(De)legitimization: The Impact of Language Policy on Identity Development in an EFL Teacher[1]

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Abstract

Based on Bordieuan concepts of symbolic power and legitimization, this study analyzes the identity of a language teacher in Puebla, Mexico. Through a series of in-depth interviews, we examine how Mexican institutions may (de)legitimize the teaching expertise of an EFL educator by promoting a discourse of "native"-speakerism. In contrast with existing literature, this study is situated in the Puebla context, wherein the *Poblano* State government granted permanent teaching positions to Mexican bilingual transnationals with no formal teacher training. While our participant contested some of the dominant language ideologies, such as the use of language certifications, she also appeared to internalize deficit discourses about her "non-nativeness," which made her question her own pedagogical identity. We found that some of our participant's deficit views were reinforced during her own teacher preparation and professional development. By analyzing our participant's perspectives in terms of current scholarship—such as Higgins, 2017; Kachru, 2005; Rudolph, Selvin, & Yazan, 2015—, we aim to generalize results to teacher preparation in other contexts so that processes of delegitimization based on the "native" speaker fallacy are less often perpetuated.

Resumen

Teniendo como referencia los conceptos bourdieusianos de poder simbólico y legitimidad, el presente estudio cualitativo analizó la identidad de una docente de inglés en Puebla, México. A través de una serie de entrevistas en profundidad, examinamos cómo las instituciones mexicanas (i)legitiman los reconocimientos académicos de nuestra participante mediante un discurso que favorece la idea de que los hablantes nativos son *a priori*, docentes modelos para enseñar una segunda lengua. A diferencia de la literatura existente, este estudio se sitúa en un contexto en donde el gobierno del estado de Puebla decidió otorgar plazas de docente a migrantes transnacionales mexicanos de retorno, sin tomar en cuenta su formación docente para su contratación. A pesar de que nuestra participante tomó posiciones contestatarias en términos de las ideologías lingüísticas dominantes —por ejemplo, en el uso irreflexivo de las certificaciones—, ella interiorizó un discurso de inferioridad al no ser hablante nativa, lo que le hizo cuestionarse sus propios conocimientos pedagógicos. Así, identificamos que el discurso de inferioridad de nuestra participante se fomentó durante su formación profesional y académica. Al analizar el contexto de nuestra participante en el marco de investigaciones previas en dicho rubro—como Higgins, 2017; Kachru, 2005; Rudolph, Selvi, & Yazan, 2015—, nuestro objetivo es generalizar los resultados para que, en otros contextos educativos de formación docente, los procesos de deslegitimidad no sean repetidos a perpetuidad.

Introduction

Historically, Mexican migration to the United States has been caused by underdevelopment, poverty and insecurity in Mexico (Durand, 2007). In 2016, the Mexican government calculated that 37.1 million Mexicans lived in the United States (Ramos Martínez et al., 2017). Although the total number of *Poblanos,* or individuals born in the Mexican state of Puebla, living in the United States is unclear, it has been estimated that around 1.5 million Mexicans have migrated from the Mexican state of Puebla, which lies in central Mexico (Consejo Nacional de Oblation, 2018). While *Poblano* migration increased steadily in the first years of the new millennium (Sánchez Moreno, 2016), a slowdown in the U.S. economy, the lack of job opportunities and an increase in deportations, and anti-Mexican discourse have motivated Mexican transnationals, or Mexicans of first and second generation who lived in a different country for extended periods of time, to go (back) to Mexico in the last decade (Ramos Martínez et al, 2017). Specifically, Puebla ranks seventh in terms of transnational-returned migration (Ramos Martínez et al., 2017). While some *Poblano* transnationals go (back) to Mexico voluntarily (Espinosa-Márquez & González-Ramírez, 2016), many others have been forced to return to their communities; for example, during the first semester of 2018, 6,000 Poblanos were deported from the United States (González-Guzmán, 2018).

