Impact of L2 Proficiency on Graduate Teaching Assistants' Teacher Identities: A Proposed Study

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INTRODUCTION

At a basic level, there is an intuitive assumption that teachers should be proficient in what they teach. This issue is perhaps even more critical in second language (L2) classes when the L2 serves as both content and the medium of delivery. Not surprisingly, over 40 US States require that K-12 second language (L2) teachers must attain Advanced Low proficiency on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview in the language they teach. However, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), who teach L2 coursework at universities and colleges in North America, exist outside the jurisdiction of state requirements for teachers. This unique context provides an opportunity to understand the impact of a teacher's L2 proficiency on their language teacher identity (LTI) free from the constraints of ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

While studies have shown connections between L2 proficiency and self-reported teaching ability in K-12 contexts (see Choi & Lee 2016; Faez & Karas, 2017; Wang & Sun, 2020), and have considered L2 competency as foundational to language teacher identity (LTI; Pennington & Richards, 2016), the topic deserves more attention in the context of post-secondary language instruction.

CONCEPTS

LTIs - "The way language teachers see themselves and understand who they are in relation to the work they do. It is also the way others, including their colleagues and students and institutions, see them (Barkhuizen, 2021).
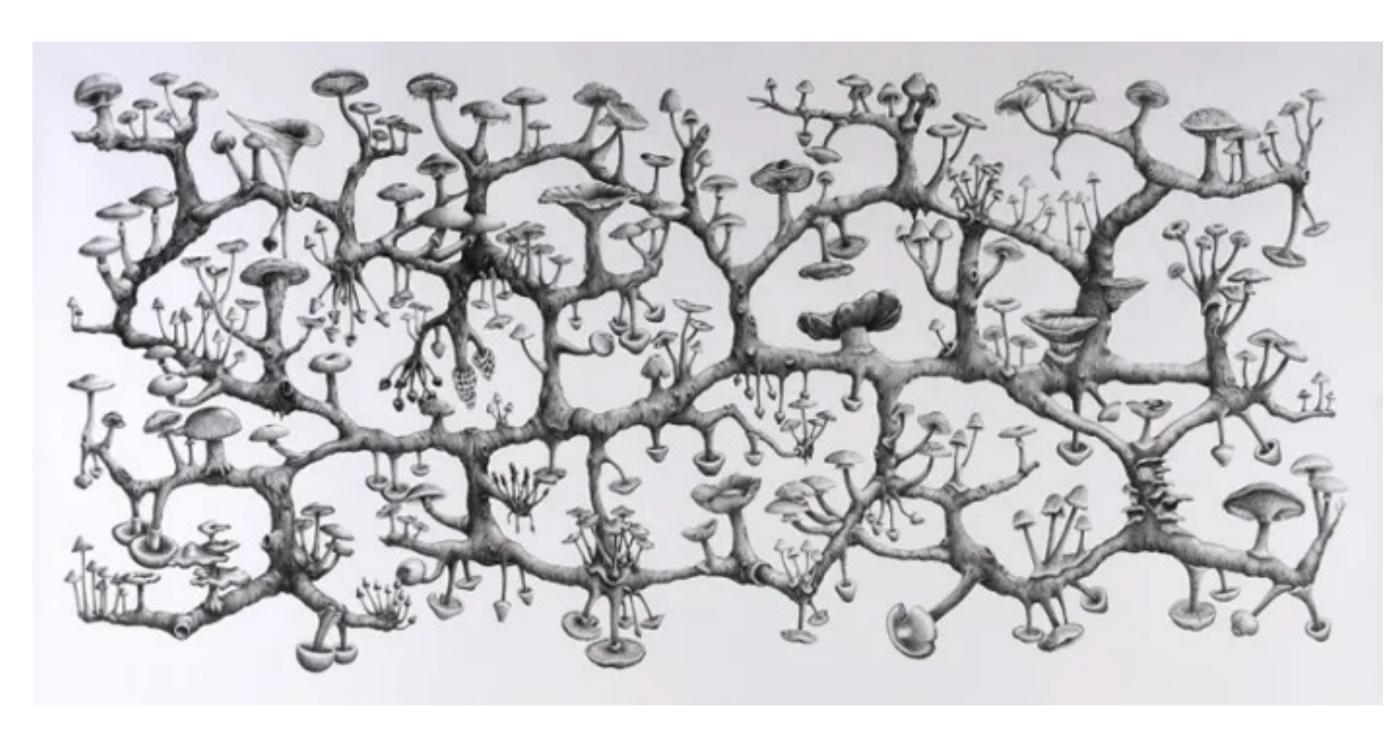
Language proficiency - An individual's ability to use language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context (ACTFL, 2012/2023).

Arborescence - Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argued that much of western knowledge and ideas from biology to linguistics have been conceptualized as being tree-like, developing linearly along pre-defined stages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described a rhizome as "assum[ing] very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers" (p. 7). This philosophical-botanical reference becomes useful to analyze identity. Identity under the lens of the rhizome becomes something that "can be connected to anything other" (p. 7) and "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows" (p. 21) or connects to some other element.

This conceptualization of identity is characterized by multiplicity, heterogeneity, motion, change, and non-determinacy and rejects singularity, unity, stagnation, changelessness, and determinacy.

Giblet, R. (2008). Mycelium rhizome.

This rhizomatic thinking also forces us to reject conceptualizations of language proficiency that relies on hierarchical categories of ever-increasing complexity (e.g., Novice Low, Intermediate high, Advanced Low, and Distinguished) while reinforcing the concept of the native speaker as the ideal.

METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to understand the impact of L2 proficiency on GTAs' LTIs. The research questions of this study are:

- How does viewing L2 proficiency through a Deleuzoguattarian lens contribute to conceptualizations of teacher identity?

- How do GTAs articulate the impact of their own L2 proficiency as part of an assemblage of language skills and experiences on their classroom practices and student language learning?

PARTICIPANTS

Participants for this study will be GTAs who are currently pursuing a graduate degree (i.e., MA or PhD) at a North American post-secondary institution in world languages, cultures, or literatures, and receive funding in exchange for service in their departments as instructors.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection could involve a variety of qualitative methods such as interviews and observations to gather rich and detailed data that captures the dynamic and evolving nature of language teacher identity.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis could involve identifying and categorizing the different elements of a teacher's assemblage of language skills and experiences. For example, language learning experiences, teaching experiences, and cultural background. Particular attention should be given to exploring the relations between elements, how they interact, and how they evolve overtime in non-linear and non-hierarchical ways. It is important to keep in mind during data analysis that the underlying assumptions of the theoretical framework is to look beyond the static and determinate notions of identity, language acquisition, and language teacher practices in the classroom.

SIGNIFICANCE

Despite GTAs teaching the majority of lower-division coursework at North American post-secondary institutions, we know very little about their individual beliefs and practices.

GTA pedagogy has implications for future K-12 WL teachers as pre-services teachers complete pedagogical content courses in language departments beginning with lower-division coursework.

GTA experiences are considered to be part of faculty early career socialization which has implications for future faculty beliefs and practices.

REFERENCES