

# A teacher-in-context: Negotiating professional identity in a job promotion examination

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*Although there is an increasing body of research on the formation/re-formation of language teacher identity, there are still contexts within the professional practice of language teachers that remain relatively unexplored. One such context is the oral examination situation undergone by language teachers in Poland as part of the procedure for professional promotion. During this examination, teachers are expected to present their work, taking the prescribed ministerial regulations as their reference point. As access to teacher identity can be obtained through teacher talk about themselves, the presentations can be treated as teacher-made identity texts. Drawing on the 3A (affiliation, attachment, autonomy) Language Teacher Identity Framework (3ALTIF), this qualitative study focuses on the narratives of 15 examinees, all of whom are in-service English teachers, with a view to discovering: (a) what interpretative repertoires the participants employ with regard to conceptualizations of the language teaching profession (affiliation) which, in turn, determine (b) how they conceptualize themselves as language teacher practitioners with regard to their repertoires (attachment), and (c) how they express their agency through canonical self-presentations and responses to examiners' questions within the framework of their repertoires (autonomy). Based on the analysis of the study, five interpretative repertoires were identified: the examination-orientation repertoire, the self-positioning repertoire, the care-for-others repertoire, the change repertoire, and the making-a-difference repertoire. The obtained repertoires can be 'read' as the participants' self-evaluations with regard to their perceived teacher roles and the ability to express themselves.*

**Keywords:** in-service language teachers, teacher promotion examination, interpretative repertoires, professional identity, Poland

## 1 Introduction

Teacher identity has recently become a popular concept in the language teacher literature (Cheung, Ben Said & Park, 2015; Geluso, 2013; Gu, 2014; Kiernan, 2010; Nagatomo, 2016; Park, 2012; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013, 2016a, 2016b; Trent, 2010, 2011; Trent & DeCoursey, 2011; Varghese, 2010). This is because it has been discovered that the success of language teaching often depends on language teachers: who they are, how they teach, or what they promote through their teaching. Although there are many professional contexts that have been

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explored with regard to teacher identity, one of the contexts that has remained uncharted is the examination context in which language teachers themselves are examinees. The present article aims to bridge this gap by focussing on language teachers during their oral promotion examination, which is an obligatory part of the professional promotion procedure for teachers in Poland. Given the considerable recent interest in the construct of identity negotiation by applied linguists (Barkhuizen, 2017; Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott & Brown, 2013; Gu, 2013; Kidd, 2016; Kramsch, 2013; Miyahara, 2015; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Rugen, 2013; Sharma, 2013; Taylor, 2013; Williams, 2013), the article has two main objectives. First, and most importantly, to identify the participants' interpretative repertoires; this can be done on the basis of what teachers say about their work during the teacher promotion examination, and second, to test the effectiveness of the 3A (Affiliation, Attachment, Autonomy) LTIF model (Werbińska, 2016, 2017) for examining language teacher identity. This research tool was created for examining language teachers' conceptualizations of their profession (affiliation) and of themselves as language teacher practitioners (attachment), and their expressions of agency (autonomy). By exploring the narratives of Polish teachers of English, the article contributes to the discussion on language teachers' professional cultures and can provide a modest response to calls for more plurality and local discourses (Canagarajah, 2017; Hayes, 2017), especially "in the context of globalization and late modernity" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 273).

I first discuss the basic terms raised in this article: teacher identity, the 3ALTIF and interpretative repertoires, and then report on a study of language teachers' negotiation of their identities in job promotion examinations. Following a description of the study, I discuss my research findings. The article concludes with a call for more investigation of in-service teachers' interpretative repertoires in various teacher promotion contexts.

## **2 Basic terms**

In this section, the basic terms – teacher identity, the 3ALTIF and interpretative repertoires – are considered so as to clarify their meanings here.

### *2.1 Teacher identity*

Recently, the concept of teacher identity has been linked with poststructuralist thinking, according to which identity, understood as subjectivity, is experienced as a site of struggle, contradiction, and change (Norton, 2000, 2013). Unlike identity in structuralist perspectives, post-structural identity is neither fixed nor socially determined, but dynamic, fluid, multiple, and sometimes a formidable task for a language teacher to work upon (Benson, 2013). The literature (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011; Breen, 2014; Erlam & Gray, 2012) shows that identity aligned with post-structural thought is constantly being co-constructed and reconstructed, negotiated and modified as the teacher faces new experiences, establishes new relations, makes decisions, or enters language-mediated interactions (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000, 2013). The development of language teacher identity is, therefore, taking place all the time.

One way to access teacher identity is through listening to him or her talking (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Hallman, 2015). The words spoken at length create a text, or a teacher's identity talk (Cohen, 2010), authored and delivered by a teacher, on his or her experience as a teacher (Farrell, 2015; Hayes, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Kalaja, 2017) but also as a learner or a teacher-trainee (Oda, 2017). As it involves reflection on the teacher's profession, the teacher promotion examination, which is discussed in greater detail in 3.1, could represent one of the means of in-service teacher development, analogous to teacher research (Borg, 2013), including action research (Burns, 2009), engagement in mentoring (Nguyen, 2017), collaboration with colleagues (Johnston, 2009) which may be obligatory and institutionally endorsed i.e. 'sponsored professionalism' (Leung, 2009) or voluntary and initiated by teachers themselves, referred to as 'independent professionalism' (Leung, 2009). The teachers' examination texts are addressed to and, to some extent, negotiated with others – their 'readers'. In the 'texts' presented during the promotion examination, teacher *identity bids* (Cohen, 2010) reveal themselves through the way teachers talk about their work, through what they choose to describe or ignore, or through the language to which they resort. Therefore, the promotion examination can be seen as an opportunity to generate a teacher-made identity text delivered to a panel of examiners, which can then be used to highlight the discourses teachers adopt or resist. In other words, by giving meaning to the experiences presented, teachers uncover their understanding of the examination, of the examiners and, above all, their teacher selves.