Many Mexican transnationals of first and second generation take advantage of their bilingual skills (English and Spanish) and enroll in English Language Teaching degree programs in Mexican universities (Christiansen, Trejo Guzmán, and Mora Pablo, 2017). Due to the increase in the number of transnationals pursuing English teaching degrees in Mexico, scholars have concentrated on analyzing the pre-service identities of

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transnationals, especially in the states of states of Nuevo León, Sonora, Tamaulipas and Guanajuato (i. e., Christiansen, Trejo Guzmán, and Mora Pablo, 2017; Cortez Román and Hamann, 2014; Mora Pablo, Lengeling & Crawford Lewis, 2014; Mora, Trejo & Roux, 2016). In contrast, the identities of Mexican national English language teachers have not been as extensively analyzed. While some scholars have focused on the identities of Mexican national language teachers (Avalos Rivera, 2016; Trejo-Guzmán, 2010; Sayer, 2012), less attention has been paid to this population. In addition, most studies of transnationals have examined their identity from the perspectives of transnationals themselves but not from the perspectives of their Mexican national colleagues, professors or pre-service teacher classmates. As such, in the present study, we seek to explore the ways in which the professional identity development of a Mexican national English language teacher is ultimately legitimized (or not) by the social and institutional forces at play in the current Mexican English Language Teaching milieu.

Review of the Literature

Exploring (De)Legitimization

To further explore the impact of institutions on language teacher identity, the present study applies Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, or the system of dispositions towards social reproduction, and *legitimization,* which we define as the process in which people's knowledge is deemed valid. Because dominant groups may transmit power relationships not only by economic reproduction but also by symbolic means, *symbolic power* is, therefore, a way in which individuals may internalize a social structure and adapt it to different layers of interaction, such as in linguistic and corporal behavior (Bourdieu, 1990). Symbolic power is also a way in which subtle domination takes place, as it "contributes to the reproduction and perpetuation of social structures and hierarchies" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.131). In addition, symbolic power may be granted to individuals by dominant groups by providing them with institutions that legitimize their cultural capital. Following this logic, then, domination in societies is practiced not solely by individuals, but also by a system of institutions that provides people access to other forms of capital--such as linguistic capital--which may explain why some languages or language varieties are recognized as more prestigious than others (Philipson, 2017).

The concept of legitimization may be deployed to explain identity development among educators, especially those working in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Canagarajah, 2012; Nguyen, 2017). Because many educators in EFL contexts speak a language other than English as their first language (L1), their legitimization process may consist of constant identity negotiation in order to be acknowledged as "competent" or "qualified" speakers of English despite the "non-native" label that may be imposed upon them (Park, 2012; Sayer, 2012). While of common use in the language teaching field, the "native/non-native" dichotomy promotes a pan-identity which tends to perpetuate fallacies about what an effective language teacher should sound and look like (Philipson, 1992) and may overshadow investigation of other intersectional aspects of language teacher identity such as culture, age, gender, professional training, and so on (Morgan, 2004).

The dichotomy between "native" and "non-native" English speakers has an impact on the identity of English language teachers in EFL contexts in that it promotes *native speakerism,* or the notion that a "native" speaker of a language is the ideal (i.e., most legitimate) model for learners of that language to emulate (Holliday, 2006). In turn, "native speakerism" impacts EFL educator identity based upon whether and how EFL educators internalize the notion that "native" English speakers are the desired norm. As a result, they may undervalue their competence as educators rather than embrace their own multilingualism and/or look at English in terms of the pluricentric ways it is used across the globe (Higgins, 2017; Kachru, 2005). Moreover, EFL educators may leave unexplored other aspects of their identity that contribute to their pedagogical practices because they focus so much on who they are relative to English (Motha, 2017).

Recent scholarship, such as Rudolph, Selvin and Yazan (2015) argues for the problematization of the "native"/ "non-native" speaker dichotomy in English language teaching for several reasons. First, the dichotomy privileges "native" speaker teachers and marginalizes "non-native" speaker teachers. It also contributes to the idea that all "non-native" speakers have common personal and professional experiences. We see the perpetuation of a "native speaker" ideal and its related discourse as de-legitimization of both the pedagogical and linguistic knowledge that EFL educators develop during their professional careers.

