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Narratives in L2 Learner Identity Development

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This article focuses on second or foreign language (L2) learner identity and its development as discursively constructed, and we will summarize four studies conducted on this topic. The studies were conducted in the context of L2 teacher education in Finland, and the participants were student teachers (pre-service teachers) or recently qualified teachers of English or other L2s. As data we made use of narratives in different modes (oral, written, visual). The summarizing of the studies will be followed by a joint critical discussion of the theoretical and methodological lessons learned and possible applications.

本稿は第二言語学習者や外国語学習者 (L2) のアイデンティティと言説の中で構築されることで起こるアイデンティティの発展について、4つの調査を行い分析を行った。調査はフィンランドのL2教師教育の文脈で行っており、研究参加者は教師志望の学生 (教育実習生)、あるいは教師となって間もない英語や他の言語教師である。研究参加者から得られた、オーラル、筆記、ビジュアルという異なるモードのナラティブの分析を通して、理論や方法論に関する見解を示すとともにそれらの実践への応用可能性について批判的な議論を行う。

Keywords

L2 learner identity, identity development, narrative, discursive construction

キーワード

L2学習者アイデンティティ、アイデンティティ発達、ナラティブ、言説的構築主義

This article investigates second or foreign language (L2) learner identity and its development as constructed in narratives. Over the past few years we have been exploring the possibilities of narratives in researching and fostering L2 learner identities. Our starting point is that narratives can be viewed as constructions of identities (and beliefs), which are shared in time and space (Kalaja, Barcelos, Aro & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2016). The narratives collected in our studies were produced in a variety of modes: written, oral and visual—and were sometimes complemented with other types of data. In this article, we explore how different types of narrative tasks assigned to student teachers (or pre-service teachers) or recently qualified teachers of English or other L2s in different stages of their studies with us helped them to: 1) make explicit their beliefs about aspects of L2 learning or teaching, 2) envision their future L2 classes, and 3) consider the meaning(s) of other people's narratives in relation to their own identity.

We start by defining one of the key terms, that is, identity. Recently, Barkhuizen (2017, p. 4) offered a new definition based on a review of over 40 studies of (L2) teacher identity. We suggest Barkhuizen's definition be broadened to apply also to L2 learners (basically by replacing L2 teacher identities with L2 learner identities):

L2 learner identities are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological and historical—they are both inside the learner and outside in the social, material and technological world. L2 learner identities are being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying. They are struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued, by self and others. They are core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and backgrounded. And learner identities change, short-term, and over time—discursively in social interaction with teachers, learners, teacher educators, administrators and the wider community, and in material inter-

action with spaces, places and objects in the classroom, institutions and online (adapted from Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 4).

No single study can address all of the facets of L2 learner identity mentioned in this very comprehensive definition. In the following, we will focus on the phenomenon as discursively constructed on specific occasions of narrating by a specific group of L2 learners on their way to becoming qualified L2 teachers. By focusing on the discursive construction of identities we wish to illustrate the possibilities of this approach for research and teacher education.

This article begins with a short introduction to narrative research on L2 learner identities and our understanding of identity development (Section 2). This is followed by the main body of the paper comprising a dialogue between the two co-authoring researchers: first, we summarize four studies carried out in three different projects (Section 3), then we discuss the lessons learned from the studies and the meanings of the narratives that became evident in the process (Section 4). We close the article by considering possible practical applications of our findings.

Background to the Studies: Narrative Inquiry and Narrative Identity Construction

Over the past few decades, narrative inquiry has become an established form of research in Applied Language Studies (Barkhuizen 2013; Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014; Benson, 2014). It has been widely used to study learners' and teachers' experiences in multiple contexts, such as studying abroad, held beliefs, and envisioning the future (Benson, 2014; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Kubanyiova, 2012; Norton, 2013). Essential to narrative inquiry is the phenomenological idea of the unique construction of human experience: individuals do not experience life as isolated events; rather, they are active in creating cohesion and connections between the events to create a meaningful life story (Barkhuizen, 2011; Polkinghorne, 1988). Life narratives are used to tell oneself and others who we are, where we come from and what our values are. Narratives thus provide essential insights into individuals' ways of conceptualizing the world and a means of examining beliefs, attitudes, agency and emotions. In the context of this article, we understand narration as an activity in which beliefs, experiences and attitudes can be made meaningful and justified (Kalaja et al., 2016). We do not claim that narratives equal identities, but rather they are evidence of an active process of identity development.

