

8-2012

# English Learning and Teaching Journey of Second Language Learners in Postgraduate Program: A Study of Bilingual and Multilingual Speakers' Construction of Identity in Autobiographical Narratives

Tong Zhang

*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Zhang, Tong, "English Learning and Teaching Journey of Second Language Learners in Postgraduate Program: A Study of Bilingual and Multilingual Speakers' Construction of Identity in Autobiographical Narratives" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 1106.  
<http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/1106>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact [cclouser@iup.edu](mailto:cclouser@iup.edu), [sara.parme@iup.edu](mailto:sara.parme@iup.edu).

ENGLISH LEARNING AND TEACHING JOURNEY OF SECOND LANGUAGE  
LEARNERS IN POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM  
A STUDY OF BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL SPEAKERS' CONSTRUCTION OF  
IDENTITY IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Tong Zhang

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2012

© 2012 Tong Zhang

All Rights Reserved

Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
The School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the thesis of

Tong Zhang

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

---

---

Sharon K. Deckert, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English, Advisor

---

---

David I. Hanauer, Ph.D.  
Professor of English

---

---

Gloria Park, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of English

ACCEPTED

---

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: English Learning and Teaching Journey of Second Language Learners in Postgraduate Program: A Study of Bilingual and Multilingual Speakers' Construction of Identity in Autobiographical narratives

Author: Tong Zhang

Thesis Chair: Dr. Sharon K. Deckert

Thesis Committee Members: Dr. David I. Hanauer  
Dr. Gloria Park

In this study, I explored four bilingual and multilingual speakers' constructions of identities in their language learning and teaching journeys. Conducting this research by using autobiographical narrative analysis method, I collected and analyzed participants' autobiographies and the follow-up interviews which offer a rich data resource to utilize in order to unfold these four ELLs' language learning and teaching experiences inside and outside of school and to help me investigate bilingual and multilingual speakers' constructions of identities and explore how their multiple aspects of identity are related to their identities as English teachers.

Participants presented their identities as co-constructed and complex in nature and viewed their identity construction in autobiographical narratives: Language learners or language teachers, gender identities, and members of different language communities, which were collaborated and interconnected within their entire constructions of identities. The participants' narrative also indicated the uniqueness and complexity in their construction of identities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who made it possible to complete this thesis. This work would not have been completed without the contribution of the following people who I would like to express my sincere thanks.

I appreciate my committee members: Dr. Sharon K. Deckert, Dr. Gloria Park and Dr. David I. Hanauer who have supported and helped me in productive ways. It was such a privilege to have all of them on my research committee. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Sharon K. Deckert, my advisor for this thesis. Her timely and constructive feedback, stimulating suggestions, and encouragement helped me through all the research for and writing of this thesis. I am honored to have worked with her in this process. In addition, her valuable advice helped me to improve on my academic writing skills. I also want to thank the committee members, Dr. Gloria Park and Dr. David I. Hanauer, for their guidance throughout the design of this thesis and their suggestions for improvement in this thesis. Their effort encouraged me to be a professional researcher and educator.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the faculty of the English Department, namely Dr. Dan J. Tannacito, Dr. Jeannine M. Fontaine, Dr. Lilia Savova, and Dr. Michael M. Williamson, for their contributions to my academic and professional growth in my program. I offer heartfelt thanks to my classmates and friends who encouraged me while I struggled to write my thesis. I would also like thank all my participants for their cooperation, and I would like say thank you to all the friends who stayed by my side over the past two years; without you I would not have such wonderful and unforgettable memories in my life. Last but not least, special thanks go to my dear Mom, Dad and family. Without their dedicated support, which was an irreplaceable source of energy and inspiration, I could not successfully complete this study.

