"A Little Bit out of Control": Doing Identity-Work by Chinese University Teachers in Online Teachings

"Un poco fuera de control": Construyendo identidad en el trabajo en los profesores de universidad de China, en la enseñanza online

"电脑有点儿失控了"：中国高校教师线上教学中的身份工作

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Abstract: Online classrooms have offered "unique and irreplaceable" sites for teachers to do identity work. In this article, we aim to explore what and how different types of teacher identities are constructed and negotiated in online teachings. We draw on 6h of video-recorded online instructions delivered by four teachers from the Department of Foreign Studies in China's local university. Data analysis finds Chinese university teachers in online lessons mainly construct three types of identities: professional identity, affective identity, and technical identity. Professional identity is related to teachers' epistemic and deontic authority. Affective identity is reflected in the way teachers negotiate interpersonal relationships with students. Technical identity is made salient when teachers mention the technological environment or (in)ability. These identities are constructed through different discursive practices, such as person-referencing practices and speech acts. This study also yields interesting findings on the interlinks and struggles of teacher identities in an online pedagogical environment. We hope that it could provide some insights for the current teacher training and education in China.

Key Words: Identity work; teacher identity; discursive practices; online teaching.

Resumen: Las aulas online han ofrecido sitios "únicos e irremplazables" para que los profesores muestren identidad laboral. En este artículo, nuestro objetivo es explorar qué y cómo se construyen y negocian los diferentes tipos de identidades docentes en las enseñanzas en línea. Nos basamos en 6 horas de clases en línea grabadas en video entregadas por cuatro profesores del Departamento de Estudios Extranjeros en la universidad China. El análisis de datos muestra que los docentes universitarios chinos en la docencia on line construyen principalmente tres tipos de identidades: identidad profesional, identidad afectiva e identidad técnica. La identidad profesional está relacionada con la autoridad epistémica y deóntica de los docentes. La identidad afectiva se refleja en la forma en que los profesores negocian las relaciones interpersonales con los estudiantes. La identidad técnica se destaca cuando los profesores mencionan el entorno tecnológico o su (in) capacidad en ese entorno. Estas identidades se construyen a través de diferentes prácticas discursivas, como las prácticas de referencia de personas y los actos de habla. Este estudio también arroja resultados interesantes sobre los vínculos y las luchas de las identidades de los docentes en un entorno pedagógico en línea. Esperamos que pueda proporcionar algunas ideas para la formación y educación docente actual en China.

Palabras clave: trabajo; identidad; identidad docente; prácticas discursivas; enseñanza en línea.

摘要：在线课堂为教师的身份工作提供了"独特而不可或缺"的场所。本论文旨在研究在线课堂教学互动中教师的身份建构类型及话语策略。我们录制了中国某高校外国语学院4位资深教师6小时的线上教学互动作为研究语料。研究发现，在线教师在教学互动过程中主要建构了三类身份：专业身份、情感身份和技术身份。专业身份与教师的"认知和道义权威"相关、情感身份聚焦师生关系建构、技术身份关乎教师对技术环境和能力的认知。身份建构通过人称指示实践以及言语行为等各类话语实践实现。研究也发现网络教学语境下教师各类身份的相互关联与竞争。我们希望本研究能为在线教师培训带来启示。

[关键词] 身份工作；教师身份；话语实践；在线教学

1. Introduction

The past few decades have seen increasing interest in how participants do identity-work in social interaction in the fields of sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics (Antaki & Weddicome, 1998; Chen, 2013,

2018; De Fina et al., 2006; Tracy & Robbles, 2013; Yuan, 2020). In applied linguistics, language teacher identity also represents an "emergent field" increasingly attracting scholarly attention (Barkhuizen, 2017; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Varghese et al., 2016). The types of language teacher identity explored include professional identity (Nagatomo, 2012), non-native speaker identity (Park, 2012), and multilingual identity (Canagarajah, 2017), to list just a few. However, most of these studies focus on teacher identities in traditional F2F (face-to-face) teachings, few of which have examined those in online instructions. One possible reason is that F2F instruction still constitutes the primary teaching model, while online teaching is a new model attempted by some pioneering educators.