## 2.2 The 3ALTIF

There are many teacher identity frameworks in the language teacher literature. The 3ALTIF (Three-A Language Teacher Identity Framework) draws on seven identity models put forward by Benson et al. (2013), Clarke (2009), Gee (2001), Pennington (2015), Trent (2015), Varghese, Morgan, Johnston & Johnson (2005), Wenger (1998). Although these research framework tools clearly show that identity is multidimensional and constantly in the process of being unravelled, there is no one agreed-upon definition of what exactly identity means (Trent, 2015, p. 45). Yet, there is sufficient agreement about the core of the notion to merit continued research, which encouraged me to search for overlapping areas among the different terms in these selected models and use them to build another framework, one that is sufficiently comprehensive and feasible to serve as a research tool for exploring language teacher identity.

On closer analysis, it appeared that many of the constituent parts of the seven identity frameworks have marked similarities in meaning and, although the larger concept they most nearly resemble is debatable, most can be successfully reduced to three categories which are helpful for investigating teacher professional identity (Werbińska, 2017). Hence, *alignment* (Wenger, 1998), *I-Identity* (Gee, 2001), *substance of teacher identity*, *authority sources*, *Telos* (Clarke, 2009), *embodied*, *projected*, *imagined*, *recognized*, *identity categories and resources* (Benson et al., 2013), *disciplinary*, *vocational*, *economic*, *global*, *local* (Pennington, 2015) refer, more than the other constituents of the frameworks, to the willingness to become a teacher, to major associations with the language teaching profession, to identifications with socially assumed teacher roles and obligations, as well as to possible maintenance of this conviction throughout their professional career. In the 3ALTIF model, this category is called the *Affiliation* category. The second group which contains *A-Identity* (Gee, 2001),

*identity-in-practice* (Varghese et al., 2005), *self-practices* (Clarke, 2009) and *instructional* (Pennington, 2015) seems to relate to displaying ways of doing, preferences for teaching certain aspects rather than others in a way that is comfortable, secure, important, or for different reasons preferred by a teacher. In the model this is called the category of *Attachment. D-Identity* (Gee, 2001), *identity-in-discourse* (Varghese et al., 2005), *reflexive* (Benson et al., 2013), *professional* (Pennington, 2015) provide space for doing things on one's own initiative (*D-Identity*), the employment of critical reflexivity (*identity-in-discourse, reflexive*), and teacher interpretations (*professional*). As all these elements make it possible for teachers to exercise their agentive, reflexive and resilient skills with regard to their profession, they are concentrated into the category of *Autonomy*. Therefore, these three qualities – affiliation, attachment, autonomy – can be seen as the domains which are key to the teacher professional identity core. Each contributes too little as an individual lens, but together they offer a combination of useful conceptual lenses through which to view teacher identity.

### 2.3 Interpretative repertoires

In the exploration of teacher identity in teacher talk during the promotion examination, the concept “interpretative repertoire” would appear to be very useful. It can be defined as relatively consistent ways of speaking about a topic, objects and events in the world (Kalaja, 2016, p. 98; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2016a, p. 154), “choices made at any level of language by those who produced the discourse” (Kalaja, 2016, p. 98), or “patterns in content or form – possibly recycled from one person to another” (Kalaja, 2016, p. 98). Inspired by the concept of the interpretative repertoire, I decided to examine the repertoires relating to affiliation, attachment, or autonomy that the study participants employed in the examination context. As the meanings covered by the three domains may sometimes overlap, the repertoires that seem to denote the teacher's associations with *what belonging to a profession of language teachers involves* would stand for affiliation, those that refer to *how teachers approach professional commitments in the light of everyday classroom practices* would signify attachment, and the ones that indicate *the extent to which they take control* would constitute autonomy. Hence, the question *who am I as a language teacher?* arises along with the questions *How do I teach?* and *What am I allowed to do?*, all of which are significant issues when it comes to negotiating professional identity.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Context

The legal act defining the professional status and conditions of Polish teachers employed in the school education sector is called the *Teachers' Charter*. According to this document, the post of a language teacher may be taken up by a person who has graduated from a higher education institution with pedagogical training. After one year of employment at school as a ‘trainee’, a teacher becomes a ‘contract’ teacher, and can embark on an apprenticeship of two years and nine months (called *staż*), which leads to the promoted status of an ‘appointed’ teacher, provided that the candidate passes the promotion

