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Language Teachers on Study Abroad: A Discourse Analytic Approach to Teacher Identity

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Abstract

This paper examines how normative assumptions about language teacher identity and cultural belonging can work to construct an intercultural identity that problematizes language ideologies of standardization, monolingualism, and linguistic and cultural purism. The data are drawn from a larger study investigating the professional identity construction of a cohort of Canadian French-second-language teachers who participated in a professional development sojourn in France. The analysis presented here centers on one teacher's (re)conceptualization of French culture, which both highlights and subverts prevailing Eurocentric discourses in French-second-language education and of particular prominence in study abroad contexts. The teacher's semi-structured interview accounts are approached from a participant-relevant perspective as discursive action that serves to display a particular identity as French language teacher. The use of membership categorization analysis is especially productive in attending to how identity categories associated with discourses of authentic Frenchness are drawn on to construct a French teacher identity that challenges taken-for-granted conceptions of culture in intercultural encounters abroad.

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1. Introduction

The current COVID-19 pandemic has made excruciatingly visible the existing inequalities in our societies alongside increasingly explicit expressions of Anti-Asian, Anti-Black, and Anti-Indigenous racism with a devastating impact on racialized, marginalized and minoritized groups (Dervin, Chen, Yuan, & Jacobsson, 2020). These forms of discrimination are not new; they are deeply entrenched systemic processes that often form an invisible part of our personal and professional spheres of daily interaction (Dick and Wirtz, 2011). In North America, these processes of exclusion can manifest through various types of linguistic ideologies, often articulated in discourses of standardization that circulate within second language (L2) education contexts and impact those who do not fit the Eurocentric notion of a white, middle class, monolingual native speaker (Rosa, 2016). For L2 teachers, many of whom teach a language they themselves have learned as an additional language (Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006; Lurda, 2004), the persisting emphasis on monoglossic conceptions of second language teaching and learning means having to negotiate a legitimate teacher identity in their professional contexts because, as so-called non-native speakers, this identity often conflicts with normative assumptions about who can teach “real” language and culture (Wernicke, 2017, 2020).

Ideologies of standardization are particularly salient in study abroad settings where authentic language and culture are often taken for granted and where intercultural encounters play a crucial role in how teachers might align with or resist these ideological assumptions. Despite the emphasis on study abroad as part of teacher education, researchers are aware that such experiences can also reinforce ethnocentric attitudes and negative prejudices among participants (Obenchain, Oudghiri & Phillion, 2020; Pennington, 2020). Within the context of language education, such attitudes can manifest in the form of linguistic purism and essentialist notions of culture. Silverstein has noted that “a culture of monoglot standardization” can become visible by attending to the way this ideal “lies behind, or is presupposed by, the way people understand sociolinguistic behaviour to be an enactment of a collective [‘natural’] order” (1996, p. 285). Important here is that

cultures of “monoglot standardization” do not merely promote a single language, but rather serve to construct “an investment in the value associated with particular standardized varieties of a given language” (Dick and Wirtz, 2011, p. 165). Among qualitative studies examining L2 teachers’ experiences on study abroad, only few have investigated these forms of exclusionary processes and the ideologies which underlie L2 teacher identity construction. For the most part, the focus of these studies has been on participants’ intercultural learning in the form of newly acquired knowledge, both pedagogical or with regard to their language proficiency, at times in relation to teachers’ instructional practices (e.g., Çiftçi & Karaman, 2019; Jochum, Rawlings, & Tejada, 2017; Roskvist, Harvey, Corder, & Stacey, 2013; Zhao & Macaro, 2014). Furthermore, teachers tend to be considered only as learners without particular attention to the expertise and the multiple identities they bring to their learning experiences abroad (e.g., Pray & Marx, 2010). Exceptions include Trent, 2011, and recent research that centers on building teacher critical awareness (Baecher & Chung, 2020; Pennington, 2020). Perhaps most important is the methodological approach researchers choose in designing their studies and interpreting data. Responding to the above-mentioned research foci, participants’ narratives and accounts are typically analysed as direct reflections of what they experienced or perceive (e.g., Hauerwas, Skawinski, & Ryan, 2017; Ortaçtepe, 2015), without consideration of the processes of meaning-making in play or how these experiences or perceptions have been constructed in interaction with others, including the researcher (Wernicke & Talmy, 2018). This analytic approach can render invisible or fail to explain the tensions documented in study abroad research with teachers (e.g., Allen, 2010; Plews, Breckenridge, & Cambre, 2010) as participants encounter marginalizing discourses that position them in particular ways. In other words, failing to understand the way hegemonic discourses of linguistic standardization and authentic culture work to constrain teachers’ identities as legitimate users of the languages they use and teach makes it likely that these same assumptions will be reproduced in the classroom, potentially leading to the devaluing of multilingual students’ identities in similar ways (Putman, 2017).

