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The Identities of Language-Trained Content-Based Teachers: An Underexplored Community of Practice

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Content-based instruction (CBI) is defined as "a curricular and instructional approach in which nonlinguistic content is taught to students through the medium of a language that they are learning as a second, heritage, indigenous, or foreign language" (Tedick & Cammarata, 2012, p. S28). Content-based courses have two aims: the cultivation of students' language proficiency and the exploration or mastery of non-linguistic content (e.g., biology or other school subjects, cultural studies). CBI is practiced in a variety of second language contexts in the US and abroad, notably in immersion (one-way and two-way), bilingual education, and English as a second language (Lyster, 2011; see also Met's [1998] "continuum of CBI" and Christian's [2011] "dual language umbrella"). Many researchers have demonstrated CBI's effectiveness, e.g. Lindholm-Leary (2011) in the context of a US two-way Chinese immersion program and Cumming and Lyster (2016) in the context of a US high school French class.

From an identity perspective, enacting CBI invites teachers to conceive of themselves as both content *and* language teachers. However, research has shown that teachers who work in content-based settings largely see themselves as either content *or* language teachers (see, e.g., Tan, 2011). This bifurcation is arguably related to the curricula of teacher preparation programs, which tend to emphasize one of these domains over the other, depending on context. For example, ACTFL's (2013) *Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers*, which encode the knowledge and skills base for aspiring foreign language teachers in the US, address language and culture much more than content from other school subject areas.

Research conducted to date on the identities of content-based teachers has focused almost exclusively on those who were ostensibly content-trained, i.e., educated in programs that put a primary emphasis on subject-area content. It is important, however, to also understand how those who were language-trained, i.e., educated in programs that put a primary emphasis on language and culture, process the content-associated demands placed on their identities as CBI practitioners. Such research can inform the conceptualization of professional development opportunities geared toward helping language-trained teachers more successfully and comfortably enact CBI.

Literature Review

Identity Construction within Communities

In educational settings, especially at the K–12 level, it is common for teachers to gather for professional development purposes in groups called professional learning communities (PLCs). Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas (2006) define PLCs as "group[s] of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way" (p. 223, citing the work of Mitchell & Sackney, 2000 and Toole & Louis,

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2001). Reichstetter (2006) characterizes PLCs through a list of major themes: 1) shared mission, vision, values and goals, 2) commitment to continuous improvement, 3) collaborative culture, 4) collective inquiry, 5) supportive and shared leadership, 6) supportive conditions, and 7) results orientation. As these definitions indicate, a PLC must not only engender changes in participants' teaching practices, but also enhance student learning in order to be considered effective (Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). In other words, simply gathering in groups without structured goals and strategies is not sufficient.

PLCs may also constitute what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) call communities of practice (CoPs), or "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). CoPs exist in a variety of fields (e.g., business, government, education) and have three principal characteristics: the domain (a shared area of interest), the community, (engagement in group activities), and the practice (a "shared repertoire of resources") (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). In regard to the community, it is important to note that "having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). That is, members of communities must connect with each other and learning must occur for a group to be considered a CoP. CoPs exist at a variety of levels, both locally (e.g., foreign language teachers in a particular school) and on a larger scale (e.g., foreign language teachers in a specific country).

The robust theoretical framework elaborated around CoPs by Lave & Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) contends that learning within a CoP involves not only engaging in the shared practices of the CoP, but also negotiating an identity in relation to the CoP. According to Wenger (1998), "the formation of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities" (p. 149), and identity construction should be considered "in terms of all the learning involved in entering a community of practice" (p. 155). Identity construction is thus considered to be a principally social phenomenon that represents, in line with post-modern conceptualizations of language teacher identity, a "constant becoming" (Varghese et al., 2005, pp. 153–154).