examination. For this examination the teacher prepares a presentation concerning the period of his or her apprenticeship, which is addressed at the examination. The qualification commission is made up of two experts (one who teaches the same subject (a foreign language) and one who teaches at the same educational level as the examinee), a school principal, a representative of a school leading body, a representative of a school supervising body and, optionally, a representative of a teacher union, if this is requested by the teacher. The presentation should focus on five areas which appear in the regulations: (1) the ability to self-evaluate and introduce changes in one's teaching; (2) the ability to address pupils' developmental needs, problems related to the local environment or contemporary social and civic issues in teaching; (3) the ability to use information and communication technologies; (4) the ability to apply psychological and pedagogical knowledge to solve school problems; (5) the ability to apply legal regulations concerning the educational system and social aid. Teachers are expected to address each of the points and include their accomplishments in the given areas. After the presentation, the teacher is asked several questions relating to different aspects of the profession, usually those raised in the presentation talk. On passing the examination, the teacher earns the status of appointed teacher, which has two important legal consequences: entitlement to higher remuneration and relatively secure employment. As a result, all teachers who intend to stay in the teaching profession sooner or later apply for the title of appointed teacher. Although the whole situation is considered formal and officially called 'the promotion examination for the appointed teacher', the actual level of formality varies. In small rural places (local office or school venues), the examination is usually held in a conference room at a table full of refreshments, to which the examinee is often invited. In larger centres (town or city hall venues), the atmosphere is more formal and no refreshments but water or coffee are served. In the opinion of many examiners, this examination should be treated as an opportunity for teachers to articulate their professional stance before a panel of professionals in the field.

### 3.2 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of ten females and five males, all of whom were teachers of English in Polish schools. Having worked as language teachers for at least five years, they took part in the promotion examination to achieve appointed teacher status. All of them had obtained the degree of BA in English, while nine of them additionally had MA degrees in English. The examinations took place in different environments, with nine participants being examined in small towns (up to 50,000 inhabitants), two in larger towns (about 100,000 inhabitants), while four examinations were held on the premises of rural schools. The demographic information of the participants is summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic information of participants.

Participant No.	Gender	Education	Place	Years of language teaching experience	Type of school
P1	Female	MA in Early Years Education	Village	7	Primary school
P2	Female	MA in English Studies	Larger town	8	Lower secondary school

P3	Female	MA in Education	Small town	6	Lower secondary school
P4	Female	MA in English Studies	Small town	7	Upper secondary school
P5	Male	MA in English Studies	Village	6	Primary school
P6	Female	MA in English Studies at one of the best universities	Small town	5	Primary school
P7	Female	MA in Early Years Education	Larger town	7	Primary school
P8	Female	MA in Economics	Village	8	Primary school
P9	Male	MA in Physical Education	Village	5	Primary school
P10	Male	MA in English Studies	Small town	5	Lower secondary school
P11	Female	MA in English Studies	Small town	6	Upper secondary technical school
P12	Male	MA in Music Studies	Small town	6	Primary school
P13	Male	MA in English Studies	Small town	8	Lower secondary school
P14	Female	MA in English Studies	Small town	9	Primary school, lower secondary school
P15	Female	MA in English Studies	Small town	5	Lower secondary school

### 3.3 Data collection

Having listened to many promotion examination presentations over a ten-year period as an expert for language teachers, it occurred to me that despite very similar presentations based on general ministerial regulations, language teachers managed to exhibit their unique teacher selves, significantly different from one another. I therefore decided to collect the data to investigate this phenomenon on a regular basis. Whenever I had the chance, I opted out of the role of examiner by declining to ask questions during the examination (to which I was entitled) and adopted the role of a researcher. This was possible only when the examinees gave their consent to my recording their presentations and the answers to the examiners' questions for research purposes. If the examinees preferred not be recorded, I always respected their decision and continued in my role as examiner. Permission was usually obtained from every third or fourth requested teacher.

The data in the present study was generated from the promotion examinations of teachers who had given their consent to recording for later transcription and analysis. All the data was collected in the summer examination session of June, July and August 2015. This temporal aspect as well as the permission of the participants served as the criteria for candidate selection. As the official language of the promotion examination was Polish, the teachers' quotations were translated from Polish into English. The transcription conventions are given in Appendix 1.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The analysis of the data occurred in several stages. First, each transcribed text was carefully read and coded for themes which seemed to reflect the affiliation domain. As affiliation, in the 3ALTIF, stands for teachers' individual perceptions of the language teaching profession and their roles in it, it was treated as the first domain to be studied for the choice of interpretative repertoires. In practice, isolated individual utterances were given code words which were to stand for the provisional names of the repertoires. Only then was an attempt made to identify examples indicative of the attachment domain, such as examples of teachers' practices, followed by the autonomy domain, such as examples of teacher stances reflecting agency, in-depth reflectivity or resilience. The data obtained referring to each teacher's affiliation, attachment and autonomy was then subjected to within-case followed by cross-case comparisons. Finally, after a number of additions, deletions and reformulations, including modifications to the number of labels for provisional repertoires, the data was reduced to five interpretative repertoires as those negotiated by the teachers during their promotion examination.

## 4 Findings

The repertoires identified were: (1) examination-oriented repertoire, (2) self-positioning repertoire, (3) care-for-others repertoire, (4) change repertoire, and (5) making-a-difference repertoire. Although the participants did not explicitly use these labels to describe their teacher practices, each of them could be inferred as a representation of a teacher's professional identity constructed during the presentation of their teaching apprenticeship. The repertoires are described and illustrated with representative text excerpts below.

### 4.1 Examination-oriented repertoire

Teachers whose talk is classified as examination-oriented (Table 2) tend to quote the words from the ministerial regulations and then recall activities which they pursued during their teaching apprenticeship in order to show how they fulfilled each of the five criteria (the areas enumerated in 3.1). Their presentations consist of a predominance of verbs, as they stress what they did, rather than considering the influence that their actions might have on their professional development. They also tend to use words reminiscent of neoliberal economic thinking, based on competition ("to attract pupils"), effectiveness ("the best effects"), superficiality ("we're building an image"). Early Years Education English teachers sometimes stress that they graduated from BA English studies because it was an imposed requirement ("we're required to teach English"), rather than emphasizing their personal decision to increase their professional qualifications.