It is for this reason that I have chosen a discourse analytic perspective to examine how L2 teachers make sense of the identity-categories they encounter vis-à-vis the languages they teach. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how such a perspective can provide significant insights on L2 teacher identity by moving beyond participants' reported reflections to focus on identity as a discursive process. Specifically, the analysis here highlights how one teacher mobilized a more critical understanding of interculturality to construct an identity as "French language teacher" that circumnavigates the tensions of a learner/teacher identity grounded in ideologies of standardization. The data are drawn from a qualitative study that investigated the professional identity construction of a cohort of French-as-a-second-language (FSL) teachers from Canada who participated in a 2-week professional development sojourn in France. The study's research focus was on understanding the ways in which the sojourn brought to light teachers' understandings of what counts as authentic French and their use of conceptions of authentic language and culture to construct an identity as legitimate FSL teacher. The research narratives analyzed below were generated by one particular participant whose identity displays differed significantly from those of other teachers in the study in that they showed a reconceptualization that not only made visible but called into question prevailing views of authentic Frenchness.

The paper begins with a discussion of how interculturality is conceptualized in relation to discourse and then offers a brief overview of membership categorization analysis (MCA) and its application here to investigate how this particular teacher produced and interpreted situationally-relevant descriptions of people, events, and other social phenomena in terms of social categories. The analysis itself focuses on two extracts of interaction to show how interculturality is both recognizable and useable as a resource in interview interactions. A discussion of main findings and implications is integrated directly into the analysis of each extract. The concluding section attends to the merits and challenges of a discourse analytic approach, the potential limitations of MCA, as well as its value in taking account researcher reflexivity.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Understanding Interculturality as Discourse

In the field of language education, intercultural competence has been defined in many ways, from specific kinds of knowledge or *savoirs* (Byram, 1997), to a model of desired behaviour and communicative skills (Deardorff, 2011), to an unstable process of negotiating cultural understanding (Dervin, 2016). In this paper, interculturality draws on a conception of culture as social practice (Dasli & Diaz, 2017), a situated process of constructing experience in the social world in interaction with others that engages meanings that are "fragmented, contradictory, and contested" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 21). From this perspective, interculturality is seen as an action rather than as a product or a tangible outcome. Cultures are the "resources that individuals draw on to construct sustained courses of action and to develop new courses of action in response to changed circumstances – they do not determine practice, they allow for it to happen" (p. 21). As Shi-xu (2001) reminds us, "language and communication are a joint social activity that is embedded in broader cultural and historical and by implication unequal power context" (p. 280). Instead of locating intercultural understanding purely within the individual, a discourse-centered approach makes salient the interactional dimension of meaning-making, that is, the socially constructed process of interculturality and thereby the discourses and ideologies individuals draw on as part of this meaning-making process.

2.2. Using Membership Categorization to Analyze Culture-in-Action

Understanding intercultural understanding as jointly constructed and negotiated social action aligns well with the conversation-analytic approach of membership categorization and its focus on analyzing "culture in action" (Baker, 2000; Hester & Eglin, 1997). Membership categorization analysis examines how individuals routinely describe, use, and organize social relations and activities in everyday social interaction (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015). It provides a way of analyzing how people make sense of the world by considering how descriptions are occasioned

and recognized in connection with people and events (Hester & Eglin, 1997) – for instance, how someone talking about French language teaching resources or participating in francophone activities may allow us to recognize that person as a French language teacher. Particularly relevant to the present discussion is that membership categorization offers “analysis that puts culture inside action, rather than action inside culture, already preconstituted” (Baker, 2000, p. 99). It provides insight into cultural understandings and practices that infuse people’s daily interactions, instead of opting for a static notion of culture associated *a priori* with a given social group or behaviour.

While conversation analysis focuses on the sequential organization of talk, the primary interest in MCA has been on categorial issues (e.g., identity, ethnicity, linguistic affiliation) relevant to members’ understandings (Stokoe, 2012). It aligns with the discursive psychology tradition (Potter & Hepburn, 2008) which sees participants’ accounts approached from a participant-relevant perspective as discursive phenomena that construct, rather than reflect, people’s beliefs and attitudes. Analysis of the stories examined here thus takes into account these categorial issues by examining prevailing cultural beliefs and values made relevant in the research interaction as these are orientated to by the participants themselves.

An important “sense-making” resource in MCA are the social categories, or *membership categories*, that people locally deploy to describe or explain themselves or others (either explicitly or implicitly). These categories are *inference rich* in that “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of these categories” (Sacks, 1992, pp. 40-41). This common-sense knowledge is made evident in what are called *category-bound activities* or *predicates*. These are the qualities, obligations, attitudes, or expectations that members of a particular social group associate with a particular category in a given interaction. For example, giving an explanation about communicative language teaching or discussing a preferred means of assessing students’ language proficiency are predicates that get tied to and thus produce the membership category of a French language

teacher. It is important to note that the perceived association between categories and predicates does not exist independently of an interaction. The association “is achieved and is to be found in the local specifics of categorization as an activity” (Hester & Eglin, 1997, p. 46).