## Table of Contents

Chapter		Page
ONE	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	PERSONAL RATIONALES .....	1
	STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	3
	SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	4
	RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	5
	ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY .....	5
TWO	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
	INTRODUCTION .....	8
	IDENTITY .....	9
	THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN LANGUAGE.....	9
	<i>Identity and gender.</i> .....	11
	<i>Identity, community and membership of groups.</i> .....	12
	<i>Language identity and language community.</i> .....	13
	<i>Identity and self.</i> .....	15
	COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION .....	18
	BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL SPEAKERS’ IDENTITY IN RESEARCH .....	19
	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	22
	<i>Narratives.</i> .....	22
	<i>Interviews.</i> .....	24
	<i>Autobiographical narratives and research.</i> .....	24
CONCLUSION.....	29	
THREE	METHODOLOGY .....	30
	QUALITATIVE STUDY .....	30
	RESEARCH SITE .....	30
	PARTICIPANT SELECTION.....	31
	METHODS OF SELECTING PARTICIPANTS.....	31
	METHOD OF OBTAINING DATA .....	33
	PROCEDURE .....	34
<i>Stage 1: Collection of autobiographical narratives.</i> .....	35	

	<i>Stage 2: Initial analysis of autobiographic narratives</i> .....	35
	<i>Stage 3: Autobiography highlighting</i> .....	35
	<i>Stage 4: Interview.</i> .....	36
	<i>Stage 5:Transcribing.</i> .....	37
	DATA ANALYSIS METHOD .....	37
	CONCLUSION.....	38
FOUR	PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION .....	40
	YEA-TING: .....	40
	DEWI .....	45
	TEIBA.....	56
	THABANG .....	65
	CONCLUSION.....	75
FIVE	DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....	75
	IDENTITY AS CO-CONSTRUCTION AND COMPLEX IN NATURE.....	80
	IDENTITY CONSTRUCT AS AN ENGLISH TEACHER .....	82
	<i>Yea-ting: "Exchange Student" and "Prospective Teacher"</i> .....	84
	<i>Dewi: "English Learner" and "English Teacher"</i> .....	87
	<i>Teiba: The path to be an "English Teacher"</i> .....	91
	<i>Thabang: Multiple roles in being an "English Teacher"</i> .....	93
	LANGUAGE IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE COMMUNITY .....	96
	<i>Thabang: Language identity and language community</i> .....	97
	<i>Dewi: Language identity and language community.</i> .....	100
	<i>Teiba: Language identity and language community</i> .....	102
	GENDER, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY .....	104
	CONCLUSION.....	106
	REMAINING QUESTIONS IN THIS STUDY.....	108
	IMPLICATIONS .....	109
	REFERENCES .....	111
	APPENDICES .....	117
	APPENDIX 1 SAMPLE E-MAIL COMMUNICATION .....	118
	APPENDIX 2 INFORMED CONSENT FORM A .....	119

APPENDIX 3 INFORMED CONSENT FORM B ..... 120  
APPENDIX 4 DIRECTION FOR HIGHLIGHTING AUTOBIOGRAPHY ..... 121

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Profile of Participants .....	33
2	Constructions of Participants' Identities.....	76, 83

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

With the growing number of second language writers entering the United States universities, there has been a great deal of interest in the discussion of bilingual and multilingual language writers' identities and their writings in the composition classroom (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008; Pavlenko, 2007; Park, 2011). As a group whose members come from varied cultural backgrounds, bilingual and multilingual speakers display multiple identities that connect their personal experience with the language learning process in their writings. In recent decades, linguistic autobiography has become a popular means of data collection in the applied linguistic field (Pavlenko, 2003; Numrich, 1996). Linguistic autobiographies offer insight into people's private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide an inside view of the process of language learning, attrition, and use. Therefore, the analysis of bilingual and multilingual speakers' autobiographies can provide reliable data in the research of their multiple identities. Numerous studies have discussed second language learning through analyzing second language writers' personal narratives. However, there are few studies discussing how second language writers construct identities that influence their second language learning and teaching in personal narratives. Thus, it is worth exploring the theoretical connections between second language writers' autobiographies and their multiple identities.