Legitimization and Identity in Mexico

While there are extensive studies of various aspects of TESOL programs in Mexico, there are few studies of identity development of Mexican EFL teachers in these programs (Sayer, 2012; Avalos-Rivera, 2016). In the existing literature, EFL teacher identity in Mexico has been examined as a multilayered phenomenon not only connected to *nativism*, or the idea that second language speakers should have a "native" person as the ideal model (Philipson, 1992), but also to race, institutional policies, and power access. In this way, Sayer (2007, 2012, 2015) examined the tensions and contradictions that English teachers experience in the Mexican state of Oaxaca during the legitimization process of novice teachers who had an indigenous origin, and those who had a mestizo ethnicity, which is a mixture of Spanish and indigenous ancestry. Sayer (2012) emphasized that Mexican EFL English teachers encounter a process of legitimization that is ideological in nature because the teachers' external and internal acknowledgments play an important role in the construction of their teaching identities. In addition, Sayer (2012) showed how other factors such as race and skin color are variables that influence the process of legitimization by those who hire Oaxacan language teachers.

Similarly, Avalos-Rivera (2016) analyzed the identities of a group of Mexican EFL language teachers in terms of language ideologies, which relates to conceptions of certain communities towards the use of one particular language (Spolsky, 2002), power structures, nativism, and legitimization. She found that English teaching in Mexico has been historically associated with deficient teaching practices and that, in alignment with Sayer's (2007, 2012) conclusions, teachers perform conflictive and opposing identities. In Avalos-Rivera's (2016) examination, language teachers tried to push back against top-down administrative rules, such as hiring preferences for "native" speakers. Trejo-Guzmán (2010) also researched changes in the identity of EFL teachers and pre-service teachers in terms of institutional legitimization. Trejo-Guzmán's findings showed that the participating language teachers were not consulted in top-down administrative approaches in Mexican institutions. As a result, the Mexican English teachers felt alienated and unwilling to develop agency, which is the way individuals may try to transform their contexts in spite of the already-existing power structures (Ortner, 2006).

In short, the present study views the ways in which institutional policies may affect the identity development process of a Mexican EFL teacher through the lenses of symbolic power and legitimization (Bourdieu, 1991). For language teachers in the Mexican EFL context, the process of (de)legitimization may be conditioned by the "native speaker" fallacy present in national educational policies, (Philipson, 1992), which ultimately impacts their identity and their pedagogical practices (Park, 2012; Yazan, 2018) and social agency (Avalos-Rivera, 2016; Trejo-Guzmán, 2010). Thus, the following research question guided our study:

Research Question

How do institutional language policies that prioritize "native speakerism" (de)legitimize the identity development of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educator in Mexico?

Methodology

A qualitative design allowed for in-depth and detailed analysis of an individual teacher to better understand the way in which policies influencing the Mexican EFL context ultimately affected her as an English language educator (Merriam, 1998). Below, we describe in greater detail the context, the participant, the procedures, and the analyses.

Context

English language educators face a challenging situation in Puebla, the Mexican state that was the site of the present study. In 2017, the Mexican government estimated that deportations of Mexican nationals from the United States ranged from 12,000 to 13,000 per month (Cacelin, 2017). In the first semester of 2018, Puebla itself reported receiving more than 6000 deported *Poblanos* (González Guzmán, 2018). Due to increasingly negative U.S. political rhetoric towards Mexico in general, the Mexican government anticipated a massive return of Mexican transnationals to their country of origin. For this reason, in November 2017, for the first time in Mexican history, the federal government issued a report about *migrantes de retorno*, or returnees[4], defined as Mexican transnationals who come (back) to live in Mexico after living abroad. In it, Ramos Martínez et al. (2017) pointed out that during 2010-2015, many transnationals returning to Mexico

[4] Although "returnees" is the official term use by Mexican government, we have decided to use the term transnationals. This is because, while some individuals return to Mexico, they also bring family members, such as their daughters or sons, who have never been to their parents' home communities.

(re)settled in the states of Estado de México, Veracruz, Puebla, Oaxaca and Guerrero. Specifically, Puebla ranks seventh in terms of returned migration. Ramos Martínez et al. (2017) stated that only 3.3% of *Poblano* transnationals are classified as highly educated or trained.

During 2017, in alignment with the Mexican federal government, the state government of Puebla recognized the importance of transnationals and their incorporation into the local economy (*Gobierno del Estado de Puebla*, 2017). In this context, the former governor of Puebla, Antonio Gali, mandated that transnationals who could speak English would be hired as English teachers in public elementary (*primaria*) and middle school (*secundaria*) institutions in Puebla (Vera Cortés, 2017), especially in regions of La Mixteca, and the north and mountainous southern regions of this state. According to the online database of the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (*La Secretaría de Educación Pública,* or SEP, 2016) there are more than 400 universities in the state of Puebla. Among them, programs that prepare students to become English language teachers (such as the *licenciaturas*, or bachelor's degrees, in Modern Languages, TESOL, Applied Linguistics) are common. To graduate, students usually study from three to five years.