However, with the globally spreading of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) from the end of the year 2019, F2F teaching has undergone significant changes due to university closures. Teachers, old or young, expert or novice, are all required to deliver online instructions to their students. As a result, in the spring semester of the year 2020, online classrooms have replaced the traditional ones as the primary teaching sites. In such a new educational context, online teachers' identity-work constitutes an important topic worthy of investigating. Given this, this study explores what and how different types of teacher identities are constructed and negotiated in online teachings. We hope it could provide some insights for "how online teachers might be trained and supported" (Baren et al., 2014: 422).

2. Identity-work and discursive practices

Links between identities and discursive practices have been fully recognized and frequently investigated by scholars in multiple research fields, ranging from sociolinguistics to discourse analysis and pragmatics. Scholars investigate how participants' identities shape their language use (Labov, 1966; Lakoff, 1975) or focus on how talk constructs participants' identities (Chen, 2012, 2018; Tracy & Robles, 2013). All these studies could be put under an umbrella term "identity-work", defined as "the process through which talk makes available to participants and observers who the people doing the talk must be" (Tracy & Robles, 2013: 7). Tracy and Robles (2013) further link identities and discursive practices. According to them, "discursive practices are talk activities that people do" (ibid: 25). They have made it clear that: "A discursive practice may refer to a small piece of talk (person referencing practices), or it may focus on a large one (narratives); it may focus on single features that may be named and pointed to (speech

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acts); or it may reference sets of features (dialect, stance). Discursive practices may focus on something done by an individual (style), or they may refer to actions that require more than one party (genre)" (ibid). Table 1 summarizes these different types of discursive practices:

Table 1: Types of discursive practices (Tracy & Robles, 2013: 26)

Discursive practices	Description
Talk's building blocks	
Person-referencing practices	Words used to address others and refer to self/others
Speech acts	Social acts performed through talk, including criticizing, informing, praising, directing
Sight and sound of speech	Gestures, facial expressions, use of objects while talking Dialect; ways of using one's voice (loudness, rate, pitch quality)
Interaction structures	Expected ways to pair utterances, rules about taking turns
Language selection	The meaning of choosing a language, switching between codes, or embedding phrases from another language in a dominant one
Complex discourse practices	
Style	A set of talk features that go together signaling a kind of identity
Stance	An attitude toward a topic or conversational partner conveyed through linguistic, vocal, and gestural means
Narrative	Structure, content, and style of stories
Genre	Discourse activities that involve an ordered set of speech acts and distinctive vocabularies

Tracy and Robles (2013) then identify the relationship between discursive practices and a person's identity and consider it to be a reciprocal one. On the one hand, "the identities a person brings to an interaction influence how one communicates". On the other hand, "the specific discursive practices a person chooses will shape who he or she is taken to be and who the partner is taken to be" (27). Informed by Tracy and Robles' (2013) analyses, Chen (2013, 2018) proposes a novel concept of "pragmatic identity". For him, identity studies in pragmatics should distinguish themselves from those in sociology, social psychology, or sociolinguistics. The types of identities attracting pragmatic scholars are not participants' existing and stable master identities or personal

identities. Instead, these are the identities used, activated, made salient, or even denied, by participants in interactions. Chen (2013) constructs a framework to analyze the dynamic choice and discursive construction of participants' pragmatic identity in communication. He argues that two aspects are crucial in the analysis of pragmatic identity: (1) the dynamic choice of participants' identities motivated by specific communicative needs, and (2) the discursive practices related to identity-work.

In this article, we concentrate our analysis on the "pragmatic identities" constructed by online teachers. Specifically, we combine Tracy and Robles' (2013) and Chen's (2013, 2018) discussions on identity-work. We argue that teachers have various social roles and personal identities before entering online classroom interactions. As soon as they enter classroom interactions, they choose to make salient some of their social roles or personal characteristics for their communicative need of teaching effectively. Their identity-work is closely related to and finally reflected in their discursive practices. As such, the present study addresses the following two research questions: (1) What types of teacher identity are made salient in online interactions? (2) How are these identities constructed discursively?