#### **Personal Rationales**

As a second language learner who has been studying English since primary school, I have been learning English as a foreign language in mainland China for nearly twelve years. Reviewing my English learning experience, English as one of the compulsory subjects in China's education system has played a significant role in my personal educational journey and has even

changed my life path. With the improvement of my English proficiency in varied stages, the way I see myself has been changed gradually. When reflecting on my English learning journey, that how I struggled in identifying myself in the different language learning and teaching contexts can be seen, especially after I came to the United States and had contact with a different English education system. Also, as a candidate for the master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in an accredited university in the US, the knowledge that I have learned from this two year study also inspired me to consider how to investigate second language learners' identities in their language learning path.

During the two years of study in the TESOL program in the United States, where English was taught as the native language in most of the education system, learning English and learning the knowledge of teaching English to speakers of other languages changed and (re)shaped the way I saw myself through the whole English learning journey. This also intrigued me to find out whether other second language learners experienced the same struggles of identifying themselves in their lives. In addition, in the summer of 2011, I took one class which mainly introduced the knowledge of identity, and also discussed the relationship between identities and second language writers. This was my first time studying identity in a theoretical and systematical way, which brought some important theories and concepts to me. What I learned from that class built up my fundamental structure of theories in studying second language learners' identities. Therefore, at the end of my two year studying in the MA TESOL program, I planned to do research through which I could explore other second language learners' identities through autobiographic narratives and interviews. During the discussion in class and communications with other second language learners, the varied recognitions and negations about how to understand identity caught my attention. All these different ideas about "identity" inspired me to

explore more about how second language learners understand and present their identities through narratives. Finally, conducting research about second language learners' identities in second language writings came to my mind.

Above, I have explained the background and origin of my research; I conducted this qualitative research project based on the notion of construction, identity and second language acquisition. This research is focused on what identities are presented and how they constructed their identities, particularly, how they view their identities in their autobiographies. Through examining their autobiographical narratives, this study sheds light on how second language learners' identities are constructed and contribute to their language learning and identity construction as an English teacher which are presented in their autobiographies. Meanwhile, as a master student in the TESOL program, through this study I realized the importance of investigating second language learners through studying their language learning experiences, which contain rich information about how to understand bilingual and multilingual learners who are studying English as their second languages.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In this study, I explore the language acquisition experiences of four multilingual speakers who study English as a second language or one foreign language during their language learning and teaching journey. Understanding and studying what identities are constructed and how their identities are constructed through their varied language learning and teaching experiences are my major concerns in my research. Based on the theories of the constructs of identity and second language acquisition, I focus on how second language learners' identities are formed in their different social and cultural contexts, and how these constructs of identities are influenced by their language educational journey.

With the increase of learners who study English as their second language or foreign language coming into the English learning classroom, the attention to the bilingual and multilingual speakers who are studying English as a Second Language (ESL) or as a Foreign Language (EFL) is raised in the research. Through studying more about second language acquisition and the previous research about second language learners' identities, I believe more investigations, which are based on analyzing individual second language learners' experiences, are needed in the whole second language acquisition field. In this study, the discussion of second language learners' identities includes more second language learners' cognitions of their language learning and teaching journey. Thus, the studying of the bilingual and multilingual speakers' autobiographical narratives is one of the effective approaches which could provide rich and various data for investigating how second language writers' identities are presented by second language learners themselves. Second language writers' own reflections on their identities might bring some useful information or suggestions in second language acquisition and second language teaching pedagogies.

### **Significance of the Study**

For ESL and EFL learners, this study provides insights of learners' identities and how these English language learners (ELLs) constructed their identities under the different language learning and teaching contexts in their educational journey. Examining participants' autobiographical narratives and interviews could offer some ways to better understand how individual multilingual speakers negotiate their identities within certain Communities of Practice. In addition, this study will contribute to clarifying second language writers' identity construction as English teachers that are presented in their language learning and teaching experience within the analysis of their constructions of identities.