Within the examination-oriented repertoire, the examinees draw attention to their regular use of 'active' methods and modern technologies. It seems that the majority of the activities that they do in the classroom are either connected with the use of an interactive board or Youtube video clips. When they are prompted to reflect on their problems (reflection is one of the subdomains of autonomy in the 3ALTIF), what they say relates to examination scores and their responsibility

for students' preparation for external examinations. Overall, the examination-oriented repertoire reflects the teachers' understanding of the teaching profession in terms of strict conformity to the fulfilment of the promotion examination criteria: the more of them they implement, the better teachers they believe they are.

**Table 2.** The examination-oriented repertoire with illustrative excerpts.

<p><b>Affiliation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I cooperated with ..., I <b>organized</b> language competitions, I observed my mentor's lessons, of course I <b>evaluated</b> my work, I used the electronic register, I prepared language <b>competitions</b>... (P15).</li> <li>• I took part in many forms of teacher training (P15), I conducted <b>diagnostic tests</b>.</li> <li>• We are a new school so we have to analyse the test results to have the best effects. We must take care to attract pupils, we're still thinking about the school image. (P7).</li> <li>• My first degree is in Education. One teacher teaches all subjects ... Now we are required to teach English. So I <b>had to</b> study for BA English (P7).</li> </ul> <p><b>Attachment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I use work cards, I use <b>active</b> methods, such as drama, discussions, intercultural teaching and projects (P14).</li> <li>• I use an interactive board, I prepare lessons by myself or use ready-made activities, reading comprehension competitions, You-tube songs, Fun English website (<b>sixth</b> place in Poland for my pupils' activity on this site) (P7).</li> <li>• E-learning as much as possible (P15)</li> <li>• Since we invested in interactive boards it has become easier to run interesting lessons (P7).</li> <li>• I encourage them to develop an interest in social portals and communicate in their free time (P7).</li> </ul> <p><b>Autonomy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examiner: "Did you learn anything negative about your teaching from your mentor?" Teacher: "Negative? (.) I was told that I had problems with the lesson time management, that I was too active, not pupils, that I did things for them. I translated everything into Polish. But I was also told that I could <b>motivate</b> students, that I introduce interesting elements, for example word associations" (P11).</li> <li>• I wouldn't like to be the only teacher responsible for their test results. The teachers who teach at lower levels don't have that responsibility (P10).</li> </ul>
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#### 4.2 Self-positioning repertoire

Within the self-positioning repertoire (Table 3) teachers tend to position themselves at two ends of the continuum: either higher or lower than other language teachers with respect to the promotion examination criteria.

At one end of the repertoire, the examinees stress their supremacy which can be reflected in their prior experience (living in an English-speaking country and hence 'knowing' better) or better education: "I completed a postgraduate course in speech therapy", "I knew more than other teachers and I even informed them about it [the Asperger Syndrome] during our teachers' meetings". They make it clear that the examination is a formality for them and seem to have no doubts about passing it. They give an impression that their knowledge and skills are more than sufficient. When it comes to their attachments in the classroom, they stress various international projects in which they participate, or their fluent use of English throughout the lessons. These teachers' self-confidence may enhance their autonomous inclinations. As they believe in their professional supremacy

over others in some respects, they can even be more assertive and more agentive than the majority of English language teachers in Poland, who rarely visit English-speaking countries.

At the other end of this repertoire, there are teachers who may self-position themselves in negative terms. They usually look sheepish and reveal to the examiners their insecurity or lack of confidence when they say: “I tried to behave in accordance with the regulations”, “I’m a teacher with only a few years’ experience”. When confronted with a question, they may even simply answer: “I don’t remember” or “It’s a difficult question”. In terms of attachments, they tend to repeat what they think is true, or what they suppose the examiners may approve of. Their beliefs are often banal: “I’m trying to think about students’ needs; (that) the lesson shouldn’t be boring” and they usually hope for the committee’s sympathy.

As far as the exhibition of autonomy, or lack of it, is concerned, both groups use acknowledgement strategies which are reflected in the phrase “You’re right” when addressing the members of the committee. The difference is that those who position themselves as ‘betters’ agree with the examiners, sometimes giving the impression of being surprised that someone else could have the same opinion or possess the same knowledge as they do. On the other hand, those who feel uncertain during the examination, tend to uncritically agree with whatever is expressed by any of the panel members, perhaps assuming that holding the position of an examiner makes a person and what he or she says appropriate. Both positioning repertoires are ends of the continuum and imply asymmetry between the exam-taker and the panel. In high self-positioning, the teacher makes himself or herself conspicuous, whereas in low self-positioning he or she assumes the position of a victim.

Overall, both ends of the continuum are employed in negotiating one’s positioning *vis-à-vis* others, and therefore the self-positioning repertoire is related to language teachers’ self-confidence.