Analytic tools from CoP theory have been used in a handful of studies on language teachers' identities, often combined with narrative inquiry. Tsui (2007) recounted the experiences of Minfang, an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher in China who had a precarious relationship with communicative language teaching, beginning as an English learner and continuing into his first six years of English teaching. Similarly, Liu and Xu (2011, 2013) related difficulties experienced by two Chinese EFL teachers during periods of liberal pedagogical reform. In the first study, the participant moved to the periphery of the reform-based CoP, and in the second study, the participant was excluded from the CoP all together. Highlighting the "mutually constitutive relationship between identity and practice" (p. 240), Kanno and Stuart (2011) used an identities-in-practice lens (Lave, 1996; Wenger, 1998) to chronicle the experiences of two teacher candidates in a US MATESOL program. These studies demonstrate not only the socially-oriented nature of identity construction, but also ways in which identities are constructed in relation to other members in a teacher's CoP.

The Identities of Content-Based Teachers

Much like a CoP is defined by a domain, a community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), it is also defined by the identity positions expressed by its participants as they relate to the CoP. Within the array of research conducted on various phenomena related to CBI, the identity construction of teachers has received only a limited amount of attention, despite Morton's (2016) observation that "being a content and language teacher is a struggle to establish a new identity" (p. 383). As stated above, enacting CBI in many instances invites teachers to see themselves in novel ways

in relation to both language and content. To date, a handful of studies have been conducted on content-based teachers' identities, yielding several interesting themes.

First, content-based teachers' content expertise figures as part of their identities. For example, the participants in Moate's (2011) and Hüttner, Dalton-Puffer, and Smit's (2013) studies, who received formal training in their respective content areas, felt confident in their mastery of their subject matter. Second, content-based teachers appraise their language proficiency from an identity vantage point. Morton's (2016) participant expressed a need to improve his target language proficiency, while Moate's (2011) participants felt like better teachers when instructing in their native language, all while "recognis[ing] themselves as the same professionals in FL or L1-mediated teaching, or are at least confident in the maintenance of the integrity of their subject" (p. 342). Interestingly, the teachers in Moate's (2011) study saw themselves as co-experts with their students when it came to language, and students corrected their English errors in class, which teachers seemed to appreciate. (The participants in both Moate's and Hüttner et al.'s studies were teaching in their additional languages, not their first languages.)

Third, content-based teachers see themselves somewhere on a continuum when it comes to content and language integration. The fringes of this continuum are evident in Tan's (2011) study; teachers responsible for content saw themselves principally as content teachers, and teachers responsible for language saw themselves principally as language teachers. However, the participants in Cammarata and Tedick's (2012) study, three immersion teachers who saw themselves principally as content teachers, came to see themselves as more integrated over the course of a yearlong professional development experience geared toward unpacking core principles of CBI. They also exhibited divergent levels of awareness of the relationship between language and content and had difficulty determining which language forms to focus on in their teaching.

These studies characterize the identities of content-based practitioners in a wide variety of contexts: one- and two-way immersion in the U.S. (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012), English-medium instruction in Malaysia (Tan, 2011), vocational CLIL in Austria (Hüttner et al., 2013), bilingual education in Spain (Morton, 2016), and English-medium instruction in Finland (Moate, 2011). However, they were almost exclusively conducted with content-trained content-based teachers, meaning that the identity conceptualizations of language-trained content-based teachers remain under-researched.

Methods

Research Question

Based on the gaps in the literature outlined above, the following research question was designed for this study: How do language-trained foreign language instructors who are required to use CBI conceptualize their identities as content knowers and teachers?