Our view of identity development as storytelling has its roots in narrative and discursive theories of identity (Barkhuizen, 2013, 2017). Accordingly, identity is not understood as something that is stable, fixed or determined, but as something that is constructed within a given socio-historical context (Block, 2007). This makes identities situational and social in nature (Norton, 2013). For us, identities are thus social processes rather than fixed products (Duff, 2012, p. 14). To provide a more complete idea of this process we rely on one important feature of the identity development process: that of human agency. Although social, identities are not determined by the social environment, but rather actively moulded and negotiated by individual learners in relation to their environment (Kalaja et al., 2016). It is through personal narratives that life is made meaningful and understood and thus identities are constructed (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). In L2 learner identity development, identities are not only expressed through storytelling, but also through learning and teaching activities (Trent, 2011; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005) but, as such, narratives provide an important means of understanding the processes of identity development. In narratives, identities are in a constant state of being and becoming. In narration, individuals express their beliefs, attitudes and values. They justify them by using a storyline that further constructs their identities. This

process of identity construction in time and space (Norton, 2013) also provides further possibilities for continuous identity development. Although narratives are often backward looking, they also contain a future-oriented component (Block, 2017). In identity narratives individuals attempt to make sense of “who they are and who they desire or fear to be” (Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 4). For us, this concept of identity is tightly linked to the concept of beliefs, since identity is expressed in the form of beliefs that define who we are (Kalaja et al., 2016). For the identity of an L2 learner, beliefs about language, learning and self are central. However, any belief can be used to construct L2 learner identity.

Typical of narrative inquiry in general is involvement by the researchers in the data construction processes. Narrative data collection is often a result of a collaborative activity and thus becomes a meeting point of different needs and expectations. As Barkhuizen (2011) points out in reference to narrative data collection: “These practices come with complex ethical, ideological, and emotional responsibilities” (p. 393). In educational settings, research activities are very often connected with pedagogical motivation. Narratives provide a teacher-researcher with the possibility of combining both goals, i.e., supporting their students’ reflection processes and learning activities and collecting data to better understand his or her own teaching and learning. Different kinds of narrative tasks are widely used in educational contexts, especially in teacher education, to foster student teacher development (Barkhuizen, 2017; Golombek & Doran, 2014). Also for us as researchers, narrative research has been both part of our practice as language teacher educators and a way of collecting data for our studies. Narratives have enabled our students to reflect on their lives, hopes and future goals and construct their L2 learner identities. In our research projects we have regarded these stories as constructions of identities (and beliefs), shared in time and space. In this article, we aim to share our current understanding of this process of storying and its significance for L2 learner identity development.

Four Closely Related Studies Summarized

Both of the co-authoring researchers are experienced L2 teacher educators at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. For more than a decade, we have been involved in a number of narrative research projects in which we have collected data from our students in the form of course assignments and other types of tasks. All of the projects made use of narrative data and were mainly longitudinal in design. In this section we summarize four studies carried out in three of these projects. We follow this with a joint critical discussion of the lessons learned (Section 4).

Although all three research projects focus on L2 teacher identity and its formation, they also provide insights into L2 learner identity as the participants are university students or newly qualified teachers who have been studying English or other languages as major or minor subjects and as second or foreign languages. Especially in the early phase of teacher development, learner identities serve as a foundation for reflection on teaching in the future. In this article we focus on the facets of the narrative tasks used that can be used to trace the development of L2 learner identity.

Study 1 Summarized by Paula: What was Studied, How, and What was Found?

Study 1 was carried out as part of the research project “From Novice to Expert” (see, e.g., Kalaja, 2016a) as a discursive study with a longitudinal research design. It traces developments in the beliefs held by university students regarding English, a language they were studying, and Finnish, their L1.

We (meaning a research team consisting of myself and two colleagues of mine, Riikka Alanen and Hannele Dufva) asked a group of English majors and minors on an MA programme at our university, irrespective of their line of specialization, to fill in a questionnaire. The

questionnaire contained, for example, a section with half a dozen sentence completion tasks aimed at comparing English with Finnish, e.g., “In my opinion, English is/sounds ...”, “If you ask me, compared with Finnish, English is ...” and closing with the more open-ended question, “What does English mean to you these days?” The students completed the tasks twice—in the first and final year of their studies (approx. four to five years apart), the first time with pencil and paper (n = 118) while attending a course on “learning to learn foreign languages”, and the second time online (n = 37).

Table 1. Interpretative Repertoires Identified in Comparing an L2 (English) with an L1 (Finnish) (FL = foreign language) (adapted from Kalaja, 2016a, p. 112)

Repertoires	Issues/Dilemmas	Subject positions/identities
1) Affection repertoire	Close vs. distant	User of Finnish as L1/mother tongue; user of English as FL/L2
2) Aesthetics repertoire	Beautiful vs. ugly	User of Finnish as L1/mother tongue; user of English as FL/L2
3) Vitality repertoire	Global vs. local	User of English as lingua franca/world language vs. user of Finnish as L1 (in Finland)
4) Challenge repertoire	Easy vs. difficult to acquire or learn	Learner of English as FL (including Finns); acquirer of Finnish as L1 and learner of Finnish as FL (excluding Finns)

The sentence completions varied in length from one or two words or sentences to half a page of text. We read and re-read the pool of written data looking for patterns in content or form and identified a total of four interpretative repertoires (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 149), or recurring or shared ways of describing the two languages. Within the repertoires the students seemed to adopt different subject positions or identities when comparing the two languages, not only from one moment to another, but also over time (Table 1).