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

In this study, we adopt a discourse analysis method to examine data collected from online classroom interactions between four university language teachers and their students at a local Chinese university. These four teachers, including two males and two females, are all in their middle ages, have rich experience in delivering the F2F courses of linguistics and language teaching, but are not very familiar with the technology/devices-required online teachings. Due to the spreading of COVID-19, this university required all teachers to provide online teachings. The data were collected when these four teachers conducted their first online teachings in the early March of 2020. Their online courses include Cognitive Linguistics, Comparative Education, English Linguistics, and English Teaching. They use English as the primary teaching language, but there are some cases where the teachers shift to Chinese for a more precise explanation. Altogether 6h online classroom interactions are audio-recorded and then transcribed to word, with a total word number of 56,246. Besides these audio-recorded data, some teachers occasionally use online chatrooms to interact with the

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students. These interactive data are also examined in our study. Table 2 presents the detailed information of the four teachers:

Table 2: Participants' information

Teachers	Gender	Course	Hours of teaching	Words of transcripts
Teacher A	Male	Cognitive Linguistics	1.5	13,192
Teacher B	Male	Comparative Education	1	7,384
Teacher C	Female	English Linguistics	2	18,681
Teacher D	Female	English Teaching	1.5	16,989

3.2. Data analysis

Data analysis of this study consists of two steps. In the first step, we judged teachers' identities constructed in their online classroom interactions. We referred to the literature on online teachers' roles and identities and summarized the possible types of online teacher identities. According to the research, though the traditional roles of teachers in F2F teachings can be transferred to the online teaching environment, "the affordances and limitations of the new learning setting require teachers to adapt to new roles for creating effective and meaningful learning experiences"(Coppola et al., 2002; McShane, 2004). Scholars in distance education provide different categories for online teachers' roles and identities, summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Identities associated with online teaching
(adapted from Baren et al., 2011: 428)**

Studies	Online teachers' identities
Guasch et al. (2010)	Design, social, instructive, technological, management
Bawane & Spector (2009)	Professional, pedagogical, social, evaluator, administrator
Berge (2009)	Pedagogical, social, managerial, technical
Varvel (2007)	Administrative, personal, technological, instructional, pedagogical, assessment, social roles
Coppola et al. (2002)	Cognitive, affective, managerial

These categories are insightful for our study. However, some types of identities overlap in terms of their content and functions, thus rendering it

hard to provide a clear-cut line between similar categories. For example, professional identity might overlap with pedagogical or instructional identities. A teacher can construct him/herself as either a pedagogical professional or an instructional professional. Despite this, these categories can still give some hints for our judgment of online teacher identities. Inferred by these categories, we then examined the main topics selected and typical behaviors performed by online teachers to form our judgment of their identity types. We do not attempt to provide an exhaustive description of online teacher identities but focus on the most salient ones in online teachings. In the process, we found three remarkable types of teacher identity: professional identity, affective identity, and technical identity. Professional identity is related to online teachers' skills and competence in teaching their courses (Baren et al., 2011). The main topic is knowledge/information-related, and the typical behaviors include questioning the students and evaluating their performance. Affective identity means teachers' maneuvering different linguistic/non-linguistic tools to promote friendly relationships with their students (Coppola et al., 2002). The main topic is relationship-oriented, and the typical behaviors include chatting, greeting, or joking. Technical identity means teachers' mentioning, evaluating, and analyzing the technology environment in online teachings (Berge, 2009). The main topic is technology-related, and the typical behaviors include talking about and evaluating the advantages or disadvantages of new technology. The criteria for judging these three identities are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Criteria for judging different identities

Identity types	Features	Typical topics	Typical behaviors
Professional identity	Related to teachers' skills & competence	Knowledge/information-related	Questioning the students, evaluating performance
Affective identity	Related to teacher & student relationship	Relationship-oriented	Chatting, greeting, joking
Technical identity	Related to technological environment	Technology-related	Mentioning & evaluating the new technology

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In the second step, we described the discursive practices the online teachers used to do identity-work. Informed by Karen and Robles' (2013) and Chen's (2018) analyses of identity-related discursive practices and their lexico-grammatical realizations, we focus on how different online teacher identities are constructed and negotiated in and through discourse. Considering the multimodality feature of online communication, when analyzing the discursive practices, some non-verbal symbols, including emoticons, are also analyzed. Finally, when reporting the findings, we don't use the teachers' real names to protect their privacy.

4. Research findings

In this section, we mainly present findings on how three different types of online teacher identities, including professional identity (4.1), affective identity (4.2), and technical identity (4.3), are activated, highlighted and constructed in and through teacher-student interaction in online teachings. In section 4.4, we also discuss how different identities are interlinked and struggling with each other.