Site

The study was conducted at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California. Serving about 700 students, the Institute offers master's degrees in internationally-focused fields, including but not limited to: International Education Management, Translation and Interpretation, International Environmental Policy, and Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies. Students spend between one and two years on campus, and immersive learning experiences are a key feature of all programs' curricula, whether in the Monterey Bay area, elsewhere in the US, or abroad. All students,

no matter their track of study, are required to take 12 credits of content-based language courses at the Intermediate Low level or above, meaning it is necessary that they possess a basic level of proficiency in their language of study before starting their degree program. The instructors for these content-based language courses, members of LIS (Language and Intercultural Studies) Program, are asked to design curricula that draws from the Institute's tracks of study, making courses as relevant as possible to students. Sample courses from the time of this study include The Middle East after the Arab Spring (Arabic), Secularism, Culture, and Identity (French), and Spanish for Social Entrepreneurship (Spanish).

PLC Participants

The researcher invited all instructors in the Institute's LIS department via email to participate in a PLC related to key issues in CBI. Seven expressed interest, yielding a healthy representation of languages offered in the program: one Arabic instructor, two Chinese instructors, one Japanese instructor, and three Spanish instructors. All were primarily language-trained. These instructors constituted the core members of the PLC, in addition to the researcher, who teaches in the Institute's language teaching program and has a background in French teaching. All participants were native speakers of their teaching languages, except for the researcher. Two of them were new to the Institute at the time of the study, while the rest had worked there for varying amounts of time. The researcher invited the PLC members to participate in the study at the same time as he organized the PLC, and all gave their consent.

As previously discussed, the PLC constituted a CoP. As a reminder, according to Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015), CoPs have three principal characteristics: domain, community, and engagement. The CoP's domain, or shared area of interest, was CBI. Orienting the CoP around CBI emerged from the LIS faculty's institutional requirement to design content-based courses, their desire to seek professional development, and the researcher's interest in the topic. The PLC itself represented the community, as it provided a space for participants to interact and share ideas, which often did not happen in their regular, siloed workdays. Finally, engagement was evident in the multitude of pedagogical practices that were discussed throughout the PLC related to CBI.

In order to maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used in this report in lieu of participants' actual names. Munira denotes the Arabic instructor, Mei and Lin the Chinese instructors, Hisako the Japanese instructor, and Valeria, Mateo, and Bruno the Spanish instructors.

PLC Procedures

The PLC met a total of ten times over the course of the academic year. Meetings were face-to-face, lasted two hours each, and were constructed around tasks designed by the researcher that were modified based on input from PLC participants. The fall meetings included the following:

- Meeting 1: setting the stage for the project
- Meetings 2 and 3: sharing group members' prior experiences with and expertise in CBI
- Meetings 4 and 5: reporting on and discussing CBI-related scholarship chosen and read by participants (e.g., Lightbown, 2014)
- Meeting 6: reporting on and discussing observations participants did of content-based classes in the community

Spring meetings were devoted to a process called Lesson Study, which the researcher chose for its potential to help participants make sense of content-based lesson planning (see Lewis & Hurd, 2011). Lesson Study is a professional development activity consisting of multiple stages: 1) teachers identify an activity or lesson that is not working as well as they would like it to; 2) they discuss the lesson as a group and propose modifications; 3) a group member teaches the lesson while the others observe; 4) the lesson is brought back to the drawing board, and further modifications are made in light of observational data; and 5) the lesson is retaught, time permitting. Lesson Study was adapted for the PLC during the spring semester like so:

- Meeting 1: getting to know the Lesson Study process by discussing the procedures in Lewis and Hurd (2011) and deciding how it would work for the PLC
- Meeting 2: presenting and voting on lesson plans to be taken up for the Lesson Study process
- Meeting 3: reviewing lesson plans with their authors and proposing modifications for reteaching
- Meeting 4: sharing out results of reteaching of modified lesson plans