The students discursively constructed the languages as being either emotionally close to or distant from them (Affection Repertoire), beautiful or ugly (Aesthetics Repertoire), global or local (Vitality Repertoire), and/or easy or difficult to learn (Challenge Repertoire). Of the repertoires, Repertoire 4 was the most dilemmatic, i.e., the students had mixed opinions or beliefs about the two languages, and Repertoire 3 the least dilemmatic, i.e., the students agreed that English was a widely-spread or global language, and Finnish, in contrast, a small or minority language. The students continued to draw on the four repertoires over the period of four to five years. The dilemmas, or opposite views, seemed to remain for the most part unresolved but some diminution was observed over time. For example, within the Challenge Repertoire, there were fewer and fewer comments on English being a difficult language to learn (in comparison to Finnish or other foreign languages). By the end of the project the participants had already studied the language for some 15 years, so this issue may have lost relevance.

In addition, and importantly considering the focus of this article, we managed to trace some further developments longitudinally, especially regarding the students' identities.

Firstly, English was gradually realized to have gained the status of a second language. Thus, the students' identities tended to shift from learners of a foreign language, the status as-

signed to English in the official national core syllabi of the time, to users of a global language or lingua franca, as illustrated by Example 1 (translated from Finnish):

Example 1

It [English] is a language that opens the whole world. Part of my everyday life. Useful both in spare time and at work.

Knowing English made it possible for the students to communicate in international contexts with both native speakers and other non-native speakers of the language; to pursue hobbies and spare time activities; to travel or live abroad; to find employment; to pursue a career; or to do well in their job, including teaching the language.

Secondly, the students started to talk about themselves as bi- or multilingual, albeit still with a fairly traditional understanding of the concept, as illustrated by Example 2 (translated from Finnish):

Example 2

Even though I feel like I am multilingual, Finnish is still clearly my only mother tongue and is my emotional language. My English could only gain that kind of status if I lived in an English-speaking country for years. In my opinion, my knowledge of English does not have to be comparable to my competence in my mother tongue; my knowledge of English is after all pretty good, with its own weaknesses and strengths.

Thirdly, English was becoming an aspect of the students' professional identity. Consider Example 3 from a student teacher qualifying as a teacher of English after completing her pedagogical studies (translated from Finnish):

Example 3

[English is] a tool. It is a tool quite literally, as I will graduate as a teacher of English, and English is what I will be teaching, teaching about, and using as the medium of instruction. It is also a tool for communication. I often realize that I am thinking in English, and in everyday conversations I often end up using an English word when the Finnish equivalent doesn't come to mind or isn't quite "to the point" in that situation.

In summary, Study 1 with its longitudinal research design provides evidence that the identity of English majors and minors can evolve during their university studies as they become aware of the changing status of English—from learner of English as a foreign language to qualified professional of English as a lingua franca in the Finnish educational system (and beyond in the case of non-teacher trainees).

Study 2 Summarized by Paula: What was Studied, How, and What was Found?

Study 2 is a follow-up study to Study 1 (see, e.g., Kalaja, 2016b) carried out as part of the project "From Novice to Expert". Some of our students took part in both studies. In Study 1 we asked them to recollect their past experiences of learning English. This time, we asked the students to envision their teaching in the years to come, as envisioning is related to motivation and identity (see, e.g., Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014). We made use of drawings, or visual narratives (for a definition, see, e.g., Squire, 2012, pp. 2–4), for this purpose.

We asked another group of student teachers (n = 58), majoring not only in English but also in other foreign languages and being in the final stages of their MA studies at our university, to envision an instance of teaching a foreign language in the not-so-distant future. We in-

structed them as follows: “Draw a picture of ‘My Language X class a year after graduation’”. In addition, on the reverse side of the task sheet, we asked the participants to give a brief written account of what their class would be like: “Explain what is going on in your class”. The task was carried out as the final in-class assignment on the very last session of their pedagogical studies. We subjected the drawings and their commentaries to theory-guided content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 99–124). Study 2 drew on sociocultural theory (e.g., Lantolf & Thorne, 2006); thus, in our analysis we focused on the environments, artefacts, and interaction in the class and coded the drawings accordingly.