Moreover, this qualitative study will help other ESL and EFL learners who are English teachers or preparing to be English teachers to better understand other second language learners' identity construction and adjust to varied social and cultural contexts during their language educational journeys. This study may also contribute to the educators who are teaching in ESL or EFL contexts to better understand ESL and EFL learners' identities and meet their academic and professional needs. All of the reflections from this research produced the rich and powerful perspectives in the studying of second language speakers' identities through their autobiographical narratives and interviews.

### **Research Questions**

I studied how bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities are constructed in four bilingual and multilingual speakers' language learning and teaching journeys via autobiographical narratives. To be connected with the sociolinguistic field, second language acquisition and the notion of identity are added into the theoretical framework in this study. In this study, I mainly discussed the following questions:

1. What identities are the second language learners constructing in the bilingual and multilingual speakers' autobiographical narratives and interviews?
2. How do second language speakers perceive their learning experiences as contributing to their becoming language teachers themselves?

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 2 is an overview of the research from different fields that are related to the topics. It includes the notion of co-construction, the notion of identity in applied linguistics; the theory of Community of Practice; the relations between second language learners, multilingual speakers and identities and the introduction of the qualitative research methodology. Considering the need

to explore how second language writers' identities are constructed, I also focused on the ambivalence in identity, language identity and language community. With regards to the characteristics of the qualitative research methodology in this study, I introduced the historical research by analyzing bilingual and multilingual speakers' identity through autobiographic narratives. It can be seen that most of the research has been centered on how autobiographies are interpreted and analyzed by the researcher, with only a few studies presenting how bilingual and multilingual speakers illustrate their identities in autobiographies. Therefore, analyzing second language learners' construction of identity through participants' own illustrations becomes the focus of this study.

In Chapter 3, I detailed the procedure of exerting autobiographic narrative analysis and interviews within one combined qualitative research method in this study. I reported the methodology in data analysis and data collection. In particular, I introduced the research site and specified the advantages of using autobiographic narrative analysis and interviews. In addition, through describing the procedure in the selection of participants, I explained the design of my interview questions and ended this chapter by explaining the data analysis method which is used in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 includes my findings on these four participants' identity construction in their language learning and teaching experiences by exploring the themes and motifs in their narratives. Through locating participants' narratives of personal experiences, which is focused on language learning and teaching, I have seen a vivid picture of these four bilingual and multilingual speakers' construction of identity. Also, the details in participants' narratives are helpful in understanding their identity construction as English teachers in their language learning and teaching experiences. In Chapter 4, the diversity, uniqueness, and complexity can be seen in

individual participants' constructions of identity. Therefore, I argue that it is hard to generate an identity like "English learner" or "ESL learner" as an identity construction to label different bilingual and multilingual speakers.

By presenting the main theme and motifs in participants' autobiographies and interviews, Chapter 4 also reveals the various factors are related to their constructions of identity, especially for their identity construction as English teachers. These factors include how specific community or gender issues are connected with their construction of identity. Within different social and cultural contexts, participants' construction of identity reflects more diversity in the way they identify themselves as English teachers. Therefore, multiple aspects of participants' identities are displayed in their narratives, which are complex and diverse in nature.

Through using the notion of co-construction and community of practice to analyze participants' narratives, I concluded this qualitative research by discussing what identity construction is presented by these four participants in Chapter 5. In addition, as seen in Chapter 5, I emphasized how participants' constructions of identities as English teachers in their narratives are discussed by each participant. Furthermore, the construction of participants' identities index gender, social, and cultural identities, language identity in language community are necessary constructs which cannot and should not be neglected in exploring bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities. This discussion of bilingual and multilingual learners' identities in Chapter 5 require the acknowledgment of the complexity and uniqueness of ELLs' identity construction. The reflection from the analysis and discussion encourages me to discuss how participants' identity construction as English teachers is displayed in ELLs' narratives.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

In recent research about second language learning, the conceptions of bilingual and multilingual language speakers' identity are congruent with prevailing theories of identity construction and second language learning. In this chapter, the main aim is to introduce the trends and historic research about identities and second language acquisition, especially focusing on displaying how autobiographical narratives contribute to investigating second language learners' identity construction through their educational experiences. Therefore, this chapter includes three main topics: the co-construction of identity in language; Community of Practice in language education; bilingual and multilingual speakers' identity in research; qualitative research methodology; language identities and social identities; self-recognition of identities and the use of autobiographical narrative in understanding identity construction.