**Table 3.** The positioning repertoire with illustrative excerpts.

Affiliation	
	<i>Higher</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I completed a postgraduate course in speech therapy. It certainly helps me at work. I tell them that the sound <i>th</i> is treated in Polish as a speech defect. They remember better. It’s <b>easier</b> for me to explain, to tell them how to position their mouth. Children with dyslexia answer my questions orally, not in writing (P15).</li> <li>• I had a child with Asperger Syndrome. I didn’t know anything about this, but at that time my supervisor encouraged me to study the case of the boy for my MA. Thanks to this <b>I knew more</b> than other teachers and I even informed them about it during our teachers’ meetings (P12).</li> <li>• I lived <b>abroad</b>. In Polish schools there is little openness, exchange, tolerance. Since 2007 I have invited students from other countries to our school. Thanks to <b>me</b> (.) they can communicate without serious problems (P2).</li> </ul>
	<i>Lower</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I made use of post-lesson feedback (P11).</li> <li>• I tried to behave in accordance with the regulations (...) (P11).</li> </ul>
Attachment	
	<i>Higher</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I use <b>only English</b> in the classroom. This is an English class, not a class about English (P12).</li> </ul>

- Every year I organize a reading contest. Introducing was difficult for them but now I can point to a scene in the contest book and they can recite the whole script. They even acted out in English **before parents** (P10).

*Lower*

- It's a difficult question. (.) I don't remember it very well (P9).
- I'm a teacher with only a few years' experience. (.) I'm trying to think about students' needs (.) the lesson shouldn't be boring (P9).

*Higher*

#### Autonomy

- You're right that we are teaching for tests but they can say more about evaluation, help us to evaluate students. The tests are for the whole of Poland, make you think why my students are weaker (P10).

*Lower*

- Yes, yes, it's true. You're right (P11).

### 4.3 Care-for-others repertoire

Within the care-for-others repertoire (Table 4), the language teaching profession is presented as caring for students' needs. The teacher fulfils the role of a companion who does not present everything on a plate but accompanies their pupils in the process of language learning, remaining in the background but ready to support if a problem occurs. These teachers often refer to their motivation for the job, which results from their own biographies (like being a scout) or significant others who surrounded them ("my mum worked at school"). What distinguishes this repertoire is that the teachers seem to realize that they are preparing their pupils for life challenges. Therefore, they tend to be more interested in teaching them useful things than making them interested in the language for the sake of obtaining good grades. At the same time, they teach them other skills necessary in life, such as being responsible, orderly or tolerant.

The activities promoted in the classroom are those that play an integrative function, such as games, trips, skits, drama. This repertoire never excludes any pupils, irrespective of their special needs. The teacher tries to make a cohesive group out of all students in the classroom. The incidents encountered are treated as challenges, or departures from the plan, which can teach a memorable lesson (the dog situation described in the autonomy domain in Table 4). Overall, the care-for-others repertoire is one that resembles the nurturing role of the teacher.

**Table 4.** The care-for-others repertoire with illustrative examples.

#### Affiliation

- It's not that I didn't want to be a teacher, my mum worked at school as a nurse, but I was a scout, spending time with other friends was something obvious ... there was no other direction for me but to become a teacher (P13).
- I always tried to make the pupils interested. I conducted regular competitions to get them interested in culture. I wanted to show them how important it is to learn English (P10).
- I do tests every second or third unit to check their skills but ... I'm **more interested** in what they really know rather than what grades they have (P10).
- When I became a homeroom teacher I was able to address my pupils' needs better. I tried to integrate with them, encourage them to take part in competitions, taught them responsibility for wall exhibitions, the appearance of the hall, class events. I always tried to understand them, especially when there was a problem. They felt accepted and good in my presence. I also tried to offer advice to parents (P13).

## Attachment

- Games, projects, skits (P14).
- Frequent trips, responsibility for school assemblies, I'm a member of *Schools Always Together Society* which promotes activities supporting pupils' positive feelings about schools (P14).
- For the performance I mobilized the kids from the special needs class. Even an **autistic girl** came to the stage and sang a song (P10).
- I didn't know how to help two kids with special needs, one visually impaired and the other with ADHD. I invited them to my extra English group, only for one quarter. The girl has changed completely. She really looked forward to her task and the boy was also more attentive. This experience gave me **a lot** of satisfaction (P8).
- In the youngest classes a teacher's positive attitude is enough. They say "I won't repeat that". But I believe in them. Older learners should be encouraged more or offered something they are interested in. The most motivating is the possibility of achieving success, when they know that something can be improved and where to look for it (P7).
- I learnt what a young person's brain needs. If a lesson is brain-friendly, the effects are incredible. I introduce short TPR exercises which improve learning (P6).

## Autonomy

- When it turned out that the grades had deteriorated, I organized an emergency meeting with parents, a confrontation with discussion, the grades have improved, the parents are interested in their progress and I have a good relationship with them (P14).
- One of the school pupils got bitten by a dog. I asked my friend to come and talk to them about what should be done so as to prevent such problems (P10).

#### 4.4 Change repertoire

The change repertoire (Table 5) is probably the most important in the sense that it shows the real impact of the teachers' apprenticeship. If teachers claim that they have undergone a positive change as a result of *staż*, this testifies to its effectiveness. Within the change repertoire, teachers compare their previous beliefs and actions when they started their teaching careers with their present position. The teachers' metamorphoses are usually linked with new experiences, such as a new teaching challenge (teaching the elderly) or attending a useful course (a course in assertiveness). Post-change teachers tend to be more reflective (they ponder why something happened), empathetic (they listen to others more often) and capable of noticing the nuances of a teaching situation rather than resorting to stereotypical thinking and doing.