The ability to recognize a particular category in association with a category predicate relies on a third analytic resource called *membership categorization devices* (MCDs). These are locally generated inferential frameworks that allow the hearer or reader to interpret a certain category in terms of other, related categories. These situated collections of categories in use “are understandable according to their belonging to a collection of words that ‘go together’” and, in this sense, define the context of the interaction (Lepper, 2000, p. 16). In the case discussed here, the categories “French teacher” or “professional sojourner” can be heard as belonging to the MCD “French teacher on professional development abroad.”

Most importantly, MCA allows us to “interrogate” the means by which people make sense of reality. Membership categories “lock discourses into place, and are therefore ready for opening to critical examination” (Baker, 2000, p. 99). In the present study, these include postcolonial discourses and positionings (Andreotti, 2011) that produce, reshape, and articulate daily interactions with language and culture, and are infused with language ideologies, cultural stereotypes, and essentialist conceptions of intercultural encounters that bring to light the hierarchization of language varieties, its speakers, and notions of cultural belonging that underpin the valuing of one type of language/culture/speaker over another. The privileging of French from France over Canadian French varieties by some of the study’s participants, for example, highlights the continuing Eurocentric emphasis in French language education in Canada (Wernicke, 2016).

In the study reported here, the interest was in the kinds of categories participants were deploying as they talked about their experiences in France as teachers, the category under which they had both applied to the sojourn, and subsequently been recruited to the study. In the analysis below, the focus is specifically on the

categorial work in relation to cultural identity – the way culture gets talked about and is occasioned with reference to a European variety of French, and in this way mobilized as a resource during the interview interaction to construct a certain kind of identity as a French language teacher. Identity is thus examined as “something people in society do, achieve, negotiate, attribute things to and act upon as part of their daily lives” (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015, p. 3). As a participant-relevant method, MCA places members’ concerns at the centre of analysis and, in this way, offers a tractable means of investigating those concerns – not in terms of externally ascribed social identities but as interactionally constructed categories that provide insight into participants’ cultural understandings (Stokoe, 2012). Interculturality thus becomes the topic of analysis itself, based on how members orient to and make relevant ideas about culture and cultural identity and, from this analytic perspective, gives access to how people might conceive of culture differently to manage social reality and associated moral assumptions in their interactions in new ways. In the analysis below, we see an example of how teachers might be encouraged to reconsider what they understand to be “authentic” language and culture, which, in turn, may afford alternative identities as a French language teacher, ones that cease to be grounded in Eurocentric ideals of standardization, monolingualism, and linguistic purism.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Context and Data Production

The data analyzed here were generated as part of a two-phase multiple-case study that investigated the narrated experiences of 87 FSL teachers from Canada who participated in a two-week professional development and certification initiative for the DELF (*Diplôme d’études en langue française*) at a French language institute in Vichy, France. The project was a response to provincial curricular revisions and included an orientation to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The program also offered a selection of teaching workshops and language classes and provided participants with host family accommodation and a wide range of cultural excursions and local activities.

Participating teachers represented a range of French language programs in Western Canada, from the basic or core French program, to French immersion, and the more recent intensive French for middle school grades.

So as not to make the teachers’ admission to the sojourn program contingent on their participation in the research study, recruitment of participants took place after the cohorts’ arrival in France. Participants had the option of consenting to three levels of participation in the study: (1) In addition to completing pre- and post-questionnaires, (2) teachers were also invited to keep a travel journal while in France, and (3) upon their return to Canada, to consent to individual semi-structured interviews and classroom visits during the subsequent school year as focal participants. Data were generated both in France and during the subsequent school year in Canada using questionnaires, journals, field and classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and email correspondence. While the first phase of the study considered the entire cohort of teachers in France, the follow-up phase in Canada focused on seven focal teacher-participants. These teachers agreed to a more in-depth examination of their teaching practices in light of the sojourn to France through multiple interviews and, in four cases, classroom observations. Data analyzed below are drawn from the first semi-structured interview with one focal participant, named Sara (pseudonym), seven months after the sojourn to France.

3.1. The Participant

As noted earlier, in contrast to other focal participants, Sara offered a different set of identity displays in constructing a teacher identity during our interview interactions, drawing on her extensive educational background, particular professional experiences, and her non-conventional teaching context. She had worked as a core French teacher at the secondary level in a large city for over a decade at the time of the study, was one of the few participants with a master’s degree, and was both developing and teaching online courses in several languages for one of the local school boards. She had also been involved in ongoing curricular revisions taking place in the province at the time and, through this work, had acquired an advanced knowledge of the CEFR. The main

reason for centering on Sara's identity displays in this paper is that, aside from exemplifying a productive FSL teacher identity that moves beyond hegemonic discourses, the analysis makes evident the Eurocentric, colonial-based, and monocentric assumptions circulating in L2 educational contexts. These are the common-sense meanings that construct the standards and expectations of administrators, students, parents, and colleagues within educational settings, leaving little recourse to those who do not speak the language they teach as a first language or who do not fit the image of the authentic French teacher.