4.1. Activating the default identity as professional teachers

Richards (2006) proposes that traditional pedagogical and professional identity constitutes teachers' "default identity" in classroom teachings. For most students in the class, teachers are professional instructors with reliable sources of information, and transmitting knowledge is the required task for professional teachers in classroom teachings. Professional identity is closely related to teachers' epistemic and deontic authority (Heritage, 2012). In online instructions, teachers' epistemic authority is realized through the choice of different discursive practices. The most remarkable ones include the choice of "words used to address others and refer to self/ others (person-referencing practices)," and speech acts, including praising, informing, and criticizing.

Person-referencing practices are frequently used in online teachings. These practices are realized on the lexical level through personal pronouns, address terms, or identity labels. Excerpt 1 provides an example to illustrate the use of these practices for identity-work.

Excerpt 1

When we, the teachers, have class..., well, you know, I was once a teacher of the Integrated Course of English. At that time, I often taught

<u>the students, just like you,</u> how to memorize the English words. It is closely related to Morphology. How to form a word, how to create a compound word, or how to change a noun into its adjective form, all these, <u>you as English majors</u> should get familiar with. (English Linguistics)

Excerpt 1 is a piece of teacher talk in the beginning part of the introductory course of English Linguistics. In this excerpt, Teacher C introduces one of the principal branches of Linguistics, Morphology, to students. She first refers to herself as "we, the teachers", with the combination of the first personal pronouns "we" and the identity label "the teachers". As Cramer (2010: 620) explains, personal pronouns can be used by speakers to "create, recreate, and make visible specific identities in real-time". Rounds (1987) finds that the first personal pronoun "we" is the most frequently used pronouns by all the teachers, and has different "semantic mappings". The exclusive "we" (I and they) is usually used by experts to highlight their professional identities (Planken, 2005). Based on these analyses, we argue that the exclusive "we" in this excerpt is related to this teacher's professional identity as one member of the university's teaching staff. Besides, the identity label "the teachers" further clarify the speakers' default identity. Following the first clause, the teacher then repairs her discourse and shifts to storytelling. In her story, she directly mentions she was once "a teacher of the Integrated Course of English", which offers her the legitimate right to talk about the relationship between vocabulary teaching and the study of Morphology. Besides, she uses an identity label to describe the hearers, "the students, just like you", and "you as the English majors", mentioning the hearers' identities as students and language learners, thus making salient her teacher identity relative to the students.

Besides the person-referencing practices, the choice of assertive, evaluative, and directive speech acts is closely related to teachers' professional identities. The assertive speech acts are used when teachers transmit expert knowledge, usually "the knowledge of the specific subject and the content teachers are required to teach" (König et al, 2016: 321). For example:

Excerpt 2

Let me <u>clearly</u> tell you <u>it is the second syllable that</u> receives stress. 'Cognition'. The adjective form is called 'cognitive, so the stress is, <u>undoubtedly</u>, the syllable, which is to the initial or the beginning. (Cognitive Linguistics)

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Teacher A in Excerpt 2 teaches the students the correct pronunciation of the word "cognitive". He uses assertive speech acts, plus some boosters, the type of metadiscourse to convey the speakers' high degree of certainty on the information communicated (Hyland, 2018). In the first assertive speech act, an emphatic structure "it is … that" is used, plus the booster "clearly", implying that the speaker has a high degree of certainty in the knowledge that "the second syllable receives stress". In the second assertive speech act, the speaker conveys what he knows about the "adjective form" and the "stress" to the students. A logical structure is used, showing that he has a good reason and good logic in the process of teaching these ideas. Similarly, the speaker also uses a booster "undoubtedly" to show he has full confidence in the proposition. Through the use of assertive speech acts and boosters, Teacher A emphasizes his epistemic authority, thus constructing his identity as a professional teacher.

The directive speech acts are used together with the deontic modality to convey that the teachers have the right and authority to ask the students to participate in discussions and complete some tasks. Here is another example:

Excerpt 3

<u>We students must understand these linguistic concepts</u>. Since all of us are students majoring in English teaching, we will teach them in the future. So <u>we need to learn these concepts</u>. <u>We should learn them well.</u> First of all, <u>you should know</u> what the definition of linguistics is. Come on! Please show me the answer! (Cognitive Linguistics)

In Excerpt 3, teacher performs the directive speech acts to require the students "to understand" the linguistic concepts, "to learn" these concepts well, and to answer her questions. Directive speech acts are intrinsically Face-Threatening Acts (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Though the speaker uses the inclusive first personal pronoun "We" to include both participants, he uses the deontic modal verbs, including "must", "need" and "should", to produce a rather authoritative tone in performing the directive speech acts. Deontic modality, or modulation in Halliday's (1985) term, conveys a degree of obligation. It has been divided into three categories based on its degree of obligation: the low-degree, the medium-degree, and the higher-degree category. "Must" and "need" is a modal verb in the high-degree category, used to convey the requirement to the addressee. "Should" is a medium-degree modality, used to emphasize the addressees' obligation. In this extract, Teacher A emphasizes the requirements and obligations for

the students, implying that he has the authority and legitimate identity to set the requirements and obligations. As such, the professional identity is made salient through constructing his deontic power.