The change is also reflected in the methods that they use. Some of the teachers were at first reluctant to teach a certain age group, or could not imagine teaching without grades, yet, when pressed to do so, their perceptions have changed. The introduction of personalized teaching, based on the teachers' personal experiences, or the willingness to test something that seems to work in theory (contracts with students, following a spiral syllabus) may imply that the teachers have entered a new kind of professionalism. Unlike the examination-oriented repertoire, this repertoire is not sponsored-like (Leung, 2009) but generated by the teacher himself or herself, who is now convinced of the purposefulness of his or her apprenticeship.

Autonomy in the change repertoire is often exemplified through the teachers' participation in various courses. Unlike the examination-oriented repertoire, the completed courses are not enumerated almost in a single breath but their impact on the particular teacher is articulated. Moreover, they are not obligatory courses organized by school but the training voluntarily found and attended by

the teachers who care about their professional development. Overall, the change repertoire is one that clearly provides information about the teachers' change for the better, mainly in terms of their reflexivity.

**Table 5.** The change repertoire with illustrative excerpts.

<p><b>Affiliation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When I started [teaching], I somehow forgot what it was to be a child. When there was a test, I said once and didn't repeat. ... And now – what did I do? It results from their development, that they are the way they are. I try to understand the pupils why they did something (P15).</li> <li>• I used to be aggressive, rather than submissive. But on a course I learnt that it's not good to say to a pupil "You've made a mistake" because they would answer back "I haven't. It's not true". It's much better to say "Let's talk about it and you will tell me where there could be a mistake and I will tell you why it is a mistake". I've changed my way of quizzing them. I used to have a stereotype: the choice of one person and quizzed him or her for ten minutes. I learnt how you could quiz all of them in ten minutes (P10).</li> <li>• Since I started teaching elderly people, my teaching values have changed. ... If an elderly person has had to pluck up the courage to come, she won't come again if something goes wrong. One lady says that she has come to get convinced if it is true what her former teacher said that she shouldn't continue learning. About seventy percent of people come to see if it is possible. They are full of energy (P3).</li> <li>• I wasn't aware of how important relations are. I thought it would be enough if I knew teaching methods. Until I started thinking about group processes, I had previously known nothing about this. I'm not afraid of conflicts. When I let them express themselves, formulate emotions I know I will <b>achieve my aim</b>. It's <b>always the same</b>: group formation, conflict and reconciliation, teachers can act (P3).</li> </ul> <p><b>Attachment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contracts with children and parents (P15).</li> <li>• I personalize my teaching. I showed them photos of London and talked about the places of interest from my own perspective (P10).</li> <li>• When I first learnt that there wouldn't be grades in our extra classes, I thought they had gone crazy. But during those lessons we do everything that the kids want. But the only thing that doesn't change is using English, for example recently, they made a vegetable salad. After one year of working with this programme, I can say with all the responsibility that formative assessment is great. They learn from one another, after each class they know what they've learnt and what they haven't. In this way, they come to the classes even more willingly. This project has <b>changed</b> my thinking (P5).</li> </ul> <p><b>Autonomy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I took part in several courses connected with my self-education, for example "How to be assertive?" about not only presenting your own judgements but accepting praising, responding to criticism, recognizing my own rights, NLP, what effective teachers do (P10).</li> <li>• I make use of all training sessions available. Now I'm using webinars (P6).</li> <li>• The webinars have given me support. I used to have problems with discipline, now I know there's a model called cog wheel (teacher, learner, context). I don't know everything but I want to learn more. I have <b>unblocked</b> myself (P3).</li> </ul>
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#### 4.5 Making-a-difference repertoire

Within the fifth and final repertoire, the teachers talk about the impact they make on their pupils (Table 6). In practice, this implies that a teacher is special in some respect and his or her exceptionality may be beneficial to students. In

the making-a-difference repertoire, teachers talk about their passions or values which they cherish and which they are eager to pass on to the learners.

Their choice of activities in the classroom always relates in some way to their passions or values. In the data, P6 is interested in visual arts and, therefore, films, pictures and images occupy a regular place in her classroom (“When I teach, I always try to use real images, banknotes, numbers of houses that they know, book covers ... I remember introducing the simple past only on the basis of book covers. I use mobile phones, postcards, mug inscriptions to make the language real”), whereas P8 desires to infect pupils with her passion for learning new things (“I love learning and I try to make them love it, too”).

Within the autonomy domain, teachers employing the making-a-difference repertoire tend to be autonomous in their thinking. They voluntarily engage in self-development and hold their own stance on most issues (for example, the opinion about games). When they think their opinions differ, even from those represented by the examiners, they still tend to cling to their own values. In the data, a teacher was asked to say what she disliked about her mentor’s teaching. Although her answer was diplomatic, she did communicate to her interrogator that the question was not the most fortunate, as her mentor was an authority to her: “When people offer advice I always listen to them. But I always do what I think is right. I also tried to listen to my mentor. She’s always been my authority, that’s why I won’t say what I didn’t like. But there’s always something that brings about something new”. Overall, the change repertoire could be the most mature of the five repertoires, as it reflects that the teacher knows what impact he or she is making, and what consequences it might have.