In the first section, I introduced the development of research in the theory of identity. Some acknowledged theories and studies about the construction of identity are reviewed in this section. In the second section, I discussed language identities and social identities which are focused on introducing language identities and social identities which are closely related to the construction of second language learners' identities. In the third section, prior studies about investigating second language acquisition through narratives are referenced. In addition, in the third section, I discuss the importance and advantages of using the particular research methodology used in this specific study. Thus, I introduce using autobiographical narratives as a methodology in the research of the second language learning field in the analysis about bilingual or multilingual speakers' identities.

## **Identity**

In the last thirty years, discussions of identity have included many different areas and fields (Block, 2006; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). All of these studies surrounding the notion of “identity” started from different perspectives that are more closely related to fields these researchers belong to. Gradually, by analyzing my participants’ autobiographical narratives, I came to understand that identity is co-constructed in language, varied in different contexts and related to the sense of community. Therefore, the definition of identity I used in this research is as Deckert and Vickers (2011) conclude:

Identity, as it will be looked at here, is not a static quality of an individual, but it is flexible, fluid, and multi-aspected co-construction that is only partially (if at all, in some instances) representative of an individual’s sense of self (p.10).

Therefore, in the following sections of my literature review I will explain what I mean by “flexible, fluid and multi-aspected co-construction” in the varied research about identities.

### **The Co-construction of Identity in Language**

As language users, people do not only use language as a tool in interaction but also try to form and express their identities. As Deckert and Vickers (2011) point out, because interactions are very complex, the identity that is formed by people includes many different aspects in the ongoing interaction of an event. This means that the constructions of identity in language contain a number of disciplinary perspectives. In addition, Jacoby and Ochs (1995) wrote: “One of the important implications for taking the position that everything is co-constructed through interaction is that it follows that there is a distributed responsibility among interlocutors for the creation of sequential coherence, identities, meaning and events” (p.177). In accordance with what they discussed about the co-construction in the interaction, in my study, I tried to present

that each participant analyzed their identities in a co-constructed view, as did. And, I aimed to argue that the construction of identity in language involves more than one aspect of an individual's identity.

It is also important to understand that discussing the individual's use of language includes of the "performance": Erving Goffman (1959) provides an explicit definition of "performance", focuses on how individuals self-consciously present themselves in different social contexts, which provided a different way to discuss identity from considering an individual's sense of "self". "Performance" can be widely found in people's daily lives and is often used to specify the capacity of speech and language in particular, as well as other non-verbal forms of expressive action, to intervene in the course of human events. Therefore, the understanding of identity in his discussion of performance includes how individuals act in their lives. Also, among all these individual performances, discourse would be one of the most important mediums that people would use to directly and indirectly express "self" in ways that socially construct identities. So, the reason I cite Goffman's work here is to illustrate that analyzing the co-construction of identity in this study involves exploring each participants' "performance" in their interactions. This would reveal more aspects of their identities, which are directly and indirectly displayed in this study. Therefore, the understanding of identity can be understood extensively, as Norton (2000) points out, "to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p.5).

Since I discussed previously that the understanding of the co-construction of identity includes more than one aspect, to see what identities second language learners present in the interactions, I focused on how their identities are generated from different gender, social and

cultural context influences. And Delanty's (2003) statement from the sociolinguistic view inspires me to view an individual's identity in an extension view, especially on the understanding the difference between the sense of self and identity construction:

Today, identity has become an issue because the reference points for the self have become unstuck: the capacity for autonomy is no longer held in check by rigid structures, such as class, gender, national ethnicity. The self can be invented in many ways. The contemporary understanding of the self is that of a social self formed in relations of difference rather than of unity and coherence. Identity becomes a problem when the self is constituted in the recognition of difference rather than sameness (p.135).