The environments in which foreign language teaching would take place ranged from traditional classrooms (furnished with desks and a board), modern classrooms (with carpets, sofas, armchairs, plants, posters, etc.) and virtual classrooms (via Skype) to out-of-classroom contexts, such as the school kitchen and the school yard. The teacher was depicted as either standing in front of the classroom, in the middle of the classroom, or engaged in joint activity with the pupils; and offering thus different possibilities for interaction within the classroom.

However, for the most part, the teaching of foreign languages was depicted by the student teachers as taking place in a traditional classroom, furnished with desks and a board of one type or another, and some modern technical equipment. Interestingly, books, of any kind, would not play as important a role in class as in the students’ own past experience (see, e.g., Kalaja, Alanen, & Dufva, 2008): the student teachers would rather use authentic materials, based on the needs or interests of their students.



Figure 1. A drawing by a student teacher “My English class a year after graduation” (originally in blue-and-white).

Furthermore, the future teachers, working mostly on their own, would emphasize in their language teaching the practising of oral skills and use of the language for authentic purposes and for addressing cultural issues. Interestingly, the teacher would take on the identity of a guide, ensuring interaction among his or her students, irrespective of the classroom arrangements. In other words, it was believed that the teaching of English and other foreign languages would be social in nature once the students entered the teaching profession. Their own past experiences of learning English had been very different (see, e.g., Kalaja et al., 2008).

Overall, we managed to identify two competing discourses in this study (supported also by previous studies conducted in the “From Novice to Expert” project): “The teaching of foreign languages in the past”, based on the student teachers’ own school experiences, and “The teaching of foreign languages in the future”. To illustrate this, let us consider one English major and the multimodal data we collected from her: a drawing (Figure 1) and its commentary in writing.

The student comments on her drawing as follows (translated from Finnish):

In the class the students are sitting in a semicircle facing the teacher—the teacher is close to the students, but the activity is teacher led. The classroom is full of electronic equipment ... but there is also some traditional equipment (a blackboard and a pointer) ... the students are expected to take an active role even though the class is teacher led. The students are talking among themselves ... The atmosphere is open and encourages discussion.

The student seems to be aware of both discourses but admits (unlike the majority of her fellow students) that she still has some reservations about the applicability of student-centred principles and practices in her future English classes. In the drawing, the pointer she holds can be interpreted as a symbol of the power she envisions to have as a teacher in her traditional classroom setting.

In summary, Study 2 shows how the language majors and minors, as student teachers, envision their future professional identities as qualified teachers of English and other foreign languages—visually, verbally or multimodally—at a specific point in time (i.e., just before graduating from our MA programme).

Study 3 Summarized by Maria: What was Studied, How, and What was Found?

Study 3 was conducted as part of the JULIET (Jyväskylä University Language Innovation and Educational Theory) programme and was longitudinal in its research design (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). It explores the development of L2 learner identities of six student teachers studying in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) education programme and specializing in teaching English in grades 1 to 6 (age 7–13). A further key aspect of the study was to investigate the role of emotions in L2 learner identity development.

As the study was conducted as part of an action research project, the data collection was integrated with other project activities. As part of their course work, we asked six students as voluntary participants to write three autobiographical essays at different stages of their studies. In the first essay, “English and me”, written during the first semester of their studies, we asked the student teachers to reflect on the key events that had shaped their relationship with the language. The second essay “English, JULIET and me” followed at the end of the first year. In this essay, the students were asked to consider how the first year of the programme had continued to mould their relationship with the language. Finally, the third essay “Me and English as a global language” was written at the end of the second or, if the student had spent the second year on exchange, third year. In this final essay, we asked the students

once more to consider how they understood their relationship with the language at this point of their studies. The three essays form a longitudinal set of data on how the students perceive the language and themselves as L2 learners at different points in their learning career. In the narrative analysis of the essays, two different emotional pathways of L2 learner identity development were detected. We also identified four distinct themes that were addressed in all narratives.

The two emotional pathways were named “Bilingualism as a gift” and “Bilingualism as a struggle”. Although they share some similar identity development themes, the two pathways construct the identity differently in relation to L2 learning. Typical of the “gift” story was the construction of L2 learning as a natural process that was easy and rewarding. In contrast, the “struggle” story constructed L2 learning as hard work with respect to both successes and failures. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes Identified in the Student Teachers’ Identity Stories

Theme	Bilingualism as a gift	Bilingualism as a struggle
Desire to belong	Desire to access different personally meaningful communities through language	Desire to become accepted by the native speaker community
Doubt and confidence	Confidence and sense of mastery	Moments of confidence, persisting doubt about own proficiency
Going beyond	Gaining access to different communities through language strengthens the relationship with the language	Gaining access to different communities through language requires effort
Awareness and acceptance of self	Understanding the complexity of L2 learning	Empowerment as a result of growing awareness of language, questioning the idea of native speaker likeness

Three of the six students narrated their identity in terms of the gift story. They expressed an easy emotional pathway in relation to the English language. In their stories, the relationship with the language was developed through frequent contact with the language in their free time and was characterized by a sense of confidence and mastery. As one of the students, Niklas, commented:

I was a three-year-old kid and excited as any kid would have been opening the presents...I found a Playstation one...it was love at first sight. So as I went to school and started to study English at the third grade, I was already quite a talent, thanks to our Playstation... (All quotes are the students’ original wordings.)