**Table 6.** The making-the-difference repertoire with illustrative excerpts.

<p><b>Affiliation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have my own wise sayings which I try to follow. For example, I think that every teacher should be the most diligent pupil. I’m considering taking up MA studies in English, I’ve always dreamed about studying biology. I like learning. I graduated from an economics department but my passion has always been English. I’d like to <b>infect</b> my pupils with my passion for learning (P8).</li> <li>• Teaching is a creative expression of yourself (P8).</li> <li>• I will never stop self-developing, especially the psychological sphere (P3).</li> </ul> <p><b>Attachment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I introduce teaching through film. Although there are many films, only some can be used in classes. I also use fragments of films to introduce grammar, and with younger classes prepositions of place. After listening to a song, they know them. I also used fragments of literature. The films are short, interesting, the kids like them (P6).</li> <li>• I treat image as an inspiration. I make folders for pupils made up of pictures which can serve as a summary (P6).</li> <li>• I love learning and I try to make them love it, too. The learners are very motivated, they want, they raise their hands to say, they are very active. I’m trying to motivate them with saying that it is not only accuracy that counts. I want them to express themselves. (P8).</li> <li>• When I teach, I always try to use real images (banknotes, numbers of houses that they know, book covers). I remember introducing the simple past only on the basis of book covers. I use mobile phones, postcards, mug inscriptions to make the language real, sort of anchoring (P6).</li> </ul> <p><b>Autonomy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have updated my private library. I’m trying to read books, make use of them, benefit from the Internet methodologists. I subscribe to <i>English Teaching Professional</i> (P6).</li> </ul>
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- When people offer advice I always listen to them. But I always do what I think is good. I also tried to listen to my mentor. She's always been my authority, that's why I won't say what I didn't like. But there's always something that brings about something new (P6).
- An interactive board for playing language games. I have different games about animals. Although I'm not an advocate of games in the classroom. But I used songs from some games. They were catchy, good for teaching months, hours, rooms (P6).

## 5 Discussion

With regard to the first research question – the identification of repertoires used by the examinees during the teachers' promotion examination – a total of five repertoires were identified in the English teachers' texts as negotiated by them during the promotion examination. Regarding the second research question – the testing of the 3ALTIF for examining teacher identity – the teachers' affiliations, attachments and autonomy were illustrated with several illustrative examples. In this section, possible implications for teacher educators are analysed, as the texts that the teachers communicate in their rather canonical presentations during a formal examination situation can help make sense of who they are. The implications refer to the participants' perceived roles of the teacher and their ability to express their teacher identities during the examination.

### 5.1 The perceived role of the teacher

Promotion examinations are “situations in which respondents [language teachers aspiring for promotion] are required to demonstrate their competence in the role in which the interview casts them” (Dingwall, 1997, as cited in Slembrouck, 2011, p. 52). Despite the difference in the participants' repertoires, all the texts (teachers' presentations) can be read as performances of identities which reflect how the examinees see themselves as teachers and how they enact their roles in practice.

Although five different repertoires used by the teachers during their promotion examination were identified, this does not mean that all of them were used by all teachers, or that only one of them was used by any individual teacher. Table 7 shows the types and numbers of repertoires used by each participating teacher during the study.

**Table 7.** Use of the repertoires by each participant.

Repertoire	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Examination-oriented	3	1	1	2	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3
Self-positioning		1h							2l	2h	3l	2h			1h
Care-for-others						1	1	1		4			2	3	
Change			3		1	1				3					2
Making-a-difference			1				7	2							

h - high self-positioning, l-low self-positioning

An important finding is that the highest total number of repertoires concerns the examination-oriented repertoire. As mentioned above, the candidates are expected to follow five broad guidelines which specify, in a general way, the areas to be addressed, but no detailed criteria are provided as to what constitutes a successful performance. Nevertheless, all the teachers employed the examination-oriented repertoire at least once, which suggests that all of them are interested in the effects of their work on promoting quality in schools, achieving higher places in school rankings, or being praised by superiors. Although the methods ('active' methods, use of IT) pointed out by the examinees are common in contemporary discourse, the fact that candidates drew attention to their use may well have been conditioned by the teachers' expectations of their stakeholders who, in the teachers' minds, are more likely to be interested in what they have done rather than in what they think. According to this perception, the primary function of the teacher is to prepare learners well for examinations and make them get good scores in external competitive tests. Clearly, the teacher's knowledge is here considered in terms of a teacher's doing rather than knowing.

Teachers who assume the positioning repertoire may opt for teacher autocracy out of personal interest. Those who position themselves higher than others may create an aura of authority, and the respect gained in the classroom may contribute to their own comfort. Analogously, the teachers who position themselves lower than others may sometimes also exhibit autocratic inclinations in the classroom as it is safer for them to be in control of the students rather than let the students dominate the teacher and uncover the teacher's lack of security.

In the care-for-others repertoire the teacher is more concerned about the needs of others than about his or her own comfort or self-esteem. Such teachers tend to invest in the improvement of teacher-student relations, or see the value of teaching beyond typical classroom settings as they realize that language teaching encompasses more than merely being English specialists. They are more like teacher educators who take care of their students' holistic development.

The change and the making-a-difference repertoires were employed in the study least frequently. These repertoires are used by teachers who rely on what makes their classrooms 'look' different, as shaped by their uniqueness. It must be added, however, that the change repertoire may, but need not, be positive for learners, whereas the making-a-difference repertoire always is. The change repertoire is likely to result in a change of role for the teacher, but much depends on what the role was like in the first place. It is possible that the change has taken place only for the teacher with little effect on the students. On the other hand, the making-a-difference repertoire is student-oriented. It usually involves an intellectual dimension (teaching through films), fosters an inquiring stance (passion for discovering new things), and thereby offers further learning opportunities. To acknowledge these differences in teachers would be to acknowledge "the potential for enhancement" (Walkington, 2005, p. 54), principally for learners, but indirectly for the whole school and teachers themselves.