In this quotation, Delanty (2003) summarizes that the definition of identity is not just strongly related to the basic physical characteristics, such as skin color, biological sex, facial features, body size and so on. However, besides including these more obviously biological characteristics, the understanding and studying of identity should be connected with the larger area of human behavior. Also as Block (2006) claims, the self is also regarded as the product of the social condition in and under which it was developed. It did not only mean that individuals are determined by their membership in social categories, which is based on social class, religion, education, family, peer groups and so on. In a broader sense, it has also meant that individual identities are shaped and formed by the 'cultures' they are situated in. Hence, I explained what different aspects of identities I discussed in this study.

**Identity and gender.** It is not surprising that gender is considered one of the constructs of society, which plays a significant role in an individual's identity. "The current research argues that gender as a social construct is socially and contextually dependent (Deckert & Vickers, 2011, p.14). This perspective is also reflected in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (2003) discussion that

“Gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural” (p.9). Therefore, in my study I aim to build on the connection between gender or one’s gender identity and certain social and cultural contexts.

In addition, gender could also be used as an indicator sign that contains social meaning in languages. As Ochs (1992) points out, “Gender ideologies are socialized, sustained, and transformed through talk, particularly through verbal practices that recur innumerable times in the lives of members of social groups. And gender has social meaning and indexicality in the using of language” (P.336). What Ochs discussed makes me wonder whether one’s gender identity, under certain social and cultural contexts, may not only index the identity that exists within that person, but also be reflected through the language. Moreover, Deckert and Vickers (2011) explain that individuals’ expression and cogitation of gender reflects their social and cultural constructions. They point out that the categorization process for individuals represents a social process that can be examined to identify how gender is socially constructed, particularly in speech communities. Therefore, in my study about second language learners’ identities, the gender identity for participants is discussed based on the social and cultural contexts through the language that are presented. Additionally, language and gender identity are closely related to language and language learning in this study.

**Identity, community and membership of groups.** From a psychological point of view, the understanding of identity goes beyond the biological characteristics but becomes more related to individual social and cultural contexts. In my study, the community is defined as Meyerhoff (2006) defines it as shared practices and goals, whose salience and meaning can only be determined through group members’ interaction or in-group knowledge. Therefore, the cognition of individual identities should include the study of social identity, which is defined by

Tajfel (1974) as “that part of individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (p.69). Tajfel (1974, 1981) points out that the in-group membership is one of the origins where individuals’ identities come from. Hence, individuals may choose to change group membership if a community does not adequately satisfy the part of their social identity that they view positively. What he maintains about social identity illustrates that an individual’s sense of community or membership in a group may be considered a constructions of identity. In my research, the membership of certain groups and various communities of practice are in the center of the discussion of my participants’ identities.

In Tajfel’s (1974, 1981) definition of social identity, which I referred to above, also shows that social identity is dynamic because people change communities or groups. Nevertheless, he rarely discusses multiple group memberships for individuals. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) discuss in their research about individual’s identity in community of practice that is application, such as education, business, and professional association: It can be seen from this research that community members are engaging in a wide range of activities, indicates that individuals constituted themselves under varied social relations and projected their life histories. Therefore, I consider that gender and language are all represented as identity construction through community of practice that signals individual’s identity construction.

**Language identity and language community.** Besides all these explorations of identity, sociolinguists also think about the construction of identities through languages. In my study of second language learners’ identities, the languages and language usage in certain groups of people are the main resource for examining their multiple identities. From the sociolinguistic perspective, language identity is related to a language group that may cross ethnicity and

nationality boundaries. As Silverstein (1998) describes, language community can be regarded as groups professing adherence to the normatively constructed ideologically articulated standard language. What Silverstein discusses about “language community” is related to sharing and claiming the belief to a certain language, dialect or sociolect that all members in the community should adhere. Also, as Deckert and Vickers (2011) write:

As speakers, we do more than perform our language competence in a variety of ways. We also construct aspects of our identities in interactions. These constructions are very complex. More than one aspect of identity can be constructed in the ongoing interaction of an event...When speakers of more than one language meet there can be social assumption about which language to use that are connected to larger societal. This means that often multilingual individuals must negotiate the language they choose to speak, particularly when one of the individuals belongs to the majority language” (p.12-24).