Ultimately, the group adopted two lessons for the Lesson Study process during Meeting 2. In the first case, Munira chose to focus on how she assigned group work and made changes to her routinized class structure based on the PLC's feedback during Meeting 3. In the second case, Bruno added an additional grammar focus to a lesson on the rhetoric of speech giving, also based on the PLC's feedback during Meeting 3. Then, between Meetings 3 and 4, Munira and Bruno retaught their reconceptualized lessons by themselves without having the rest of the PLC observe, due to time constraints (most LIS courses were scheduled at the same time). In addition, Munira, Bruno, and the researcher had the opportunity to present the Lesson Study process at a local foreign language education conference before reconvening with the PLC in Meeting 4.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected for this study in a variety of ways, with triangulation in mind (Mathison, 1998; Patton, 2002). Methods included:

- Audio recordings of all PLC meetings
- Audio recording of the conference presentation given by Munira, Bruno, and the researcher
- Interviews at the beginning, middle, and end of the PLC conducted by the researcher with all PLC members, which were audio recorded and transcribed (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions)
- Documents shared throughout the project, such as lesson plans, the conference presentation PowerPoint, etc.

Once collected, the data were analyzed using principles of thematic coding (Baralt, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) and the software Dedoose. As a first step, the researcher read through all the data and identified segments that seemed pertinent to the research question. Then, he reread these segments and applied codes to them. Finally, he grouped these codes into themes. The themes were continually refined throughout the writing of this report.

Findings

Language, Not Content Experts

Throughout the project, participants emphasized that they were not experts in the content they were responsible for teaching. As a reminder, LIS classes were meant to align with the internationally-focused fields of study at the Institute. Mateo put it plainly while discussing the non-linguistic content of one of his courses: "One of the issues I'm facing is that I'm not an expert" (Meeting 9/19/14). Rather, participants expressed clear visions of themselves as language teachers during the PLC. For example, when describing the balance of roles in her class, Lin stated:

> So what I can do is, I give the students the sentence pattern handout, but the student who really knows about these issues was a great expert in the class, and I'm the language teacher, so we really co-operate well in that class. (Meeting 11/7/14)

Lin positioned herself in this excerpt as the primary person in the room responsible for facilitating students' learning of the target language; that is, as *the* language teacher. Conversely, she positioned her students as the content experts. Along these lines, Mei said, "You know, I've got the driver's seat but I'm not the driver of content" (Meeting 11/7/14), and Hisako said, "…at least in my case, CBI, the content doesn't come solely from me. What comes is really what the students have" (Meeting 8/28/14).

Participants also described some of their core responsibilities as language teachers through an identity lens. Munira stated:

> Keeping in mind that there are things that students will not notice and it's my job […] I don't know, but it's my job to raise the flag and say, "Please notice. Please open your eyes. Please pay attention to certain structures that are repeating themselves and make connections to other structures that you might see later on." (Interview 9/1/14)

Here, Munira highlighted promoting the noticing of linguistic forms, ostensibly within the context of interpreting authentic texts, as a key aspect of her professional role as a language teacher.

Similarly, Munira saw herself as responsible for highlighting the way language operates to express content. When describing a classroom activity, she stated:

> For ISIS [the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant], what I'm going to be doing is they will be the researchers and what I'm going to do, because it's the language of the media is, okay, how is ISIS reflected through language, for example? I'll give them different patterns and discuss, what do you see as far as different styles of writing in terms of ISIS? (Meeting 9/18/14)

For this activity, students brought accounts of ISIS in the media to class, and Munira helped them understand ways in which language was used in talking and writing about ISIS. In addition to facilitating noticing, this was another way in which Munira incorporated a focus on language into her teaching.

Appraising Expectations to be Content Experts

During the PLC, it became clear that some participants felt uneasy about assuming the identity of content expert. Hisako said, "The only time I felt comfortable doing both content and language is when I had the content expert. All the other times, I did do both but I always felt some inadequacy" (Meeting 10/16/14). In this case, she referred to a grant that allowed her as a language expert to co-teach a class along with a professor from one of the graduate degree programs, who she saw as the true content knower. Additionally, Munira saw acquiring content knowledge as a demanding expectation: "For me, right now, this is the challenging part, knowing the topic" (Interview 2/3/15).