## 5.2 *The ability to express oneself*

Although the examination interviews investigated here were rather formal, some teachers managed to express themselves through making their narratives more personal. The making-a-difference repertoire, examples from care-for-others repertoire and, above all, the change repertoire all provide illustrations in which

the teachers display and comment on their professional practices through the stances they adopt (a change in the approach to grades) and what they are attached to (teaching the language through the image) in the language classroom. In such cases, their presentations, or identity 'texts', can be interaction-inviting, less artificial and at times assuming the form of an almost 'naturally occurring discourse' between professionals.

Some teachers, however, may decline from negotiating their personal stance. They may adhere to notes prepared beforehand, pay close attention to each sentence that they produce in order to sound, to their minds, professional. Clearly, the examination situation is for them an enormous personal struggle to form a teacher identity that they consider expected and recognized by the committee.

One possible purpose of the teaching apprenticeship culminating in the teachers' promotion examination is to encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching, and perhaps refine their personal teaching philosophies through experimenting with new activities or unfamiliar teaching roles. Since these are teachers who have already overcome the critical beginning years of their careers, it is not perhaps too much to expect that they will communicate some of the dilemmas, tensions or queries they have experienced. The problem is that many examiners still treat the situation literally as an examination and, as a result, candid expressions of teachers' uncertainty may be received by them as a sign of lack of professionalism. Perhaps this is why some of the teachers feel uncomfortable, look sheepish or even intimidated when they enter the examination room (low self-positioning repertoire). Perhaps this is also why so many teachers adopt the examination-oriented repertoire, which is safer, as denotational discourse, which employs direct rather than figurative or associated meanings, can give the impression of a 'correct' account. It seems that any proper evaluation of the promotion examination should include an equal focus on who the teacher examiners are, what their own preparation for evaluating language teachers is and how they treat the examiner's job. Studies on standardization in oral examinations reveal that examiners' practices and views can vary (Sundqvist et al., 2017), which raises further doubts about the uniform treatment of teachers taking an oral promotion examination.

## **6 Limitations**

One possible limitation which needs to be addressed to increase the reliability of the study relates to the last remark about the examiners' influence on the candidate choices of self-presentation during the examination. It is possible that the decision concerning which events or experiences to include or omit in their examination presentations, or which repertoires to employ can provide insights into the identities of teachers that are limited to the examination context alone. In other words, the narrated identities, as revealed through the teachers' interpretative repertoires, may not tell us who teachers are in earnest, but be confined to who they are within the constraints of the specific promotion examination situation. Their 'aspired identities' may differ from their 'actual identities' which are performed in their daily practice. To rectify this possible mismatch, the same participants should also be investigated in other professional contexts to make sure that the same, or similar, repertoires are narrated by the same teachers.

The study could have been more robust if, perhaps, a longitudinal approach to investigating the participants had been applied, which could have begun before the examination and extended after it. Such a solution was in this case hardly feasible, as I did not know who would be examined, which prevented me from approaching the teachers before the examination.

## 7 Concluding remarks

As stated at the outset, this study is unique in its choice of context, as it investigated the negotiations of language teachers' identities in the formal examination situation experienced by those teachers who wanted to be promoted in their professional positions. Although the issue described here is local, some of the elements of the study could be transferred to any international context. These elements are:

- investigating in-service teachers' interpretative repertoires negotiated in various teacher promotion situations,
- testing the usefulness of the 3ALTIF framework as a platform for investigating the negotiation of teachers' identities in various professional situations.

The five repertoires identified for experienced teachers in this study could supplement the language teacher repertoires which have recently been identified and investigated by Ruohotie-Lyhty (2016a) in the Finnish context. It is also possible that other teacher promotion examination contexts could generate still other repertoires, or even exclude some of those that were identified for the Polish teachers investigated here (for example, the self-positioning repertoire). A similar study conducted in a different international context could certainly provide valuable information, especially if the promotion examination were situated within the context of a teacher's professional development in a longitudinal project. Hence, there is a need to continue exploring the relationship between language teachers, context and the resulting impact on the teacher's professional development.

Teachers work through their identities and, therefore, teachers' identities are fundamental to their work. This study has attempted to analyse how their identities are shaped by one professional context – a presentation-based formal examination taken for teacher promotion. The study was unique in investigating this context of a language teacher's work and in identifying the five repertoires that language teachers employ in such situations. The results suggest that the repertoires used could be related to the participants' teacher identities or perceived roles as teachers, but the influence of the examination context should be taken into account in interpreting the results. The choice of examiners in terms of how well they are prepared for the job they are performing is especially important, as examiners' assessment practices may considerably vary. The investigation of teacher identity through the 3ALTIF tool in this study may contribute to critical approaches to identity development in teacher education programmes, yet the powerful and not clear-cut impact of different and less conventional professional contexts on the language teacher's work needs more exploration with perhaps other research instruments.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1. Transcription conventions*

P1	participant number
...	information deleted
(...)	inaudible
(.)	noticeable pause
<b>bold</b>	emphasis
<i>italics</i>	a word in a foreign language, the name of an organization, or the name of a journal for language teachers

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