For these students, English was a pathway to membership of various other global communities that were not necessarily linked with the idea of English as a native language. Typical of these students was also a positive idea of the language enabling participation and opening doors. We also detected a change during the studies in that by the end of the second or third year these students had developed a narrative of the language, suggesting a more considered perspective regarding the position of English in peoples’ lives, as illustrated by the following comment by Elisabeth:

This made me think that perhaps as a Finn I have been too privileged to grow up seeing English only as a resource rather than as a threat [to] my own culture or identity.

In contrast to the mainly positive storylines of the former group, the other three students narrated their relationship with the English language in terms of the struggle story. For them, becoming bilingual was characterized by hard work, investment and others' opinions. English represented a way of accessing a new identity and becoming part of the English-speaking community. Their stories were characterized by both successes and failures.

The persistent feeling was self-doubt. To quote Marie:

It is difficult to explain why I feel like this, but I guess it is mostly because of my self-reflections: I am the one who is setting the goals, who is feeling awkward because I do not dare to participate [in] lessons and who tells me my English is super simple.

For these three students, the studies were an opportunity to conceptualize their relationship with the language again in light of their new experiences at university. The development of their identities was visible in their ways of narrating their identity. In the last essay, they expressed their identities in terms of empowerment and ownership, which drastically contrasted with their original stories of hesitance and inferiority. In her final essay, Marie considers her non-nativeness an asset when thinking about her future as an English teacher:

Being [a] non-native speaker gives me asset [(the ability)] to look [at] English [from a] different point of view: what are the basic difficulties for children,...Being a multilingual is important because I have experience of learning English and empathy with my students' struggles.

In summary, Study 3 identified two different emotional pathways in the development of L2 learner identity as well as changes in identity narratives during the course of the students' studies.

Study 4 Summarized by Maria: What was Studied, How, and What was Found?

Study 4 is part of a larger project on in-service L2 teacher development that started when the participants were still pre-service teachers at the University of Jyväskylä (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2016). After entering full-time teaching, the teachers were interviewed three to five times during their initial nine to 10 years in the profession. In addition, they also regularly wrote autobiographical essays during the first four years. Study 4 reports the findings regarding the L2 teachers' identity development during the research period. Although the participants were L2 teachers, the study also provides insights into the ways in which L2 learner identity can be developed and constructed in narratives.

Narrative interviews were conducted in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 9th or 10th years at work, and combined with the autobiographical essays the aim was to create rich possibilities for the teachers to share their experiences. In the essays and interviews the participants were asked about their past and present experiences, future aspirations and relationships with colleagues and pupils. The repeated research interventions in different modes were designed to create a positive reflective circle where the researchers and the participants could return to themes and reinterpret experiences in the light of new events and relationships. The participants were also specifically asked to reflect on the ways in which they felt they had changed during their years at work. In this specific sub-study, the interviews were treated as a single pool of data and a storyline was created using the main themes emerging from them. As a result, two different ways of constructing identity in narratives were identified, that of identity change and that of continuity.

The stories of the teachers that narrated a change in their identity focused on experiences that had been significant in shaping their teacher reality. These teachers identified critical moments in their story that had changed their ways of perceiving themselves and their work. Often these moments consisted of encountering other people's stories that became influential in their own change. One of the teachers, Anu, reported:

But then one boy's words stuck in my mind. It was Monday, and he was really tired, he came in late and his clothes were dirty and then he took out his books and he hadn't done any homework. Again. And I said "AGAIN! You haven't done your homework AGAIN, after the weekend, and you've had the whole weekend to do it in". Yes, he was in year 7, a small kid, and he looked at me: (sigh) "You'd understand if you knew that I've been awake all night every night because my parents drink". That was for me a revelation. (...) The boy's words were like a slap in the face, like WELL, he hasn't got a good family. And I should have seen that because he had dirty clothes on and he was tired and everything. But still. Well. I've become more relaxed. In this sense. More understanding, let's put it that way.

Significant encounters such as this challenged the teachers' previous perception of work practices, emotions and relationships and offered them significant ways of developing their approach to teaching languages.