3.2. Interview Data and Analysis

The use of interviews in this study draws on a social practice approach which conceives of the interview as locally and collaboratively constructed in interaction, with interviewee(s) and interviewer considered as co-participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Talmy, 2011). As an interviewer, engaging participants in conversation by asking them questions during an interview not only makes evident identities oriented to by the participant, but necessarily involves the categorization of the interviewer (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). From this perspective, the role of the interviewer is "neither neutral nor indifferently supportive" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 72), but can be viewed as a valuable analytic resource in interpreting the data (Miller, 2011).

To demonstrate Sara's understanding of culture and her use of this conception to construct an identity as "intercultural" L2 teacher, the analysis presented below considers two extracts from our first interview, conducted seven months after the sojourn. The questions covered a range of topics about Sara's professional life as a teacher, focusing first on her own language learning experiences and educational trajectories before turning to the two-week training in France and her post-sojourn travels, as well as her teaching experiences in Canada and ongoing professional development. The audio-recorded interview data from the larger study were initially transcribed verbatim by taking into account several interactional features of speech (pauses, restarts, overlapping turns, etc.) following Jeffersonian conversation analytic conventions (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). A thematic discourse analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2006) was then applied to the data, which offers a constructionist perspective and therefore lends itself to examining "the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (p. 84). For this paper, a second selective thematic analysis was conducted to identify specific extracts of interest, which were re-transcribed to include relevant interactional features. As noted above, given the interactional and collaborative nature of the interview, the interview questions themselves mobilized various identities, including the category of French language teacher as well as related categories of L2 learner, non-francophone teacher, French language professional, and research participant. While recognizing that I myself, as researcher and interviewer, orientated to these categories as part of the research design and therefore contributed to their salience in the participant's interview accounts, the focus of the analysis was on how these categories were discursively produced and used as resources in the construction of teacher identity.

The interview with Sara was conducted in English, a preference on her part implicitly demonstrated at the beginning of our research interaction by way of our initial greeting and subsequent transition into the interview interaction. Our use of primarily English may possibly be seen as Sara foregrounding both my and her linguistic identities as both English-dominant and French L2 speakers. This language preference also aligns with the identity work discussed below, which shows Sara calling into question a monolingual stance of French-only to legitimize a professional identity as a French language teacher.

4. Results

In my analysis below, I move sequentially through each extract, focusing first on the identity categories and associated predicates before attending to the interactional work that supports this categorical work.

4.1. Extract 1 – "Reconceptualizing the French Teacher Category"

In this first extract, Sara talks about how she originally became interested in French during

her undergraduate studies. Shortly before, I had initiated the topic by asking her to elaborate on her educational background, following up on her responses with specific questions about the school and university programs in which she had learned French, and confirming the biographical information she had provided during the sojourn in the questionnaire. In her answers to me, Sara explained that she had intended to study English literature, had been invited into the French honours program, and

subsequently pursued a master's degree in French because she had "fallen in love" with French literature. Throughout this initial questioning, Sara made several attempts to point out that her main focus had always been on the literature, that learning the French language had merely happened along the way. The interaction below (Figure 1) begins with Sara bringing the focus back to the literature aspect of her university studies:

- 1 S: but um, what was I- I was- I studied French not so much because-
 2 you know- it was the literature that really intrigued me that's
 3 what got me into French [yeah
 4 M: [a::h](.)so not the speaking or the- it
 5 was a- (.)
 6 S: yeah it was just, the literature and I'm sure that you know- the
 7 language really- just the way the language kind of formed itself
 8 is why I got into it
 9 M: what is it about the literature? the existentialist- hehehe
 10 S: well that's wh- how I started it? um but I just- I don't know
 11 exactly I just loved 20th century literature and it was um in my
 12 fourth year of my BA I took the course on French-African
 13 literature
 14 M: uhuh
 15 S: and so with that I kind of connected with my own cultural
 16 background because like you know my parents came from a
 17 colonized country as well so, I saw [some identi]fication there
 18 M: [ri::ght]
 19 M: ri[ght
 20 S: [yeah
 21 M: yeah because there is a- that cultural connection that-
 22 especially through the literature [I find that-] that [uh]
 23 S: [yeah yeah] [but] it's
 24 not that I had- like even now I still don't have that passion
 25 for- like all of these French activities are going on downtown,
 26 I'm not dying to [go there right
 27 M: [heh heh heh
 28 S: I mean I've- might be more excited to- if there were some
 29 Spanish- cuz I also taught Spanish
 30 M: oh okay=
 31 S: =but that doesn't excite me, like the French music world or
 32 anything like that
 33 M: why do you think?
 34 (1.7)
 35 S: I don't know.
 36 M: huh (.) interesting.

