IDENTITY: CONCEPT, FEATURES AND TYPES

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ABSTRACT: Identity has interrelationships with language. It is also interrelated to the concepts of teacher identity, language teacher professional identity, which are the topics of many recent studies for their contribution to teaching language. This article is a small literature review on identity. After collecting and exploring materials consisting of books, articles, theses, among which about thirteen materials were chosen as the main references to analyze, the article summarizes and interprets the ways identity is defined, its features and classification. Hopefully, this article can provide a theoretical base for doing research on identity, teacher identity, language teacher professional identity, the interrelationships between language and identities and other related issues.

Keywords: *identity, language and identities, teacher identity, language teacher professional identity ...*

DANH TÍNH: KHÁI NIỆM, ĐẶC ĐIỂM VÀ PHÂN LOẠI

TÓM TẮT: Danh tính có mối quan hệ tương quan với ngôn ngữ. Đồng thời, khái niệm này cũng liên quan chặt chẽ tới các nghiên cứu về danh tính giáo viên, danh tính nghề nghiệp của giáo viên giảng dạy ngôn ngữ. Đó là những vấn đề nghiên cứu có đóng góp rất giá trị cho công việc giảng dạy ngôn ngữ. Bài viết này là một phần khảo cứu về danh tính. Sau khi thu thập và tìm hiểu khối lượng lớn tài liệu bao gồm sách, báo, luận văn, luận án…, 13 tài liệu được chọn là tài liệu chính để phân tích, bài báo đã tổng kết và luận giải các cách định nghĩa danh tính, các đặc điểm và cách phân loại của danh tính. Tác giả hi vọng rằng bài báo có thể giúp cung cấp cơ sở lí thuyết cho các nghiên cứu về danh tính, mối quan hệ giữa ngôn ngữ và danh tính, danh tính giáo viên, danh tính nghề nghiệp của giáo viên dạy ngôn ngữ và các nghiên cứu liên quan khác.

Từ khóa: *Danh tính, ngôn ngữ và danh tính, danh tính giáo viên, danh tính nghề nghiệp giáo viên dạy ngôn ngữ…*

I. INTRODUCTION

Identity and language interrelates closely. The language we use forms an important part of our sense of who we are - of our identity. Edwards J. (2009) outlined the relationship between our identity as members of groups - ethnic, national, religious and gender - and the language varieties important to each group. On the other hand, identity is also an important concept to understand teacher professional identity which stands at the core of the teaching profession. Teacher professional identity provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society. Therefore,

exploring identity is helpful for researching teacher professional identity and language teacher professional identity which is important in teaching languages as well as English. Through collecting materials, summarizing and analyzing the concepts, features and classification of identity, this article will present a number of results which will be in part II: Content.

II. CONTENT

1. Identity

There have been a trend in researching identity, teacher professional identity and language teacher professional identity recently. Many works have mentioned these topics though defining the concept has often proved difficult for authors. The concept of identity have been defined and used differently in the works.

Mentioning identity, Danielewicz (2001) defines: "Identity is our understanding of who we are and of who we think other people are. Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people's understanding of themselves and others (which includes us)." She wrote: "Theoretically, the concept of identity involves two notions: similarity and difference. So identities are the ways we relate to and distinguish individuals (and groups) in their social relations with other individuals or groups." According to this author, identities can never be unified or fixed; they are always in flux, always multiple and continually under construction and every person is composed of multiple, often conflicting, identities, which exist in volatile states of construction or reconstruction, reformation or erosion, addition or expansion. Besides, she wrote that no matter what the context, we are continually engaged in becoming something or someone. She also confirmed the role of discourse in the development of identities: "Individuals are constituted subjects; their identities are produced through participation in discourse. As active participants in a variety of discourses, individuals have agency to shape selves. On the other hand, discourses (and all other participating individuals) affect the development of those identities."

Beijaard (1995) also gives a definition of identity: "In general the concept identity refers to: who or what someone is, the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others." He quoted opinions of the relationship between people's feeling and reactions to changes affecting identity: "people feel themselves threatened when they are facing changes which influence their self-image and, consequently, their personal identity. To cope with such changes people often develop (situation-specific) strategies as a protection against being forced to perceive themselves in another way. Nonetheless, people are able to further develop, adjust or even radically change their self-image" (Nias, 1989); "Teachers are no exceptions to this rule (Kelchtermans, 1993, p. 84)."