Online teachers' professional identity is also conveyed through their evaluative speech acts. Teachers perform evaluative speech acts in different ways. They might make a positive or negative evaluation of the teaching content, methods, and materials to highlight their expertise in the subjects they teach (Excerpt 4). They might also assess the students' performance in class (Excerpt 5).

Excerpt 4

If you are interested in Linguistics, I recommend an excellent textbook. *Practical Course of English Linguistics*, by Professor Chen Xinren, really an excellent book in Linguistics worthy of reading. Besides, other books by Professor Dai Weidong, Professor Ding Yanren are also recommendable. (English Linguistics)

Excerpt 5

All the exercises are well-done. You have really done an excellent job. Most of you could answer all the questions quite correctly. That's terrific! (English Teaching)

Teachers in both excerpts perform the evaluative speech acts in their discourse. Teacher C in Excerpt 4 positively evaluates some textbooks on Linguistics. She uses the evaluative adjectives with positive meanings, including "excellent", "worthy of reading" and "recommendable". By doing so, she puts herself in a relatively higher degree of epistemic stance to make the assessment. Besides these adjectives, the boosters like "very" and "really" are used to emphasize the certainty of her positive evaluation. With these resources, Teacher C constructs herself as a professional member not only in language teaching but also in linguistic research. Teacher D in Excerpt 5 gives a positive evaluation of her students' after-class exercises. The evaluative expressions include the adjectives "well-done", "good" and "terrific", as well as the adverb "correctly". The boosters like "really" and "quite" are used to emphasize the degree of teacher's positive assessment. In both excerpts, the teachers give off the impression that they are professional, either in their subject or in the competence to assess students' performance.

4.2. Highlighting the affective identity as in-groupers

Affective identity constitutes another salient identity in online teachings. It refers to teachers' roles related to building, maintaining, and

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improving teacher-student relationships in a virtual space (Guasch et al., 2010). Scholars have argued that online teachers can no longer rely on sensory skills like facial expression, eye contact, and gestures to establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with students (Major, 2010: 2184). Therefore, taking on the affective identity becomes exceptionally essential for the nurturing of good interpersonal relationships. Affective identity is also constructed through person-referencing practices and speech acts. Some small stories and jokes can also work to build online teachers' affective identity.

Person-referencing practices related to affective identity include the choice of inclusive "we", endearment terms or nick terms, and the identity labels indicating in-group relationship, such as "小朋友们/my little friends", "孩子们/my kids" and "girls and boys". For example:

Excerpt 6

如果咱对语用学感兴趣的话，后期也可以去专门找些这方面的书来读。还有就是这后面的练习，exercises，咱要去做，那大家还有其他什么问题？I'm waiting for your questions. If no, let's say goodbye. (English Linguistics)

If we are interested in pragmatic studies, we can look for some related books to read. And, the after-class exercises, exercises, we should practice. Do you have any other questions? I'm waiting for your questions. If no, let's say goodbye. (English Linguistics)

In Excerpt 6, the speaker (Teacher C) shifts codes between Chinese and English. The plural form of the first personal pronoun "咱/we" is used to include both herself and the students. "咱" is an inclusive use of "we" (Rounds, 1987). With this person-referencing practice, Teacher C implies that the students are not alone learning Pragmatics. Instead, she will be together to pursue further study and complete the after-class exercises as well. "Let's" in the last part of the teacher talk is also the inclusive use. Through the choice of inclusive "we", Teacher C puts herself in the same group as the students, thus constructing her affective identity as one of the students' peers.