Figure 1

Extract 1 (interview#1, 4:48-6:18): "I'm not dying to go there"

In the first 20 lines of this interaction, Sara explains that her decision to study French was due to her love of 20th Century literature (line 11), which led her to concentrate on the literary rather than the linguistic component of her

French studies. She also cites a personal connection to a colonial heritage by way of her family's cultural background which allowed her to "see some identification" specifically with French-African literature (line 18). The

account makes relevant the following category-bound predicates: taking up French because of the literature and being intrigued by literature (lines 2-3), not being interested in speaking French (line 4), loving 20th Century literature (line 11), and identifying with literature based on one's cultural background (lines 15-17). These predicates produce a categorization as "literature student" rather than say "French language student," the latter being a category commonly paired with a preoccupation about how language is learned, authentically used, and taught, and thus associated with someone who has taken up a profession as French language teacher.

The turn-taking in this first part of the interaction shows how important this categorial work is for Sara, demonstrated by her insistence on clarifying that her interest has been in the literature and not in learning French. In line 10, in response to my question as to whether her interest centered on existentialism, she begins her turn with "well," which works to deflect my question and then allows her to turn the focus on her particular interest in French-African literature (line 12). In formulating her connection to French as grounded in her literary interests, Sara manifestly resists orientating to category-resonant predicates commonly articulated by other French language teachers in the study, notably, an explicit appreciation for French language and culture and the ability to access these authentically on study abroad and locally. Furthermore, Sara's reference to her parents' colonial heritage can be heard as invoking an unspecified racial category, a self-categorization as an incumbent in the category "not of Western/European origin." This self-ascribed identity provides a categorial account for her claimed interest in African literature, and again accomplishes an act of resistance, this time to the prevailing emphasis on a Western canon of classic works as the central focus of French literary studies. In effect, the categorial work demonstrates her disaffiliation from a Eurocentric perspective that privileges French European literature as the standard, i.e. as most representative of authentic French language and culture.

In the latter half of the interaction, beginning with line 21, we see this categorization accomplishing further disaffiliation, this time from French language teachers in her present

professional context, by mobilizing a category that offers a reconceptualized version of L2 teacher identity. At this point in the conversation, she interrupts my attempt to follow up on her cultural connection to the literature (lines 20-21) with interjections of "yeah yeah" and the contrasting conjunction "but" (line 23) in order to regain control of the floor. Again, this discursive manoeuvre signals how important it is for her to communicate that a cultural connection, as it relates to French culture, applies to her in a very different way from how it may usually be understood. She makes clear that she is not passionate about the French activities going on downtown (line 25), nor excited about French music (line 31), and that she might actually prefer engaging with Spanish, given that she taught this language as well (lines 28-29). This instance of account-giving sees Sara proffer category-bound activities that are not expectable for an incumbent of the category "French language teacher" – *not* being passionate about French, *not* wanting to engage in French activities, *not* being excited by the French music world and, instead, being interested in more than one language (not only French but also Spanish). While the explicit reference to having "taught Spanish" makes relevant her incumbency in the membership category "language teacher," the overall account produces a less conventional version of FSL teacher, one which disturbs the prevailing ideal of the monolingual language expert. Noteworthy here is that the discursive action of mobilizing a category-resonant description that alludes to "being passionate about French" and "seeking out French-language activities," highlights our mutually shared assumptions that these features are commonly heard to produce this membership category. Yet, in subverting these category incumbent features by not aligning with them, we see Sara ultimately resisting a normative categorization of "French language teacher" and the category's locally invoked meanings here. In other words, the disaffiliative action accomplished in this instance emerges in part from Sara's explicit orientation to what are heard as typical French language teacher attributes and her subsequent claim not to subscribe to these herself.

This disaffiliative nature of Sara's actions during the latter half of the interaction is also evident in my reaction to her as co-interactant.

The locally generated MCD “research interview about French teacher study abroad” implicates a categorization of Sara as both “research participant” and “French language teacher” and categorization of me as “researcher”. The categorial work engages both an orientation to these categories as heard belonging to the MCD in play and to our shared knowledge about the expectable features and characteristics that normatively accompany these categories. Sara’s claim that she is “not dying to go there” (line 26) signals not only her disassociation from professional practices typically expected of French language teachers, but also a lack of an affiliative response to the unfolding research interaction typically offered by research participants during a research interview. My responses to her here clearly demonstrate that her resisting a categorization as “French language teacher” constitutes a dispreferred response, especially considering my initial question as to how she came to be a French language teacher. My orientation to this resistance, for example, can be seen in my laughter accompanying her declaration of “not dying to go there” (line 27), signaling that this response may be troubling and possibly requires elaboration (Glenn, 2003). This gets substantiated in the next turn as Sara does in fact elaborate on this statement by explaining that she is also a Spanish teacher (lines 28-29). My immediate response to this identification is “oh okay” (line 30), the “oh” signaling that her self-ascribed incumbency as *Spanish* teacher is an unexpected bit of information (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984), which I, as the researcher was not expecting from a research participant who had been asked to talk about her educational trajectory as a *French* teacher.