As in Oaxaca (Sayer, 2015) or Veracruz (Avalos-Rivera, 2016), language teachers in Puebla face underemployment, low salaries, and lack of social benefits after graduation, especially when hired by private institutions. For many language teachers, the only chance of improving poor working conditions is by competing for a *plaza*, which is a permanent position regulated by the SEP. The number of these plazas is limited, and language teachers are required to take a test to validate their linguistic and pedagogical skills (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2017). Only professionals with the best scores are hired upon demand by the SEP, which means the process of selection is highly competitive.

Participant

Lety, our participant, is a female teacher who holds an English Teaching degree, which took her four years to complete, from a university in Puebla. She has always taught English, either as a foreign language (EFL) or for specific purposes (ESP). At the time of the interviews, she had seven years of teaching experience in private *primarias* in Puebla. At some point in the interviews, Lety pointed out she worked in private institutions because she did not feel "ready enough" to compete for a *plaza* and was not sure she could tolerate the emotional stress in case she was unsuccessful. We gained access to our participant because, more than eight years ago, she had been a classmate of one of the authors while pursuing a Language Teaching degree. Before this current study, Lety and the research team had a conversation about the reincorporation of transnationals in a pilot study that the authors conducted. Due to her willingness, we asked her to participate in a series of three interviews that took place in Mexico during the summer of 2018. At the time of the interviews, she was coordinating the English department of a small private *primaria*.

Until 1990, most Mexican teachers working in public schools did not graduate from universities, but from *Normales Superiores*. The *Normales Superiores* were founded around the beginning of the 20th century with the objective of training teachers for the public education system. During most of the previous century, teachers who studied la Normal Superior did not have to attend either *Preparatoria* (the equivalent of senior high school) or college. Instead, after *Secundaria* (middle school), they would enroll in Normal Superior and would easily find a job in the Mexican education system. Avalos-Rivera (2016) told the story of a teacher who was discriminated against in her institution because she had *only* graduated with an English Teaching degree from the Normal Superior. In Lety's private school, things were different. As we will explain later, *Normalistas,* who are trained to teach academic content, may look down on language teachers from other institutions because they are *only* trained to teach English.

Procedures

To collect data, we conducted in-depth interviews. For Seidman (2006), in-depth interviews are a meaningful way of analyzing how people reconstruct realities and make sense of the world by using oral language. McLellan, Macqueen and Neiding (2003) expanded on the meaningfulness of interviewing, stating that it also provides the researchers with meaningful non-verbal patterns, such as smiles, laughs or facial movements, that should be coded as forms of communication. Saldaña (2009) and Seidman (2006) proposed a series of three interviews to have a better understanding of the participant's perspective. For example, when the interviews are spaced out, the participant can construct their answers or reflect on what they have previously stated. Saldaña (2009) pointed out that, for the researcher, the series of three interviews is helpful to: 1) contextualize the experience and perspective of the interviewee, which usually takes place in

the first interview, 2) confirm information and ask for more detailed answers, which Saldaña (2009) recommends for the second interview, and 3) ask for meaning clarification, which usually takes places during the third one.

As interviews are situated activities that allow participants and researchers to construct meaning in a determined time and context, the series of interviews allows participants to adapt their reality perceptions to different contextual circumstances. In the present study, we utilized three in-depth interviews, which took place in Spanish, were recorded, and were later translated. The first two were transcribed, with off-topic interactions eliminated. The final interview did not provide any additional information, nor did it modify previous preliminary findings, so it was not transcribed. In this last interview, however, we requested that Lety check the previous two transcriptions, which she agreed to do.