Beijaard (2003) explains several authors' definitions of identity used in the social sciences and philosophy. The psychologist Erikson (1968)'s one focused on identity formation in social contexts and on the stages people pass through: owing to biological and psychological maturation, each stage has its own characteristics regarding the individual's interaction with his or her environment. Erikson outlined a

chronological and changing concept of identity. Identity is not something one has, but something that develops during one's whole life. The symbolic interactionist Mead (1934) used the concept of identity in relationship with the concept of self; he described in detail how the self is developed through transactions with the environment. According to Mead, self can arise only in a social setting where there is social communication; in communicating we learn to assume the roles of others and monitor our actions accordingly. McCormick & Pressley (1997) supposed that our concept of self can be defined as an organized representation of our theories, attitudes, and beliefs about ourselves. Purkey (1970) mentioned that the world of the self may appear to the outsider to be subjective and hypothetical, but to the individual experiencing it, it has the feeling of absolute reality. According to Gee (2001), Identity development occurs in an intersubjective field and can be best characterized as an ongoing process, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context.

Beijaard (2003) confirmed that although the concept of identity has different meanings in the literature, they share the common idea that identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon. And he drew a definition: identity can also be seen as an answer to the recurrent question: ''who am I at this moment?''

MacGregor (2013) quoted another definition by Erikson: "identity *the coherent picture one shows both to oneself and to the outside world* (Erikson 1980, cited in Schwartz 2001, p. 8)." Erikson postulated that this coherent picture represents who one is and that, through an Eriksonian framework, this picture can be delineated at three levels:

▪ *Ego identity – the most basic and fundamental beliefs about one's self, very private, possibly unconscious and internalised from parents. Erickson deemed this aspect of identity as consistent and resistant to change.*

▪ *Personal identity – the goals, values and beliefs one shows to the world. It is this aspect of identity that Erikson believed distinguished one person from another.*

▪ *Social identity – a sense of group identity, the consolidation of aspects that have been integrated into one's 'sense of self' from the group to which one belongs.*

(Erikson 1980, cited in Schwartz 2001, p. 10 and MacGregor 2013, p.13)

Discussing on Erikson's framework for identity, MacGregor (2013) pointed that central to definitions of identity at this time were the terms, 'the sense of self' and 'one's self-concept" and self was positioned in these definitions as a singular, unified and stable core (Erikson 1968, 1980). The notion of ego identity was viewed as something well-defined about oneself, fixed and unchanging, something inside of us *like the kernel of a nut* (Currie 1998, p. 20). It was argued in MacGregor (2013) that "all aspects of one's identity, including personal and social, change over time, through experiences and interaction with others". His study argued further that identity is in a constant state of formation and transformation in response to external factors and to internal dialogue as one asks

oneself, "Who am I?" and for the context of his research on teacher's professional identity, "Who do I want to be as a teacher?" and more specifically, "Am I able to be who I want to be in the role of teacher?"

Also mentioning the change in defining of identity, Clarke (2008) wrote: "Mansfield (2000) identifies a fundamental division between approaches, typically found in psychoanalytic theories, which view the self as a 'thing', and approaches in social and cultural theory that view the self as a 'construct' (see also du Gay et al., 2000)." Besides, Clarke (2008) mentioned the relationship between identity construction and discourses which can be described as 'a pattern of thinking, speaking, behaving, and interacting that is socially, culturally, and historically constructed and sanctioned by a specific group or groups of people' Miller Marsh (2003: 9): "post-structuralist perspectives on identity have pointed out that individuals do not autonomously construct their identities in a social, cultural and political vacuum; rather, sociocultural and sociopolitical discourses will determine what resources are available for use in the ongoing project of identity construction, just as the outcomes of this process, in terms of identities, will in turn shape the discursive patterns at work in different contexts (Burr, 1995; Butler, 2005; Hall & du Gay, 1997; Jenkins, 1996; Weedon, 1987).

Connelly and Clandinin (1987, 1999), Clandinin (1992, 1993, 2007) and Clandinin and Connelly (1996, 1998, 2000) suggested that our identities are the stories by which we live. Soreide (2006) wrote:

'When we meet other people we often tell them about our experiences, what interests us, what we like to do, what we have to do and who we like to be around. Narratives like this are what Somers and Gibson (1994) call ontological narratives. Ontological narratives are the stories we tell in an effort to make sense of how we experience ourselves and how we would like to be understood in order to bring structure to our personal lives. We use these narratives both to construct and to negotiate individual identity (Lieblich et al., 1998). In other words, when we tell and interpret ontological narratives we also construct one or several narrative identities.'

(Sreide 2006, p.529)

Connelly and Clandinin (1987, 1999), Clandinin and Connelly (1996, 1998, 2000), Bullough (2005), Soriede (2006), Clandinin (2007) and Cohen (2008) argued from the field of identity and narrative inquiry that it is the interconnectedness and intersection of our experiences, place and knowledge that merge to become identities in the sense of our narratives or stories by which we live. Bullough argued further that:

It is within intersection that personas (or situated identities) reveal themselves, are or are not reorganized by others, and are judged as fitting – contextually appropriate or inappropriate to the rules, duties and meanings of an established storyline.