In contrast, stories of continuity revealed some teachers' strategies for maintaining a balance between their personal and professional identities. To avoid being personally affected by the demands for identity change, these teachers drew a clear distinction in their stories between their personal and work lives and prioritized their commitments outside work. In their narratives, their pupils' stories did not have a central role and the teacher-pupil relationship was restricted to their official role as teachers. In response to the question posed by an interviewer "What are you to your pupils?", Tuuli responded:

Hopefully the teacher. And it's been like that all the time until now, although I'm maybe a little less formal than others, though they aren't looking for a friend or anything like that. I'm quite happy about that; I am, at least.

This positioning enabled the teachers to maintain their original subject teacher identity at work and also to avoid the vulnerability that being open to their pupils' life experiences might entail.

In summary, Study 4 shows the ways in which individuals are active in constructing their identity through the process of storytelling. To construct their identity they select a variety of narratives (both their own and those of others) that then become part of their own storyline.

Discussion: Narratives in L2 Learner Identity Development

In the following, we evaluate the potential of the narrative tasks used in the four studies summarized above in tracing the development of L2 learner identities.

This section consists of questions that we, the co-authoring researchers, pose to ourselves regarding the role of narrative tasks in research on L2 learner identity development. We start by justifying the use of narratives in our studies and continue by critically discussing the types of tasks used, evaluating their pros and cons, and considering possible further applications in L2 teacher education, or more generally, in L2 education within our school system.

Why Have You Collected Narrative Data in Your Research?

Maria: My professional identity is that of a teacher–researcher. I have always been primarily interested in teacher and learner experiences, and narratives have provided an important tool for their exploration. In my dual role as a teacher–researcher, I also find that narratives provide an opportunity for combining both of these roles. In addition to producing research data, autobiographical writing has been a powerful pedagogical tool that helps me to get a feel for the questions and struggles my students go through and to support their identity development. For example, in Study 3, the tasks were designed to bring about the beliefs and emotions the students had had in relation to the English language. Setting these tasks on a regular basis also provides my students with the opportunity to track their own development.

In Study 4 with the newly qualified teachers, we also aimed at providing rich possibilities for self–reflection that could support newly qualified teacher development. This was done by providing both written tasks and conducting narrative interviews where themes could be deepened. In this project, running now for over 10 years, we have aimed at creating a reflective circle where the understanding of the teachers and researchers is constructed as an active process.

Paula: Unlike Maria, who has a background in teacher education, I consider myself primarily a researcher in applied language studies and only secondarily a teacher educator. Based at the Department of Language and Communication Studies, I teach advanced courses on aspects of learning and teaching English, where the main focus is on teaching content (courses) and, only to a lesser extent, language skills. I use narrative tasks with our student teachers (future teachers of English) mainly to trace developments in their professional thinking or beliefs, i.e., what sense they make of the issues addressed in our courses, considering that the field of L2 learning and teaching is full of controversies and inconclusive research findings. As a by–product, my colleagues and I have learned about our students’ evolving L2 identities, particularly in studies with a pre– and posttest or longitudinal research design (as was the case in Study 1, data being collected over a longer period of time).

What Kinds of Data Can You Obtain From Narratives?

Paula: Narrative data allows one to either look back in time by asking participants to recollect past experiences or to look forward in time to envision events to come and to trace developments in, for example, identities and beliefs. It should be stressed that narratives in the different modes used so far by us (i.e., verbal, visual, multimodal) do offer different possibilities when used for these purposes, but each mode has its limitations. Depending on the research design, it is possible to obtain either cross–sectional or longitudinal data if a task is repeated over a period of time to compare different types of participants or to trace developments over time in one respect or another (e.g., identities, beliefs, emotions), as was the case in Study 1 summarized above.

In my view, we have not yet exhausted the modes of narratives available, consider, for example, moving pictures (YouTube video clips) as opposed to still pictures, drawings (as was the case in Study 2) or snap–shots, or three–dimensional visualizations (e.g., identity boxes, see Frimberger, White, & Ma, 2018) as opposed to the two–dimensional material used so far. These are all ways of broadening the array of visual narratives. In addition, social media (with different kinds of forums) can offer identity narratives, being authentic/naturalistic (as opposed to contrived) data.

Maria: In addition to what Paula mentioned, I would like to stress the value of narratives as part of longitudinal studies for tracking L2 learner development. Through repeated narrative tasks, possibly accompanied with narrative interviews, it can be possible to grasp changes in

identity. Repeated activities make it possible to return to themes that have been raised before. In Study 4, the interviews were used to return to experiences that had been brought up in essays and vice-versa. This kind of flexible data collection method offered both the researcher and the participants possibilities for correcting, reconsidering and asking questions. In my opinion, this kind of data is especially valuable in understanding identity development longitudinally.

What Kind of Tasks Have You Used and How Do These Differ in Quality?