Besides the strategical use of the plural form of the first personal pronouns either in Chinese or in English, the online teachers sometimes use intimate address terms like "小朋友们/my little friends", "孩子们/my kids", and "boys and girls". In some classes, the teachers even choose to use the nickname or endearment name to address the students. All these person-referencing practices help to give off an intimate atmosphere in a sober teaching environment. Teacher C in our data is good at such kind of labels in her interactions with the students. Some examples are as follows:

Excerpt 7

Hello, <u>boys and girls</u>, welcome to my online course on English Linguistics!

Hi, <u>my kids</u>, can you hear me?

You have really done an excellent job in your after-class exercises, <u>my little friends</u>!

<u>李哥</u>，你来回答一下这个问题！/<u>Bro Li</u>, would you please answer this question? (English Linguistics)

In Excerpt 7, the teacher uses different addressing terms to shorten interpersonal distance with students. She addresses her students as "boys and girls", "my kids" and "my little friends", presenting herself as an "affectionate senior family member" to the students. In the last line, we note that she addresses the student with the nickname "李哥/Bro Li", which attracts laughter from students with a humorous effect, consequently constructing her affective identity as students' peers and friends.

The types of speech acts related to online teachers' affective identity construction are mainly expressives, used to express teachers' care, concern, and feelings towards their students. A typical example in our data is teacher D's online interaction in her course of English teaching.

Excerpt 8

After two periods of class, you have to attend my online course. <u>You might be very tired after staring at the screens</u>. Now you should try to adapt yourself to the new learning mode. <u>I know your shoulders and eyes might be aching. I feel uncomfortable on the shoulders and eyes. How tired you are by staring at the screens for such a long time!</u> (English Teaching)

In Excerpt 8, Teacher D expresses her empathy for the students who have to attend the online courses on a daily base. She uses the exclamatory structure in the end to express her feeling, "How tired you are by staring at the screens for such a long time!" The empathetic strategy works to aid the expression of Teacher D's emotion. She first expresses her concerns about the students using the sentence, "You might be very tired after staring at the screens." In this sentence, she presupposes her understanding of the students and knowing that they have kept staring at the screen for a long time. Besides, she uses the modal verb "might" to project her guess about the students being tired. Following this, she implicitly suggests the students try their best to adapt to this new learning model. Then, by appealing to her suffering, she strategically puts herself and the students in the same boat, conveying to the students that "I know your suffering because I am suffering too". Through these strategies in the expressive speech act,

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the teacher constructs her affective identity as being sympathetic to the students.

Apart from the person-referencing practices and speech acts, online teachers also appeal to small stories or humorous jokes to shorten the psychological distance between students and teachers. Here is an interaction between Teacher B and his students in the chatroom:

Excerpt 9

Student 1: 老师，我的网有点卡

Sir, my net doesn't work well.

Teacher B: @Student 1 欢迎随时进来瞅瞅

@Student 1 Welcome to come and have a look at any time

Student 1: 大家听得清楚吗

Can you guys hear clearly?

Student 2: 不是特别清楚 杂音好重

Not very clearly, quite a lot of noises

Teacher B: 不是，这个人有口音，四川话

Not the noises. This guy has an accent, Sichuan dialect

Teacher B: 练好四川话，走遍天下都不怕 😁😁😁😁

You can travel anywhere without fear if you learn Sichuan dialect well. (Comparative Education) 😁😁😁😁

In this chatroom interaction, Teacher B's affective identity is made salient through his humorous expressions and emoticons. In the first turn, one student explains to the teacher that his technology does not work well. Teacher B uses a funny greeting to relax his discomfort, "欢迎随时进来瞅瞅/Welcome to come and have a look at any time." The behavior of "进来瞅瞅" is not typical behavior expected for students attending the classroom. The mismapping of the teacher's utterance and the expected students' behavior in class renders the teacher's talk "laughable" (Norrick & Chiaro, 2009), which helps reduce the anxiety of the student who cannot attend the online class on time. A further "laughable" falls in the last turn when the teacher comments on the speaker's Sichuan accent in the video clip. The teacher's utterance "You can travel anywhere without fear if you learn Sichuan dialect well" plus the funny intonation, and the emoticon (😁 😁😁😁), renders the atmosphere relaxed and light for the students in the online classroom. All these practices, linguistic and non-linguistic, function together to construct Teacher B's affective identity.