Data Analysis

Both *a priori* codes, mainly influenced by themes suggested by previous research, and emergent codes, based on new thematic patterns, were used to analyze interview transcription data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). We conducted two coding cycles (Saldaña, 2009). In between, for consistency and consensus, we met to discuss individual analytic memos and coding schemes. Finally, axial coding processes enabled us to group themes into relevant categories and subcategories (Seidman, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

Three main categories emerged from the data analyses: Lety's identity as an English language teacher in terms of (a) social (de)legitimization, (b) teacher preparation and certification requirements, and (c) language policy decisions. Within these three interdependent larger categories, four interconnected sub-categories also emerged: (de)legitimization, external and internal deficit views, market economy, and nativism. Our axial coding, therefore, showed that Lety's perspectives about English language teaching are multilayered phenomena in constant need of external legitimization to make it possible for her to compete in the teaching market. Her legitimization, in Bourdieu's (1990) terms, requires institutions. This legitimization seems to take place in a context in which institutions hold nativist and deficit views towards language teaching. As this legitimization is necessary for Lety to maintain her job, she has been forced to respond to these institutional trends.

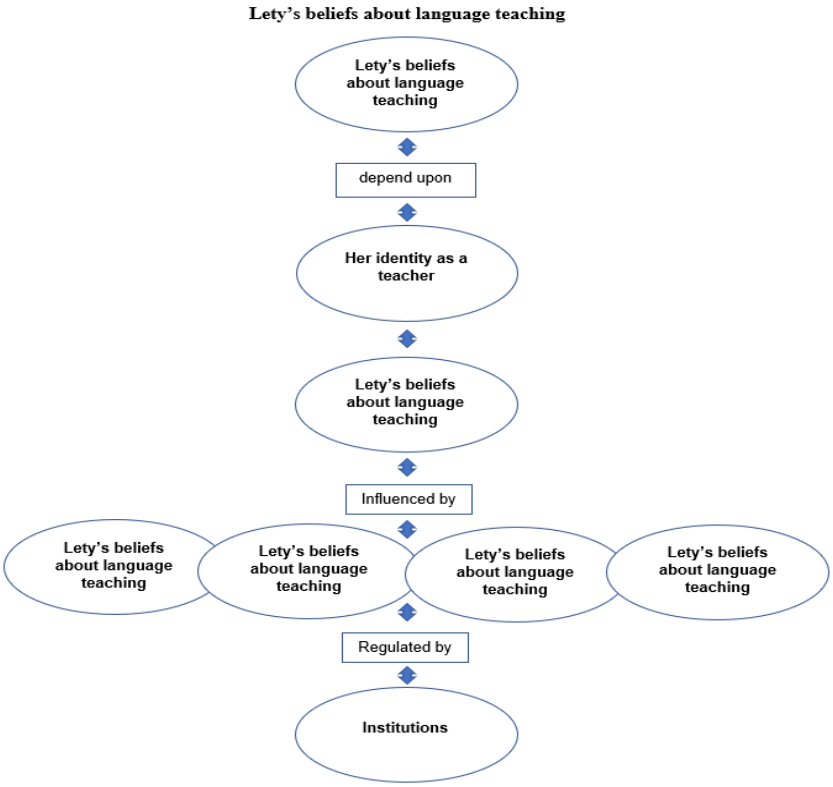

Figure 1. Factors that affect Lety's perspectives in terms of (uninstructed) transnationals as language teachers

De(legitimization) in Social Circles

In some sense, Lety feels she is a legitimate language teacher because she holds a university degree and because she has more than eight years of experience. During various times in the interviews, she expressed how her school, the parents, and the students have acknowledged her as a trained language teacher.

> *And it is a typical reaction I listen to. "She speaks English, that's why she teaches". And, no, it has not been this way. It took me five years of my life to be where I am now. Even though I didn't have experience at the beginning, little by little I have earned it, little by little I have prepared myself.*

However, at times, her satisfaction as a legitimate language teacher is threatened by external factors, such as critiques of *Normalista* teachers, institutional trends that require language teachers to "verify" their English proficiency levels with "certifications", and governmental policies. Bourdieu (1991) pointed out that institutional legitimization is essential in social reproduction. Nonetheless, Lety commented that this legitimization is also threatened by her colleagues who teach classes in Spanish and by society in general:

> *I live this* [undervalue] *at work, where sometimes some comparisons are made between Spanish and English teachers. They go like "English teachers do not know how to teach as they are not teachers." They believe that since we did not study at Normal Superior, we are not teachers. Personally, I find this comparison offensive because, as I have told them several times, maybe I did not study in Normal Superior -I am not like them- but I do have the preparation to be a teacher.*

