against the negative impact of an

imagined community on investment. This qualitative case study illuminates how these students' choices of investment may be guided by imagined identities shaped by social and personal factors in different learning stages. In particular, the wider the range of imagined identities students construct, the more varied the investments students make. This research also cautions that imagined identities may have negative impacts, given that learner resistance may reduce English-learning investment. Thus, future language education may benefit from unpacking students' English-learning lives to widen their imagined identities in a positive fashion.

Understanding identity construction in language education provides opportunities to acknowledge the voices of all the stakeholders and critically examine the identity options (un)available. This special issue thus invites readers to rethink language education in Taiwan as we explore the core of who we were, are, and will become by (re)imagining identity-based language education.

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