4.3. Negotiating the technical identity as "newbies"

The roles and competencies of online teachers vary depending on the context in which online teaching occurs (Baren et al., 2011). Among all the

skills of online teachers, technology-related competencies constitute new challenges for teachers accustomed to the F2F teaching model (Egan & Akdere, 2005). In our data, none of these four teachers are skillful computer users. Consequently, in their first online teachings, they find themselves, more or less, trapped in some technological problems. As such, we can find one type of identity typical in the online teaching environment, the teachers' identity as technological newbies.

Person-referencing practices adopted to construct teachers' technical identity include the identity labels such as "菜鸟/newbie", "电脑小白/computer idiot" and "新手/rookie", plus the singular form of the first personal pronoun "我/I". There is such an identity label in Excerpt 10:

Excerpt10

我的这个屏幕分享怎么不成功的？你们能看见吗？啊？看不见啊？怎么回事啊？哎，抱歉抱歉，我是个菜鸟啊，第一次使用这个腾讯会议室。哪位高手帮我解释一下是怎么回事啊？(English Linguistics)

Why can't I share the screen with you? Can you see my screen? No? Why? Sorry, I am a newbie, and it's the first time for me to use this Tencent Conference Room. Any computer expert to tell me what's wrong? (English Linguistics)

In Excerpt 10, teacher C explicitly mentions her identity as a technological newbie. She first poses a question on her sharing of the screen. Then she expresses "sorry" for her failure to share the screen, following which she uses an identity-label "菜鸟/newbie" to refer to herself, making salient her identity as a technological newbie. Finally, the teacher assigns an identity label "高手/computer expert" to her students, putting herself in a position to be helped by the expert. With all these person-referencing practices, Teacher C constructs her disadvantaged technical identity in this excerpt.

This technology-specific identity is also made salient by choosing different speech acts, including informal apologizing, complaining, and evaluating, among which apologizing is most frequently used. In the above Excerpt 10, the teacher also performs an apologizing speech act, though informally, by saying "sorry" explicitly to her students for her failure in sharing her screen with them. Excerpt 11 is another example:

Excerpt 11

How do you understand the nature of language? You see, all right. (2.5) Oh, my! Why can't I... A little bit out of order. <u>It seems not to be at my proposal. Sorry for that, I am not familiar with the conference function. Any volunteer?</u> (Cognitive Linguistics)

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In Excerpt 11, the teacher poses a question about "the nature of language" for the students. Then, there comes a 2.5-second pause, followed by an uncompleted question about his computer "Why can't I...". Then, he uses the phrase "a little bit out of control" to explain to the students for his uncompleted question, informing the students of his computer failure. However, he also uses the hedge "a little bit" to weaken the problem, hoping to reduce the possible negative image brought by his inability in computer use. The sentence "It seems not to be at my proposal" is used by the teacher to confess his technological disadvantage. Though being the case, he still struggles to protect his positive image as a professional in class with the use of the hedged structure "it seems not to be...". After these acts, he informally comes to the apology, with the use of "sorry" instead of the strong performative verb "apologize", followed by a confession that he is "not familiar with the conference function". The lexical choice of "not familiar with" is quite impressive. When experiencing the computer breakdown, teacher B does not choose the predicates related to his ability or competence, but those with inexperience. This choice indicates that safeguarding professional identity as competent teachers are considered especially important. Even when the teachers could not handle the technology, he still refuses to admit his incompetence. This example better illustrates the possible identity struggles (Van de Mieroops & Schnurr, 2017) in the online pedagogical context.

4.4. Interlinks and struggles of different identities

In the previous three sections, we examine how teachers construct their professional, affective, and technical identities in online pedagogical environment. We also notice that none of these three identities of online teachers are constructed in isolation. Instead, they are interlinked and sometimes struggling with each other for some specific purposes. As is shown in Excerpt 10, the teacher's technical identity is interlinked with her affective identity. She refers to herself as a "菜鸟/rookie" to activate her identity as a technological newbie. At the same time, she uses the informal discourse style to align herself to the students, presenting her affective intimacy towards her students. In Excerpt 11, though the teacher's identity as a technological newbie is activated, the teacher still tries various discursive practices to safeguard his professional identity. A more typical example is as follows:

Excerpt 12

In today's online course, there are <u>indeed</u> many problems. First, our computer devices don't work well, and <u>then I am a computer idiot</u>. <u>We are</u>

<u>required to teach online so suddenly, and we don't even know how to use these devices</u>. One of the disadvantages of this platform is that we cannot see the students, and we don't know anything about the students. The students cannot talk. If you have something to talk about, we can try the WeChat. Anyway, we have to adapt ourselves to online education. It is a trend. (English Teaching)