Sayer (2012) claims that the process of legitimization of language teachers in Mexico is full of contradictions and conflicting ideologies. With parallel findings, Lengeling, Mora Pablo, and Barrios Gasca (2017) highlight the importance of socialization in the identities of Mexican language teachers. In this sense, although Lety disagrees with the opinions of *Normalistas* to the point of contesting these claims, she has also internalized the belief that university-trained language teachers do not have the same level of pedagogical knowledge to teach content classes:

> *And yes, we are teachers. We studied to be teachers. And we did not study to be Science or History teachers. Maybe, yes, they are totally right, we do not know how to teach...But we can learn. And that's what my* [English] *teachers and I do when we have to teach content classes.*

(De)Legitimization in Teacher Preparation

Private schools have to be competitive in Puebla, since many of them offer English as part of their curriculum. In this context, Lety pointed out that English language teachers not only have to teach, but they also need to have constant legitimization from institutions to verify their English language proficiency level through language certifications, sometimes on an annual basis. Teachers who teach content classes in Spanish are not required to pass these exams, as their degree provides enough legitimization according to certification rules. When we questioned Lety if she agreed with language certification requirement for English teachers only, she replied that she is against these requirements and, even considers them *"stupid"*. However, she is aware of the recognition that certifications may bring to schools.

> *This is like something extra, a plus, right? It's like saying* [Lety changes her voice tone and speaks ironically]: *"Many teachers are certified in English, even though they are bad teachers"* [Lety returns to her normal tone of voice]. *It's like a way of endorsing. Papelito habla.*[5]

When we questioned Lety about why school administrators may rely more on certifications than university degrees or other personal teaching competencies (Gruhn, 2009), she replied that people have been told to follow certifications as administrators believe that "non-native" teachers of English need to constantly show that "*they sound like 'native' speakers* ". Her comments connect, in turn, to previous research that analyzed the repercussions of "native"-speakerism in English language teachers (Higgins, 2017; Park, 2012; Sayer, 2012). For Lety, certifications seem like a waste of time and money, as they do not offer much advantage in pedagogical terms. In other words, Lety believes that certifications provide a false assumption of language proficiency. Nonetheless, Lety recognizes that, in the school market, she "sells" certifications so parents will enroll their children in her educational institution.

[5] Papelito habla, or "Paper talks": An expression in Mexican Spanish that refers to the importance that people give to official documents as a way of legitimization. A lack of an official credential can jeopardize people's credibility about certain skills or knowledge

> *The school values certifications because they have been told to do so. They have been sold this idea. I work with certifications for children, and I sell certifications. I sell certifications and it is part of my job. But, in personal terms, I think they are a waste of time, a waste of money, and in the long run, they won't provide any advantage in professional terms.*

Lety's answers about nativism and language purity are also an area of conflicting ideologies. As participants in research by Sayer (2012), Avalos-Rivera (2016) and Guzman-Trejo (2010), Lety has tried to move away from the fallacy of the "native" speaker teacher, as she is aware that knowing the language is not the same as being able to teach it. However, sometimes she acknowledges that, as a coordinator, she has hired teachers not because of their teaching preparation but because of the job candidates' speech resembling their "native-like" speaking ability. This concurs with other findings about how "non-native" speaker teachers may experience job discrimination. In other words, sometimes, hiring practices privilege "native" speakers over all others (TESOL, 2006). Ultimately, Lety demonstrates conflicting ideologies: as a speaker, she acknowledges varieties of English; as a teacher and administrator, she prioritizes "native" speakers as models for oral communication.

> *There are people who speak English and they speak Latino English. And people understand them and everything. In the end, speaking another language is about communication, right? While people understand it, there is no problem. But we are going to teach it* [Lety emphasized the verb "teach"]. *We need to do it as closely as possible to the way 'native' speakers use the language. I know we won't make it, because of our accent, we have a Latino accent, our body language. But practice will make you reach that* [native] *intonation.*

In the above excerpt, Lety actually describes an English variety that accounts for the local ways that English speakers use language in her region of Mexico, a recognition that is important in disrupting the notion that all "native" or "non-native" speakers have learned or use English in the same way (Mahboob, 2016). However, she then negates this variety in her role as an English teacher because the "Latino English" she mentions does not comply to Lety's opinion of "native" speaker language standards.