All together then, this interaction destabilizes the “French language teacher” category under which Sara was recruited to the study in the first place by putting into question what it means to be a teacher of French. The categorial account works up an identity that has Sara disassociating from other French teachers as well as expectations about what French teachers are interested in and how they are or become involved in French language education. Her cultural connection to French is premised on a different understanding, one which does not assume a love for “all things French” and which disrupts the widely-held assumption that French language expertise must be inextricably

tied to an authentic (Eurocentric) French cultural experiences. The crucial element of the categorial work in this extract is that, by rejecting the need for an affiliation with “authentic” Frenchness and disassociating from practices that are seen to support purist and nativist ideologies, Sara demonstrates noticeable resistance to the pervasive colonial effect these ideologies continue to have on especially self and other-identified “non-native” speaker teachers. Instead, Sara engages an *intercultural* perspective, one that involves an alternative discourse for FSL teacher identity construction – a reformulation of legitimate French language teacher that draws on a non-Western affiliation with French and could be seen as a “delinking” from Eurocentric categories (Kumaravadivelu, 2016; Mignolo, 2007).

4.2. Extract 2 - “Doing French in Paris”

In the second extract, Sara recounts a story about her 3-week stay at a Buddhist centre in Paris following the program in Vichy. It is worthwhile noting that, a few minutes prior to the interaction in the extract, we had discussed in some detail her connection to local francophone communities (not represented here). Her orientation to this topic was again rather atypical of the orientation displayed by the other focal participants. While most of the teachers interviewed in the study offered narratives which, at most, implied an uneasy tension around a sense of belonging as non-francophone teachers of French, Sara explicitly stated not being accepted into French culture, noting that “France is so particular about its identity and other people being in it” (Interview 1, 7:19). Instead, she formulated a claim about having individual connections with friends who speak or are French, in other words, personal, “human connections” that are not based on incumbency in the membership category “Francophone.” She explicitly stated that she sees no need to be part of any sanctioned francophone community, justifying this with a self-categorization as “an agent,” a direct reference to the CEFR-based concept of pluricultural competence (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 168) “the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of

varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures”.

Thus, our interaction prior to the extract presented below again demonstrates Sara rejecting affiliation with a community that is normatively seen to be highly significant for French language teachers in providing access to so-called native speakers and “real” culture. In subverting a claim to membership in a francophone community, typically viewed as an enviable and taken-for-granted characteristic of an identity as French language teacher, Sara

instigates a process of “denaturalization” that “violates ideological expectations” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010, p. 24). This is an important move on her part, especially in light of the conversation that followed, in that it points to a reconceptualization of linguistic and cultural identity that does not rely on an essentialist notion of belonging. The interaction in the second extract (Figure 2) begins with Sara explaining how suggestions from a professor and the professor’s friend led to her staying at the Paris Buddhist Centre.

- 1 S: first he sent a site about how to rent an apartment, and then later in
 2 the same day he sent this other website (.) well- maybe she should try
 3 one of the Buddhist Centers in Paris and right when I saw that Buddhist
 4 Center in Paris I knew
 5 M: that [was it]
 6 S: [that's] where I wanted to stay and it was like the most amazing
 7 place for me to stay
 8 M: ((smiling))it must've been great (.) so that was afterwards=
 9 S: =that was afterwards so for three weeks I stayed at this Buddhist-
 10 Paris Buddhist Center which is run by a Polish woman
 11 M: mhm
 12 S: um who's become a monk (.) and-
 13 M: oh wow
 14 S: yeah it was- I mean Paris is not really busy in August [hehe right?
 15 M: [no they're all
 16 gone [hehehe
 17 S: [um- but- it was- it was really- so I practiced meditation in
 18 Paris for three weeks [hehehe
 19 M: [that's so cool hehehe
 20 S: and so-
 21 M: en français [hehehehehe]
 22 S: [yes:: (.)] and there- there was a French- he used be um-
 23 I don't know what to call him like a prie- not a priest but (.) uh (.)
 24 what's an abbé? (.) I- I don't know what [exactly bu-
 25 M: [y::eah
 26 S: but he used to be like Catholic but then he converted over to Buddhism
 27 and so he gave these lectures on Buddhism in French
 28 M: mhm
 29 S: um before the meditation so, and then every morning there was a chant
 30 in French and there was um, because this woman was Polish she was
 31 connected with the Eastern European Buddhist movement
 32 M: uh huh
 33 S: and so um (.) there were other people visiting from Slovakia and so- I-
 34 I saw- like now for me like France and Paris in particu[lar
 35 M: [uh huh
 36 S: which is what it really is, it's not about French alone, it's like a
 37 universal lang[uage]
 38 M: [yeah] [yeah
 39 S: [yeah
 40 M: that's very interes[ting
 41 S: [yeah=
 42 M: =yeah so that- French being an inter- sort of a- yeah
 43 (1.2)
 44 S: and I think that's why I was interested in it before...