On the other hand, some saw the need for content knowledge as a learning experience. Mateo stated:

> I didn't present myself to them as an expert in the topic. I told them it's going to be fun because I'm going to be learning with them, and I've been reading during this break a lot about the topic, and I keep reading, and it's very interesting for me, but I will still learn with them. This will be cool. We'll see how it goes. (Interview 1/29/15)

Mateo was thus energized by the opportunity to learn more about the subject of one of his courses, social entrepreneurship. Lin, who like Mateo was new to the Institute, expressed a similar feeling: "Definitely I have a really good experience here because I'm a person who really likes to learn new things" (Interview 2/6/15).

Furthermore, participants questioned whether it was necessary or even possible to be content experts. Munira asked, "to what extent can I be an expert or specialist in the field?" (Interview 2/3/15). Mateo wondered if being a content expert was in fact necessary:

> Do I need to be an expert? I don't know how I see the future. Maybe the future, I will have a job and they will find someone who's an expert who's bilingual, who can teach a class on social entrepreneurship, but he wouldn't have my experience as a learning facilitator. We're still teaching language. That's my contribution so far. (Interview 1/29/15)

Here, Mateo highlighted the principle that simply speaking a language does not qualify one to be a content-based teacher, given the dual foci of language and content in CBI. He inferred that his and his colleagues' status as language experts navigating the Institute's various content spheres may be sufficient. It is likely in this spirit that Bruno asked, "Do you think we can self-train ourselves in content so as to be confident and feel empowered enough in our classes without necessarily having to be called experts?" (Meeting 11/7/14).

Strategies for Coping with the Expectation to be Content Experts

During the PLC, participants shared strategies for coping with the expectation to be content experts. As alluded to above, one of these strategies included mining content from students. Hisako used an approach that involved "having the students take a lead of choosing whatever they want to do," as exemplified in a course she had recently taught called "Individualized Projects in Japanese" (Meeting 9/18/14). In this course, students identified which content they would like to explore related to their degree tracks. Mei took a similar approach in an upper-level Chinese course based on speech-giving.

Another strategy involved highlighting interculturality. Mei stated:

> So I just say, "You know, I've got the driver's seat but I'm not the driver of content. I ask the right question for you to give me that content but then while you give the content, I give you the intercultural aspect behind the content piece you gave me." (Meeting 11/7/14)

To Mei, the content of her classes did not consist solely of content that emanated from the Institute's various degree programs; it also included principles of intercultural communication, which she and her colleagues were in an expert position to incorporate into their curricula. Along these lines, she expressed pleasure in her department's recent name shift from "Language Studies Program" to "Language and Intercultural Studies Program."

Discussion

Framed by conceptual tools from CoP theory (Wenger, 1998), which explains how CoPs are characterized in part by the identities of their members, the present study explored the identities of language-trained content-based foreign language instructors at an internationally-focused graduate school. Over the course of an academic year, members of the PLC engaged in frequent sense-making of their identities through conversations with the researcher and with each other, in light of their institution's requirement to implement CBI. Overall, the participants expressed how they saw themselves principally as language and interculturality experts, not content experts. They also assessed the expectation for content knowledge bestowed on them as content-based teachers. Finally, they shared ways in which they coped with the expectation for content expertise.

The findings presented here dialogue with the existing literature in several ways. First, like in Tan (2011), this study's participants expressed a strong identification in alignment with their primary professional formation. Second, where the participants in Moate's (2011) study saw themselves as learners of language alongside their students, this study's participants saw themselves as learners of content. This interesting foil suggests that in content-based settings, teachers outsource knowledge of the domain for which they were not principally trained to others, e.g., students or other teachers. Such a strategy seems only natural, as teacher preparation programs generally emphasize either subject matter content *or* language, depending on the target instructional context. Third, in another interesting foil, this study's participants expressed a desire to learn more about content, the area in which they were not principally trained, similar to the participant in Morton (2016), who was principally trained in content and wanted to improve his language proficiency. No participant in this study expressed a desire to work on their language, which is not surprising, as they were all native speakers of their teaching languages.