Paula: Over the years we have been exploring the possibilities of narratives mainly in two modes: verbal and visual. Initially, we worked with written data, and asked our students to write their life stories or autobiographies to recollect their past experiences of learning English, starting from their first contact with the language. Since then, we have also used other types of tasks (including sentence-completion tasks, for details, see Study 1) and explored the possibilities offered by drawings or self-portraits (see, e.g., Kalaja, Alanen, & Dufva, 2013). Most recently, we have asked our students to produce drawings, either by hand or generated by a computer, to envision their teaching of English, or other L2s, in the years to come and to comment on these in writing (for details, see Study 2). The commentaries have been either open-form (as was the case in Study 2) or structured (see, e.g., Kalaja & Mäntylä, 2018) and, in my view, these have been of great help in interpreting the pools of visual data.

Maria: The most important narrative methods I have used are narrative interviews (study 4) and biographical writing (studies 3 and 4). Narrative interviews provide data on the ongoing identity construction process, which is affected by the context of the interview and the interaction between the interviewer and the participant. The strength of this method is the possibility for co-construction as the situation enables asking questions, returning to themes and asking for clarification. In comparison, biographical writing provides access to more coherent narratives that offer richer data on the individual reflective process. For a researcher, it is therefore important to consider what the most important research questions to be answered are. For the participants themselves, I believe both kinds of tasks, narrative interviews and biographical writing, create important moments for identity work. Tasks that enable reflection provide possibilities for summarizing and reinterpreting life experiences. On the other hand, tasks including interaction with other people create possibilities for seeing one's own experiences from a new perspective and being challenged to reconsider identities. To me, a combination of different tasks is the best way to foster L2 learner identity development. Especially in the early stages, discussing the tasks with pupils is also highly significant for enabling the students to benefit from the tasks.

In What Ways are Narrative Tasks Significant in L2 Identity Work?

Maria: Narratives are essential for constructing and reconstructing identities. Narrative activity occurs naturally, even without outside support. It is, however, a process that does not automatically lead to positive development of learner identity. As Polkinghorne (1996) points out, it is possible for individuals to resort to negative self-narratives that are harmful to their future development and prevent purposeful activity in a community. Language learners can resort to storytelling that labels them as poor language learners, leading, for example, to disengagement and disenchantment with the L2 learning process (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018).

For this reason, the choice of narrative tasks is quite essential when we want to use them for pedagogical purposes. I see using well-chosen narrative tasks as having three functions in supporting identity work in educational settings. Firstly, narratives provide essential understanding to teachers and learners of the ways in which the learners see the learning process

(Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Secondly, they provide the possibility of reconsidering the past in the light of present life experiences. Thirdly, and most importantly, narrative tasks can be used to positively guide narrative processes. Tasks that ask learners, for example, to describe a success related to L2 learning can positively strengthen their sense of self and provide clues for how to succeed in the future. Narrative processes such as this are important in fostering the development of L2 learner identity.

Paula: Narrative data enables us to reflect on past experiences, but also to envisage the future; this makes it possible to compare the past and future with the present, both generally and professionally, to figure out how our present situation compares with certain past and future states of affairs, such as identities and professional knowledge or beliefs, as is evident from all the four studies summarized in Section 3.

What Functions Have You Seen Narratives Play in L2 Learner Identity Development?

Paula: By looking back in time and using longitudinal narrative data, it is possible to trace developments in identity from L2 learner to L2 user or multilingual subject (as was reported in Study 1), and students' realization of the global spread of English that has been taking place in Finland (and elsewhere) in the past few years. English is used widely in the country in different domains, including education, business and spare-time activities. As a result, we should reconsider the norms for correct use of the language and its assessment practices in schools, and this reconsideration should be reflected in the aims set for teaching the language and the identity development of those involved, be they L2 learners or teachers.

In contrast, by using narratives to look forward in time (as was the case in Study 2), we can encourage our students to imagine what might lie ahead of them. This supports the development of their professional identities as L2 teachers by making it possible for them to evaluate their current strengths and weaknesses and to identify where they need to invest in their studies before entering the profession as officially qualified L2 teachers (not that identity development stops there, as is evident from Studies 3 and 4 by Maria).

Maria: In my studies the narratives have been more backward looking than in the studies of Paula and her colleagues. In Study 3, the tasks gave the student teachers an opportunity to reinterpret past experiences and ask themselves questions about their development. That study indicated that the identified development in the students' ways of conceptualizing their L2 identities was supported by the biographical writing process. The essays provided the students with a means of becoming aware of their dispositions and questioning the meaning of those dispositions for themselves. Therefore, I see that narratives, when provided at the right moment, have the potential to genuinely advance language learners' development.