Figure 2

Extract 2 (interview#1, 11:51-13:40) “It’s not about French alone”

The extract begins with Sara in the midst of an account about how she planned the trip to Paris, and how she eventually ended up staying at the Paris Buddhist Centre. In these first turns, Sara recounts how she instantly took to the suggestion to try the Centre, describing it as “the most amazing place for [her] to stay” (lines 6-7). Her emphasis on how well this accommodation choice aligned with her travel preferences (“I knew that’s where I wanted to stay” lines 3-6) plays an important role in constructing her experience in Paris as yet another *unanticipated* narrative, from the perspective of the researcher within the context of the interview. This is accomplished in the remainder of the interaction with a description of the people and activities at the Buddhist Centre, produced here with the use of location categories and the interplay of several collections of categories or MCDs that generate an alternative understanding of what it means to participate in “French culture.”

To begin, the location categories employed in this extract include both the city of Paris and the Paris Buddhist Centre. The combination of the two, the Buddhist Centre and its location in Paris (the locus of French society and culture), works to disrupt expectations about what visitors to Paris do and where they opt to reside. Choosing a 3-week meditation course does not clearly align with expectable category-incumbent activities of French language teachers on a professional development sojourn aimed at augmenting instructional resources and improving teachers’ cultural knowledge about French history, institutions, and traditions frequently referenced in French language course materials and featured in study abroad promotional literature. In this extract, the unanticipated nature of this narrative is in part made evident by my manifest surprise expressed in lines 13 (“oh wow”) and 19 (“that’s so cool”). Moreover, not only my own laughter (lines 16 and 19), but from Sara herself (lines 14 and 18) signals that this account offers a surprising version of what might usually be expected about a stay in the French capital. Further categorial use of location occurs in her description of Paris as “not really busy in August” (line 14). This statement constitutes a knowledge display that demonstrates Sara’s familiarity with the city’s seasonal pattern, i.e. that the summer months are the main tourist season in Paris and, from a visitor’s

perspective, always extremely busy. The descriptor “not busy” therefore allows us to infer that she is not speaking as an incumbent of the membership category “tourist” but, rather, can be heard as making a claim to the category “local resident.” This is reinforced by my own response in the next turn, “no they’re all gone” (line 16), the pronoun “they” implicating local residents, the only other major population inhabiting Paris besides tourists and a significant part of whom leave the city in August on their own summer vacations. The inferential upshot of this categorial account constructs the Buddhist Centre and its associated activities and occupants as part of local life in Paris, removed from the touristic world, and with Sara as a participating member in this local life.

While Paris and the Buddhist Centre, as location categories, serve to contest Sara’s identity in France as a visitor and inauthentic French speaker, it is in relation to others in the story that she rearticulates this identity in intercultural terms (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006). The version of local French life presented here, as complex and dynamic and as departing from received notions of French culture, is accomplished through the various descriptive formulations of the Centre’s occupants. The attributes of the people Sara describes make relevant categories not commonly found in the travel narratives of French teachers on professional development abroad in Paris or France. Predicates of becoming a monk (as opposed to a nun) and converting to Buddhism get explicitly tied to a Polish woman and a Catholic French abbot respectively, while visitors from Slovakia are bound to the Eastern European Buddhist movement. This categorial work makes relevant the crossing of intercultural boundaries, religious, ethnic, and gender-specific border crossings that invoke intersecting categories commonly perceived to be distinct and separate bounded entities. Instead, the proffered categories representing these different walks of life are heard to belong to the MCD “Buddhist Centre occupants,” thereby producing a version of Paris life that operates in French, but which does not rely on the essentialist attributes and moral obligations associated with the “authentic” Eurocentric Frenchness of France. My interjected question about practicing meditation in Paris “en français” is also followed up with laughter (line

21), again hinting at possible trouble as I attempt to find relevance in these descriptions for an FSL teacher. Yet, Sara does not waver from her narrative, responding positively to my question with an emphatic “yes” (line 22) only to continue with a description of the abbots’ French lectures on Buddhism (line 27) and throwing in a reference to Slovakian visitors (line 33) in conjunction with the Polish woman’s connection with “the Eastern European Buddhist movement” (line 31) – all of which serve to rearticulate an orientation to French as a means of navigating interculturality, as “social agents.” Her subsequent claim that France and Paris are “not about French alone” (line 36) can be heard to depart from received ways of associating French language and culture with the locus of Frenchness, as evidenced by my response “that’s very interesting” (line 40). In reconceptualizing what it means to be a speaker of French in Paris, the centre of the French speaking world, Sara’s story also accomplishes a “denaturalization” of French culture, separating it from its essentialist foundation and creating a space in which to construct an identity as French language teacher which incorporates a plurilingual, intercultural identity.

As noted earlier, MCA lends itself to a critical examination of how we make sense of and also construct our understandings of reality. As we have seen in the analysis above, “proffered category-bound activities and predicates can be resisted; resisting such ties transforms the common-sense meanings of categories,” which makes such “categorization work central to social change” (Stokoe, 2012, p. 290). In other words, the categorization work in the two extracts analyzed here accomplishes the construction of an identity as French language teacher that is not defined in conventional terms, nor based on an essentialist notion of authenticity as an inherent feature of people, language, and practices – i.e. as someone who is French, or who affiliates with a francophone community, or who loves to engage with “everything French.” Resisting these category-bound activities and, instead, offering predicates that foreground an intercultural understanding of a process of identification – demonstrates how the common-sense meanings of categories can be transformed and consequently made to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about the categories we claim on a

continual basis, a category such as French language teacher. In this sense, we see Sara enacting an “intercultural pedagogy” (Shi-xu, 2001), a discursive transformation that sees teachers introducing discourses of diversity to engage others to “jointly initiate, (re-)formulate, debate and execute such new discourses” (p. 279).