(Bullough 2005, p. 240)

Holland et al. (1998, p. 3, cited in Sloan 2006, p. 125) argued further that*: people tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are.*

However, Zembylas (2003) argued that the analytical focus of such a view is based on the discourse of the experience rather than the experience itself. Thus, by exploring the language that one uses to share one's beliefs, experiences and opinions, aspects of one's identity become apparent. It can be argued further that the shaping of identity is also mediated through the telling of the story and to the feedback that one receives in relating the story. When stories are written, as is the case for the study that formed part of this thesis, the *narrative is frozen and becomes a thing, a statement captured in a specific moment of time* (Bullough 2005, p. 241).

Other definitions in Warren (2016) are: "Epstein views identity as a 'person's interests, roles, attitudes and value orientations, which need to be integrated and which change in their degree of importance, depending on context and importance" (Mário Franco and Paulo Tavares, 2013); "identity can be defined as the way individuals build and maintain a sense of themselves as distinct from others in their social environment" (Gignac, 2015).

Dictionary definitions of identity highlight some of the confusion about its meaning. For example, an online dictionary (Dictionary-Online, 2005) lists four meanings for identity: 1. The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitively recognizable or known 2. The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group 3. The quality or condition of being the same as something else 4. The distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality (Dictionary-Online, 2005). Basing on these meanings, Overton (2006) drew the preferred definition of identity for his study: -The collective aspect of the set of behavioral and personal characteristics which identify a person as a distinct individual.

Briefly, there are two most prominent definitions of identity. The first one is the self. The second one is who or what someone is, the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others.

1.2. Features of Identity

1.2.1 Identity is a relational phenomenon

Identity is shown to be related to a number of factors such as recognition of sameness and difference between ourselves and others; progresses through life; past and current experiences, social influences and interactions, coupled with an understanding of one's self through reflection; social interaction with both the familiar and unfamiliar; what they do, communities of practice. This relational feature of identity formation can be seen in the researchers' points of view cited in MacGregor (2013, p.14). Identity is relational, to do with recognition of sameness and difference between ourselves and others (Gee 2001; Soreide 2006; Watson 2006; Cohen 2008). Identity is not viewed as something that is fixed or unchanging. It is not a product that one possesses, but is shaped as one progresses through life (Erikson 1968). Identity only has meaning within a chain of relationships; there is no fixed point of reference for an identity (Foucault, 1990). Foucault (1990, p. 26) termed this *the arts of self* as he referred

to identity as a work of art where one consciously or unconsciously constructs one's self into who one wants to be through past and current experiences, social influences and interactions, coupled with an understanding of one's self through reflection. Identity is produced as a lived experience of participation within specific communities, through engagement with members of that community, acquiring competence in it, taking on its perspectives and aligning oneself with it (Wenger 1998).

MacGregor (2013) showed the direct association between the relational natures of identity formation is the concept of symbolic interactionism (O'Connor & Scanlon 2005; Cohen 2008):

'Symbolic interactionism is based on an assertion that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world. The concept is also underpinned by the belief that one has multiple selves and that one's self perception is shaped and developed through social interaction with both the familiar and unfamiliar. The result is that one may act and react differently in and within different social and professional situations. As Murphy stated *we are inevitably multiple selves depending on a range and variety of contexts we inhabit, each of which calls for a different self* (Murphy 1989, p. 116).'

MacGregor (2013) concluded that thus, it can be argued that individuals become who they are because of what they do. For instance, a teacher may adopt a teacher persona or situated identity that provides a sense of affiliation or sameness.

The transitional nature of identity and its direct association with context and interaction within that context has been highlighted by the research in which Wenger (1998) argued that the individuals are members of multiple communities of practice, with each community contributing varying degrees of influence and significance at any given time. The perspectives that follow provide a picture of the dynamic nature of identity construction.

1.2.2 Identity is a dynamic process

Identity is recognized and agreed to be dynamic, not static. Watson's approach recognized that identity is ever changing in response to experiences and interaction with others. Watson (2006, p. 525) argued: *[i]t is our relationships to the world and other people, our choices, practices and language that constantly creates, constructs and reconstructs our identity.* Gee(2001) shared the view is that one should think about identity as an ongoing process of identification, a process of interpreting (and reinterpreting) oneself as a certain kind of person in a given context. Wenger (1998) supposed that the work of identity is viewed as always ongoing, something that we constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives.

Wenger (1998) argued that our identities form *trajectories* as one goes through experiences and interactions with others. He discussed on *trajectories*:

Trajectories suggest not a path that can be foreseen or charted but a continuous motion – one that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. As trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the process of negotiating the present.