Teacher D uses different discursive practices to construct a technical identity. She labels herself as a "computer idiot" after she points out the technology-related problems. Then, by saying that "we are required to teach online so suddenly, and we don't even know how to use these devices," the teacher performs a complaining speech act implicitly. This implicit complaining is made salient by using the adverbial phrase "so suddenly," implying that the university should provide training or at least give teachers time to familiarize themselves with online technology. After complaining, she continues to perform two evaluative speech acts, and both are technology-related, which further makes salient her technical identity. Meanwhile, the choice of evaluative acts also works to construct the speaker's professional identity as an expert teacher who has the right and ability to make an assessment on the (dis)advantages of online education. As such, both the newbie and the professional identities are negotiated through the combined use of different discursive practices.

Besides, there are some cases where all the three identities of online teachers are activated simultaneously. Excerpt 13 is such an example:

Excerpt 13

Morphology到底研究什么呢？我们<u>必须要</u>弄清楚。Here comes the definition: study how these symbols are combined to form words has constituted the branch of study called Morphology.<u>很显然，</u>形态学<u>就是</u>关于单词的构成的。我举一个例子，这个词，international。<u>咱们</u>看看还能有一个<u>电子白板</u>出来。好，<u>小朋友们</u>一起看一下啊。(English Linguistics)

What on earth does Morphology study? We must be clear about it. Here comes the definition: the study of how these symbols are combined to form words has constituted the branch of study called Morphology. Obviously, morphology is about word-formation. I give you an example, the word 'international'. Let's see whether we can find a whiteboard. Good. Now, my little friends, look at the whiteboard. (English Linguistics)

In Excerpt 13, all three identities are made salient when Teacher C explains the definition of "Morphology" to the students. Starting with a rhetoric question, she emphasizes that "Morphology" is a concept that "we must be clear about". The high-degree modal verb "必须要/must" and the systemic definition of "Morphology", convey Teacher C's professional

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image. The booster "很显然/obviously" in the subsequent sentence is used to promote her professional identity further. To aid students' understanding, Teacher C then gives an example to illustrate. Her mentioning the "whiteboard" indicates her awareness of the technological environment. Her uncertainty of finding a "whiteboard" shows that she is not familiar with this teaching platform. Thus, the identity of a technological newbie is constructed here. Accompanying the professional and technical identities, Teacher C's use of the inclusive "咱们/we" and the endearment address "小朋友们/my little friends" in her last few sentences also make salient her affective identity. Thus in this excerpt, all these three identities are activated, building a relaxed online environment for students to learn professional knowledge.

From the above excerpts, we can safely conclude that identity construction in online teachings constitutes a complex event where different identities are interrelated and sometimes struggling. Thus, "identity struggle" not only happens in the offline workplace (Van de Mieroops and Schnurr, 2017) but in virtual workplaces such as online classrooms.

5. Conclusion

Our analyses find that when delivering teachings online, teachers mainly construct three different identities: the default identity as professional teachers, the affective identity as students' friends and peers, and the technical identity as newbies. The construction of each identity is realized through different person-referencing practices and speech acts. Professional identity is constructed through the use of exclusive "we", identity labels such as "teacher" and "students", and assertive, evaluative, and directive speech acts. Affective identity is activated by choosing inclusive "we", intimate addressing terms, endearment names, and expressive speech acts and humorous jokes. Technical identity is made salient through the use of such identity labels as "newbie", "computer idiot", and "rookie", and apologizing, complaining, and evaluative speech acts. Other practices like epistemic modality and deontic modality, small stories, and jokes also function in the process of online teacher identity construction.

The study also yields interesting findings on the interlinks and struggles of teachers' identities in an online pedagogical environment. The teachers might use professional identity to repair the disadvantaged image as a technological newbie, activate affective identity to relax the

professional atmosphere, or combine all the three to offer a relaxed online environment for transmitting expert knowledge.

This investigation is insightful for teacher training and education in China. Overall, the current trend toward online teaching brings more challenges for many teachers in China. These teachers are expected to go beyond mere competence in the traditional F2F teachings. As a result, they need to train their new skills and expertise in online technologies (Koehler & Mishra, 2005). Through the integration of online technologies into pedagogical ideas and methods, teachers can handle better in negotiating their proper identities in an online teaching environment.

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