In Study 4, I also found that not only personal narratives but also those of others can be important for learner development. In that study, the participants shared how their experiences with their pupils influenced their teacher identity. Their stories show the importance for individual development of listening to other people's stories. As a consequence, I think we as teachers should be open to our students' stories and encourage peer sharing.

In What Ways are Emotions Related to Narrative Identity Work?

Maria: I believe this is connected to the previous question about the function of narratives. Narratives help to bring the emotions to the fore in identity development. People's stories are full of emotions. Through stories, these emotions can be reflected on in a new way. I understand this process as having two layers. In a storytelling process, people interpret their expe-

periences first implicitly to give them a shape in written or oral form. Going back to this implicit original interpretation then creates a possibility for reinterpretation, either on one's own or with the help of others. Because of the emotions that they contain, narratives can also shape learner development. As Golombek and Doran (2014) argue, cognitive dissonance is often too weak to bring about real change in practices. In contrast, emotional dissonance, as expressed in the story by the newly qualified teacher quoted above (in Study 4), has the power to change who we are and how we are. Listening to other people's stories can also make us sensitive to our own needs and development.

Paula: As I noted earlier, narratives come in different modes, and there might be personal preferences: some people simply love writing, others speaking, yet others visualizing events in their lives (e.g., by producing drawings, taking pictures, or constructing three-dimensional identity boxes). Formal L2 learning and teaching are full of ups and downs, often depending on the teachers, being either loved or hated, or depending on evaluation practices with successful or not so successful outcomes, and so positive and negative emotions are often at stake. In cases like these, L2 learners might prefer visualization over other modes of narrating. In addition, the events people have experienced may have been very dramatic, possibly involving very negative emotions. Consider, for instance, those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as might be the case with refugees (see, e.g., Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018). In these challenging cases, L2 learners or users might not have much choice but to visualize their experiences to be able to share them.

On a more critical note, so far we have not given the participants in our studies much choice regarding how, or in what mode, they should share their stories. This should be reconsidered in future studies.

More recently, we have allowed our participants greater freedom in producing narratives in the visual mode (see, e.g., Kalaja & Mäntylä, 2018): in addition to producing drawings by hand, we offer the option of using computer software or making collages from magazine or newspaper cuttings (see Section 4.2 for more ideas). On the other hand, use of more than one mode (e.g., partly visual and partly oral narratives) may make the data analysis more challenging.

How Can Narratives be Used in L2 Teacher Education or in L2 Education in General?

Paula: For years I have been collecting (with my colleagues) narratives irrespective of their mode from our students for two purposes: firstly, to carry out research, and secondly, to have our students share with their fellow students and with us their past experiences of learning (and teaching) English, their current understandings of key issues in our field, and their visions of teaching in the future. Through this verbalizing and/or visualizing, and comparing and contrasting, we argue that it is possible to increase our students' awareness of the key issues at hand and to deepen their reflection.

Regarding L2 education in general, the national core curricula (for grades 1 to 12, age 7–18) have recently been revised. As a result, the status of English as a lingua franca is finally acknowledged and learning-to-learn skills are advocated as one of the three main aims of L2 teaching and learning. I can envision plenty of uses for narratives in a variety of modes and for a number of purposes with L2 learners of any age—from small children to the elderly, the latter being a growing proportion of the Finnish population that is eager to invest in learning L2s.

Maria: If we understand foreign L2 learning as a process of identity development, as Norton (2013) suggests, it is essential that we support this process in the same way that we support other kinds of learning. Therefore, I think narrative tasks in different forms should be part

of all language teaching. Firstly, this is because they provide our students an opportunity to think about their development, and secondly, because they offer us as teachers the opportunity to understand our students and their experiences. However, it is not the meaning of narrative tasks in themselves that I want to emphasize, but rather the processes that they can bring about. The choice of narrative tasks is an important question to consider. I also think that discussion and guidance in interpreting and using narratives in learner development is an important part of the process. Using narratives also necessitates an ethical orientation from the teacher as well as dedication to commit the time needed to work through them.

Conclusion

In this article we have illustrated the use of different types of narrative tasks and a narrative approach to supporting and examining L2 learner (and eventually teacher) identity development. In our opinion, narrative tasks provide possibilities to summarize the past, envision the future, and bring emotions and beliefs into conscious consideration, and possibly reconsideration. By letting our students tell their stories and by being ready to listen to them we can help them to construct better L2 learner identities for themselves, that is, identities that can help them to embrace differences and persevere in challenging situations. By sharing our stories and listening to those of others we can also learn to be better L2 teachers.

Although we recognize narratives as a central tool in L2 learning and understanding L2 learners, we also recognize their limitations. Narratives are always highly context-dependent, constructed in specific instances of talking, writing or producing visual images of one type or another and used for specific purposes. They are, however, valuable as artefacts that can mediate L2 learner (or teacher) identity development.

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