As part of this constant need for legitimization in institutional terms, Lety highlighted that her teaching training did little to prepare her to face situations in which she had to express her disagreement with nativist ideas about language. In her case, college professors taught her practical information for linguistic and pedagogical development, but not for confronting the "native" speakerism situations that many EFL teachers experience, a fact evidenced by the fact she herself has perpetuated "native" speakerism in both teaching and hiring practices described above. While some research has highlighted the impact of curriculum ideologies in language teachers (i.e. Martel, 2015) and current literature suggests disrupting the "native"/"nonnative" binary (Faez, 2011), teacher education may reflect deficit ideologies held by participants in the field whose own teacher education may have been underpinned by those same perspectives (Oda, 2017). During the interviews, she narrated some experiences in which she had to oppose institutional linguistic discrimination. When we asked if she had learned to defend her position as a language teacher with school administrators during her teacher training, she answered:

> *Nooo [she laughs]. Not at all. I learned it at home. At home, I learned to defend my ideas. I was raised that way [she laughs]. I did not learn that at college at all. In the university, I learned how to teach a class, I learned English, its grammar, pronunciation, semantics…But it was made clear to us that we were 'non-native' speakers and we would need to sound like one* [like a native speaker]. *It* [sounding like a 'native' speaker] *was our model. Even our professors, who were Mexican themselves, imitated the British accent in our classes, even when they had never been there* [to the UK]*!*

While previous research has highlighted the way administrative action cause Mexican language teachers to be considered "second class" educators (Ramírez Romero, Sayer, & Pamplón Irigoyen, 2014), Lety described a situation in which language teachers struggle to maintain their image as legitimate teachers because institutions appear to legitimize and delegitimize--depending on their interests--their pedagogical training as language educators. Regardless of the importance of English language in these schools, language teachers face the lack of legitimization of co-workers (who do not see them as "real" teachers) and administrators (who ask them to verify their English level periodically through certifications).

(De)Legitimization in Policy Decisions

In addition to legitimacy practices in social and teacher preparation circumstances, Lety's identity as an English language teacher is also impacted by state-level language policy decisions. In particular, she has

been affected by the decision made by the *Poblano* government which, in Lety's eyes, was incorrect in granting *plazas* to transnationals based only on their fluency in English rather than on teaching experience. In her mind, this decision ignores the appropriate preparation language teachers should have.

> *I think transnationals should prepare themselves, because the fact that you speak a language doesn't mean you know how to be a teacher. They might have the motivation, because many of them do have it. But they need at least some preparation, understanding how to plan a class, how to use rubrics, the new educational reforms, the new trends in education, the origin of them. It is not fair that if they* [transnationals] *don't know these things but only English, they will get the teaching positions. There are many people who have preparation, but we don't get these plazas because we simply don't come from the U.S., or because my* [English] *language is not like theirs.*

In addition, Lety is aware of the linguistic advantages that transnationals have in terms of oral skills and perceived accent. These examples illustrate how, sometimes in Mexico, ideologies about language teachers may be based on the belief that they can teach because they "just know" the language, a perspective that can be considered both nativist and purist (Christiansen, Trejo & Mora Pablo, 2017; Smith, 2006). This perspective also aligns with Bourdieu's notion (1990) of linguistic capital. For Lety, the state policy of hiring English-Spanish bilingual transnationals as English language educators contributes to the process of (de)legitimization that many national English language teachers often face.

> *…What's the purpose of preparing for a long time, if someone that has lived* [in the United States for] *20 years, who speaks English, will come and will get the position? Then, what's the purpose of so much preparation when any person can come and take over your job?*

Lety's responses to our interview series present a contradictory process of institutional legitimization for language teachers: while *Poblano* language teachers need to obtain a degree and constantly undergo professional development to be able to work in a competitive teaching market, they are also institutionally delegitimized based on their "non-native" English speaker designation. This process of (de)legitimization is perpetuated by *Poblano* governmental institutions, which demonstrate nativist ideas about language teaching while ignoring the pedagogical preparation that teaching a second language requires. Lety's own conflicting ideologies as a school director and teacher herself demonstrate how she has personally internalized these tensions. The process in which institutions legitimize and delegitimize knowledge relates back to Bourdieu's (1990) conception of power, wherein dominant-class controlled institutions not only control access to power by providing institutionalized legitimization, but also (de)legitimize previously granted symbolic power. That is, institutional contradictions in this study support the notion that both institutions and individuals are dynamic, and thus both provide and remove legitimization according to their interests, even when these actions contradict previous legitimization processes.