From their point of view, it can be seen that the performance of languages could be varied and rich in presenting different aspects of identities continually. Especially for the individual who can speak more than one language and has to negotiate between the languages usage in specific context, the language identity becomes more outstanding than other aspects of identity. As target participants in my study, second language speakers’ language identities are one of the focuses in the discussion. Hence, I will discuss my participant’s language identity through their narratives and the interactions that show me how their language identities are constructed in their community of practices.

Besides gender, cultural and social identities, Block (2006) also contends that language identity refers to the relationship between one’s sense of self and different means of communication, understood in terms of language, a dialect or sociolect, as well as multimodality.

So, participants' multilingual competence in this study includes different understanding of languages, dialects and sociolects in participants' different language communities. Also, Harris and Rampton (2002) argue that language identities generally include three types of relationships with such means of communication: Language expertise, language affiliation and language inheritance. The expertise is related to how proficient an individual is in a language, dialect or sociolect. Affiliation is about the attitudes which the individual has towards a certain language, dialect or sociolect. Finally, inheritance is more about the fact that a person inherits a language, dialect, or sociolect from the community where he or she was born. Thus, discussing language expertise, language affiliation and language inheritance in the relationship between language community and individuals encourages me to view how second language learners explain and display their relationships within the various language communities and helps me examine their language identity inside.

**Identity and self.** From the poststructuralists' perspectives, Smart (1997) argues that the understanding of identity went beyond the individuals' understanding about "self" and differs from the universal and invariant laws of humanity. It can be seen that identity is closely related to the conception of "self" but is not equal to self. Also, Weedon (1996), as one of the foundational theorists of post structuralism, uses "subjectivities" to refer to "the conscious thoughts and emotions of the individual" (p.32) in the discussion about the relationship between identity and self. In addition, Deckert and Vickers (2011) point out that the term "self" is not equivalent to the conception of identity. However, it is possible to conclude that, in some interactions, the way individuals' view themselves construct certain aspects of their identities. In this study, I discuss second language learners' identities through the narratives that indicate the meaning of "self". However, the discussion of the construction of identity does not only include

how participants identify themselves but also includes how participants situate themselves in the interactions. Therefore, I introduce two perspectives, positioning and ambivalence, when analyzing individuals' construction of identity.

As Harré and Davies (1999) claim, "positioning is the discussion process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (p. 37). They argue that the "discursive process" in question is the ongoing engagement with others that individuals experience as they participate in their day-to-day activities. This involves not only the use of language but also other forms of semiotic activities, such as dress and body moment. For this reason, the physical metaphors of position and location are important in this discussion. Davies and Harré (1999) also state that "individuals both situate themselves through their discursive practices and at the same time, they are situated by others" (p.37). In other words, all individuals will position themselves and others according to their sense of what constitutes a coherent narrative for the particular activity, time and place.

In the discussion of individuals' identity of ambivalence, I tried to build up a connection between the factors that make individuals feel ambivalence and how their identities are affected by the ambivalence. As Mercer (1990) maintains, "the identity becomes an noticeable issue when it is in a crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displayed by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (p.43). In this research, moving across geographical and sociocultural borders could be considered as one important factor that influences how a person constructs his or her identity. In such situations, individuals would be influenced by any feelings they might have while struggling inside or outside. Besides, the struggle of constructing different identities in specific geographical and sociocultural settings does not mean that individuals would reach a stable status of self but means identity is dynamic and changeable. This status

could be regarded as ambivalence in individual's identity construction. Therefore, it can be seen that changing cultural contexts and exposure to the second language encourages the individual's identity to change into an unclearly defined stage. This perspective leads me to investigate ambivalence in the participants' constructions of identities in my research. As Block (2006) claims, ambivalence is the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart. It is a mutually conflicting feeling of love and hate. And it is the simultaneous affirmation and negation of such feelings. Therefore, in this study, the concept of ambivalence inspired me to explore participants' descriptions of emotion, which signals parts of the construction of second language learners' identities.