The findings presented above point to several practical implications for content-based teachers' work lives and professional development. To begin, participants found the PLC to be highly valuable and wished that such meetings figured as part of their regular effort. They made an exceptional (and arguably unsustainable) time commitment to participate in the PLC, and it would be helpful if such effort could be supported intentionally by the administration. Next, it would be beneficial for language-trained content-based teachers in contexts like the one studied here to receive credit and/or release time to take courses in the content areas for which they are responsible. Doing so could help bolster their confidence and give them the opportunity to analyze in greater depth the language associated with the particular subject. Then, teachers who are curious about the relationship

between content and language could further explore research on counterbalance (e.g., Lyster, 2007), keeping in mind the adage "content from the beginning, language to the end" (see Ryshina-Pankova, 2011). A PLC would be an excellent mechanism for such an exploration. Finally, language teacher educators might elaborate preparation program models in which pedagogical content knowledge related to both content and language are developed synergistically throughout, from start to finish.

As with any form of research, the present study has limitations. For starters, the findings are in some ways bounded by the context (an international, policy-focused graduate school), meaning the identity construction and experiences of teachers in other contexts may unfold in divergent ways. For example, although a language-trained teacher who implements CBI in their high school French class will likely grapple with a lack of content expertise, they may not necessarily be able to turn to their students as key providers of content knowledge like the participants in this study could. Future research should explore the identity construction of language-trained content-based teachers in a variety of foreign/second language teaching contexts. Furthermore, the present study is potentially limited by the researcher's positionality, which represents a common challenge in research on teacher identity. As Akkerman and Meijer (2011) note, "[w]hen asking the teacher to answer certain questions or reflect on him or herself, the teacher always responds by anticipating what the interviewer is after" (p. 316). The researcher's interest in and shared conceptualizations of CBI as a member of the PLC may have shaped the participants' comments about their identity construction toward what they believed he wanted to hear.

Conclusions

CBI continues to gain traction around the globe due to its promising outcomes. However, teacher preparation programs in many cases have yet to adapt their curricula substantially enough to account for the multifaceted knowledge, skill, and identity demands associated with enacting CBI. Until such curricular modifications are made, rigorous PLCs can help language teachers not only build their capacity to design integrated content and language learning experiences, but also explore their identities as integrated content and language educators. In other words, well-structured PLCs can be a starting point for helping ensure that the positive benefits of CBI are accessible to as many of our world's language learners as possible.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

First Interview Questions (around September)

- How did you become familiar with CBI?
- What experiences have you had with CBI to date?
- What challenges concerning CBI are you currently tackling, if any?
- What do you feel like you do well at concerning CBI?
- Can you talk me through an ideal (to you) CBI lesson?
- What does it mean to be a CBI practitioner to you?
- How do you currently see yourself as a CBI practitioner?
- Who or what has influenced what it means to be/how you see yourself as a CBI practitioner?

Second Interview Questions (around February)

- What lessons/insights have you had about CBI so far?
- What's currently feeling challenging about CBI?
- What do you feel like you're doing well at concerning CBI?
- Is there anything you've read/observed/discussed with a colleague that's compelled you to rethink what it means to be/how you see yourself as a CBI practitioner?

Third Interview Questions (around June)

- What are the main lessons/insights you took away about CBI from this experience?
- What challenges remain for you concerning CBI?
- What do you feel like you are/have become good at concerning CBI?
- What goals concerning CBI do you have for the future?
- Can you talk me through an ideal (to you) CBI lesson?
- Do you think differently about what it means to be a CBI practitioner as a result of this project? Do you see yourself differently? If so, how?
- Who or what has influenced you the most concerning what it means to be/how you see yourself as a CBI practitioner?