Conclusion

By exploring Lety's situation, we identified the origin of some deficit aspects of her language teacher identity in her own pre-service teacher preparation. Unfortunately, deficit views about Lety's identity, either external or internal, have continued to impact her identity during her professional development. Thus, Lety's legitimization seems to be threatened on two fronts. In one way, her legitimate identity as an English language teacher feels consistently in jeopardy, especially in terms of the institutional procedures (i.e., certifications) required to demonstrate she is a proficient speaker of English. In addition, Mexican institutions and her colleagues look with disdain on her pedagogical skills because she "only speaks English" and she does not have official pedagogical preparation or certification in other content areas.

As we have illustrated using Lety's example, institutional policies have important repercussions on English language teachers' identities. Previous studies have demonstrated that teacher education programs play an important role in the construction of positive EFL teachers' identities, specifically in terms of teachers' awareness of the fallacy of the "native" speaker and the acknowledgment of English as a global language (i.e., Nicos & Bayyurt, 2015; Vettorel, 2016). While these studies significantly help in understanding Lety's situation, we aim to contribute by suggesting ways in which language teacher education can help prevent the perpetuation of deficit views about the pedagogical and linguistic knowledge of EFL teachers. With this goal, based on the importance of institutions in the (de)legitimization and identity of language teachers, we believe in the importance of EFL teacher education institutions as entities of social change and empowerment.

First, we propose that teacher educators in EFL settings focus on debunking the "native speaker" myth, which has permeated different social layers. In the case of Lety, governmental, educational institutions and society in general seem to value language teachers solely for their language proficiency, not for their pedagogical skills. While confronting this myth may seem difficult, language education institutions should empower multilingual teachers by gradually moving away from practices that seem to perpetually delegitimize them. For example, practices such as compulsory annual or biannual certifications in which language teachers are required to pay considerable amounts of money to prove multilingual teachers' linguistic proficiency should eventually be eliminated from teacher education institutions' agendas. In cases where certifications are required to verify teachers' professional development, these should include pedagogical items that contextualize language use, and should be a requirement for all English teachers regardless of perceived or measured English language proficiency.

Secondly, English Teaching programs should emphasize the importance of pedagogical preparation as one of the main characteristics of language teachers. Based on her coworkers' comments, our participant's perspective somehow put into question her own linguistic and pedagogical knowledge, which negatively affected her own identity as a language teacher (Braine, 2010). While most teacher education institutions provide pedagogical instruction for future language teachers, this pedagogical development should be explicitly promoted not only amongst students, but also amongst employers and society in general. That is, teacher preparation programs might foster the idea that language teachers should possess the necessary linguistic proficiency to teach a second/foreign language, but that this linguistic knowledge is only the foundational basis for EFL preparation.

Understanding of language as a system (i.e., metalinguistic awareness) and pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., the ability to present information about a topic in a relevant and engaging way to students) are equally important in the development of EFL teacher identity (Andrews, 2007; Lindahl, 2016; Shulman, 1984). EFL teachers should feel confident that their pedagogical knowledge is as valid as that held by their content-area or grade-level colleagues. Situations like the one in which the *Poblano* government offered permanent positions to transnationals regardless of their pedagogical preparation can possibly be prevented if the need for pedagogically prepared language teachers is more efficiently disseminated. Students' language proficiency outcomes may improve if highly qualified educators who understand both language teaching and pedagogy are present in Mexican schools.

Finally, teacher preparation must include training for advocacy and language policymaking in order to empower individuals within their institutions (Varghese, 2017). While we have discussed the power of institutions and top-down policies on language teachers, it is important to emphasize that no institution is monolithic or static. Institutions, after all, are composed of individuals who adapt or resist power (Ortner, 2006). For this reason, English teacher preparation programs should examine the ways in which they might empower the origins and cultures of those multilingual educators studying within them, especially in EFL contexts. If pedagogical practices during language teacher preparation encourage pride in their legitimate identities as World English speakers and pedagogues, future teachers will be less likely internalize and perpetuate deficit views about their own linguistic and pedagogical development as language educators.

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