(Wenger 1998, pp. 154-155, MacGregor 2013, p.15)

There are various types of trajectories postulated by Wenger including:

- Peripheral trajectories: trajectories that do not lead to full participation within a community but become significant enough to contribute to one's identity
- Inbound trajectories: where newcomers are joining a community with the prospect of becoming full-time participants in its practices, for example, participants in this study as they transition in the contexts of schools as beginning teachers
- Insider trajectories: where new experiences, events and interactions create occasions for recreating and/or reinterpreting one's identity, for example, when beginning teachers assume a new responsibility in their school
- Boundary trajectories: where value is found in spanning boundaries. However, Wenger warned that sustaining an identity across boundaries is challenging
- Outbound trajectories; where one leaves a community, for example, the university that has contributed to how one will deal with what comes next. In leaving the community, one begins to see the world and oneself in new ways.

(Wenger 1998, pp. 154-155 cited in MacGregor 2013)

1.2.3 Identity is a multifaceted phenomenon

According to Gee (2001) and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), identity is multifaceted in that it changes over time and through the influences of a range of internal factors such as emotion (Zembylas 2003) and external factors on the individual, such as life experiences (Sachs 2005; Flores & Day 2006).

Gee (2001) recognized identity as a kind of person within a particular context and identified four perspectives through which identity may be constructed. They are:

Nature – identity (developed from one's natural state)

Institution – identity (derived from a position recognized by authority)

Discourse – identity (resulting from the dialogue of others about oneself)

Affinity – identity (determined by one's practices in relation to external groups).

(Gee (2001) cited in MacGregor (2013))

Gee's emphasized that the four perspectives are not separate from each other but rather interrelate and connect in complex ways.

Both Wenger (1998) and Gee (2001) agreed on the multifaceted nature of identity in that it involves multiplicity and fluidity in and across contexts. Wenger (1998) defined identity formation as a dual process, involving both identification and negotiability within a community of practice. According to Wenger (1998, p. 197), negotiability allows us: *[t]o make meanings applicable to new circumstances, to enlist the collaboration of others, and to make sense of events or assert our membership.* Gee further argued:

The kind of person one is recognized as being at any given time and place can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable.

(Gee 2001, p. 99)

2.4. Types of Identity

There have been different ways to classify identity. Below are three types of identity from the work by Kirby (2015):

Personal identity: Nias (1985) discusses the 'I' which she suggests people are intuitively aware of and is linked to a deep sense of personal identity, and as Woods (1985) notes, 'personal identity' is the image one has of oneself. It is considered as salient but also one that will become stable for a period of time(Serpe, 1987; Serpe and Stryker, 1987), and will vary from one individual to the next as Southworth (1995:167) states that identity is 'not entirely impervious to change'.

Role identity: The reflexive nature of our identity is illuminated once again while we act out a role altering others' perceptions of us (Joas, 1983). There is an identity for all roles we have to play especially in institutional domains (Turner, 2010:43). The concept of role identities can be linked with teachers' professional identities.

Core identity: might be considered salient, more protected and shielded from others compared to role identities. Individuals are thus presenting the mask (Woods, 1985) rather than what completely lies underneath the mask. The narratives Kirby (2015) collected from his sample were regarded as the teachers' role identities, with the knowledge that personal, core identities may emerge at points during their narratives. There are researchers who have adopted the term 'core identity', such as Merchant (2006) who discusses the existence of a 'transient' and 'anchored' identity. He describes a continuum where individuals' self-representations move along. However, along that continuum are aspects of one's identity that will remain 'anchored'. 'Core' identity has also been referred to as 'unique' or a 'personal' identity described by Hewitt (1994), Schopflin (2001) and Hitlin (2003). Cahill (1998) alluded to a public self and a selfhood (core self), but argued that the unique self is in fact 'made in the image of the public person'. Therefore, understanding the context that the public self is in is necessary in order to define one's core identity. It is the core identity, the part that needs continuity and stability, which adapts to contemporary conditions in order to prosper (Adler and Adler, 1999). This requires maintaining an understanding of self. In that respect, the individual does hold control (agency) over their identities (Turner, 2010)

III. CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the above analysis, the concept of identity has often proved difficult for authors to define. Identity has been understood and used with different meanings. Nevertheless, generally, the self and who or what someone is, the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others are the two most prominent meanings and most widely used. Identity is relational, dynamic and multifaceted. It can be classified into personal identity, role identity and core identity. The matter of defining identity, the feature and classification of it are very important and need clarifying in studies on identity and the related issues to avoid misunderstanding. Hopefully, the article is useful for audience concerning and doing research on identity, teacher identity or language teacher identity. Shortcomings are unavoidable, the writer is grateful for all comments and suggestions to improve the article.

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