For Sara, her status as a non-francophone teacher has significant implications for her professional identity within the context of French language education. A prevailing orientation to nativist ideologies that insist on authentic cultural origins as a criterion of legitimate French language teaching points to the unequal power relations so-called “non-native” speaker teachers must navigate as compared to their francophone counterparts. In subscribing to a complex and dynamic conception of cultural identity we see Sara mobilizing interculturality to de- and reconstruct these power relations on her own terms. Ultimately, she has based her notion of linguistic competence on an understanding of plurilingualism and interculturality that “enables a comprehensive view, capable of factoring in the positioning of the individual as a social agent who, on the strength of her/his experience and her/his linguistic and cultural background, operates in...a multilingual space that is constantly changing” (Piccardo & Puozzo, 2015, p. 320). For Sara, an explicit awareness of the postcolonial positionings effected by a preoccupation with authentic French language and culture as FSL teacher has led her to problematize essentialist understandings of cultural belonging seen to imbue professional authority as a teacher – a “decolonial” move (Kumaravadivelu, 2016) that would allow her to speak on her own terms (Spivak, 1988). The discourse approach taken here has highlighted interculturality as a dynamic process that occurs in interaction with others. In the end, it is not so much about how the individual is able to interpret the world, but rather, how individuals position themselves to collaboratively construct an understanding of one another, while managing differential power relations within those interactions (Shi-xu, 2001).

5. Concluding Remarks

Although discursive constructionism does not look beyond the local contingencies of social interaction, it offers a productive approach to examining identity as a dynamic process of intercultural identification and the assumptions and concepts underpinning this identity work. As noted earlier, MCA offers an analytically rigorous method that focuses on participants' concerns by investigating how members' display an understanding of everyday workings in society, acknowledging that these situated displays of common-sense knowledge about the world are always "reflexively and accountably constituted through" members' categorization practices (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015, p. 3).

As shown above, the categorial formulations presented in the analysis bring to light not only the marginalizing effects of nativist, monoglossic ideologies but also, in Sara's particular case, the postcolonial impact of linguistic and cultural authenticity for non-francophone teachers of French. Shifting the analytic focus to what is relevant for the participants and avoiding reliance on external, researcher-imposed categories is a crucial methodological advantage in studying interculturality. It moves away from a conception of culture as informing the behaviour of others and as the determining factor in misunderstandings. Focusing the analysis on participants' concerns makes visible participants' inter-discursive meaning-making practices – it "sets aside any a priori notions of group membership and identity and asks instead how and under what circumstances concepts such as culture are produced by participants as relevant categories" (Scollon & Scollon, 2001, p. 544).

While MCA has been criticized for its elusive "case-study" approach to studying identities-in-interaction and its lack of systematic analysis in identifying collaboratively occasioned categories in discourse (Stokoe, 2012), MCA allows us to analyze participants' stories "with reference to the context and medium through which they get told...achieving greater researcher reflexivity and methodological and analytical rigor" (Kasper & Prior, 2015, p. 228), which is especially important given the growing emphasis on qualitative data in research with L2 teachers. Conceptualizing data as collaboratively constructed with research

participants inevitably implicates the researcher in the generation, analysis, and representation of those data. As demonstrated above, a particular advantage of MCA is that any categorization of the participant also produces a categorization of the researcher as such, as well as other potentially related identities (analyst, L2 user of French, sojourner, etc.). The collaborative construction of categories as an interactional achievement thus turns the role of the researcher into a valuable analytic resource in the interpretation of participants' categorial work, and this interpretation must take into account not only who produces the data but also for whom those data are produced, i.e. the researcher and/or analyst. In other words, MCA not only provides a productive means of gaining insight into the categorial resources that the researcher and research participants employ in "mutually elaborated matters of practical reasoning" (Hester & Eglin, 1997, p. 26), but it also asks us to recognize that "researchers are inevitably implicated in how we come to know and speak of what we study" (Hulstijn et al., 2014).

The implications of this are relevant to both L2 teacher professional development and the way future research engages with teacher participants. As argued throughout this paper, understanding teachers' conceptual assumptions of language and culture and of learning and teaching is crucial to make visible discourses that "function in racializing ways without explicitly invoking race" and "exemplify the covert nature of many racializing discourses" (Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. 163). Only this way can we ensure linguistically and culturally responsive approaches that attend not only to students' needs but take into account the way identity informs teachers' own learning and practice (Noonan, 2019). With this in mind, future research has to investigate teachers' understandings, positionings, and cultural understandings in relation to the social contexts and power relations within which these are constructed.

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