In the discussion of identities, I also talked about power and recognition (Bucholtz, 2003; Park, 2009), ethnicity and race (Block, 2006), national identities, migrant identities, gender (Cameron, 1995, 2005a, 2005b; Park, 2006) and social class. In addition, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) further explain that identities for the individual are not "driven by...pre-existing and recognizable similarity but...agency and power." It proves that identity is multilayered, dynamic and collective when we discuss individuals' identities by considering their complexity and uniqueness.

It is not hard to find that the concept of understanding "identity" that I introduced above is beyond the "self" and not only concerns rigid structures but also includes individual performance in different social settings and how individuals provide reaction or think of themselves in specific backgrounds through certain media, like language. In this research identity could be understood as a dynamic, multilayered, co-constructed and collective concept in personal experiences. Thus, exploring identities in this study would start by discussing how

individual experiences that are presented in autobiographies and interviews reflect the constructions of identities for groups of second language learners.

### **Community of Practice in Language Education**

The activities of language learning and teaching are considered to be important practices in language education literature. In this study, I reviewed the notion of Community of Practice that was developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) as a learning theory. As Eckert (2006) defines, a community of practice as a collection of people who, on an ongoing basis, engage in some common endeavor. The importance of understanding the notion of Community of Practice in the sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology fields is to perceive that Community of Practice identifies “a social grouping not in virtue of shared abstract characteristics (e.g. class, gender) or simple co-presence (e.g. neighborhood, workplace), but in virtue of shared practice” (p.1). Also, as Wegner (2006) claims:

School is not the privileged locus of learning. It is not a self-contained, closed world in which students acquire knowledge to be applied outside, but a part of a broader learning system. The class is not the primary learning event. It is life itself that is the main learning event. Schools, classrooms, and training sessions still have a role to play in this vision, but they have to be in the service of the learning that happens in the world (p.5).

From these perspectives, the concept of Community of Practice for language learning and teaching does not only appears inside but also outside of school. Therefore, peer-to-peer professional development activities are included in the community of practice for English learning and teaching. In addition, the community of practice also exists in both teachers training, prospective teacher’s teaching practice and their interaction with colleagues. Therefore, under this framework, bilingual and multilingual speakers’ English learning and teaching activities are

presented as communities of practices for their language education. I draw on the theory of Community of Practice to discuss how ELLs in my study construct their identity from their communities of practice in English learning and teaching experiences, especially how they identified their membership in different communities in their educational journey.

The context for investigating bilingual and multilingual speakers' identity construction is situated in varied social and cultural backgrounds where these four participants initially studied English. Complex and varied linguistic situations could be found in their educational journey. The participants in my research mostly come from bilingual and multilingual societies where English is taught as a second language or foreign language in the education system. My participants have been in groups in school, language institutes, teaching training programs and other social groups which help them to improve their English and English teaching competence. Based on the theory of Community of Practice and the notion of identity, the data of varied communities of practices for English learning and teaching helps me explore how these four bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities are (re)shaped and (re)constructed.

### **Bilingual and Multilingual Speakers' Identity in Research**

When individuals can speak more than one language in certain social and cultural settings, choosing which language they can use during the interactions is connected to the negotiations between the identities they have. That bilingual and multilingual competence is interconnected with various communities of practices and social groups. As Mendoza-Denton (2008) discusses, the multivalent character of identities includes three main types: Sociodemographic category-based identity, practice-based identity and practice-based variation. She suggests that identities and linguistic reflexes are the product of continuous axes of differences. Identity is an indispensable concept for making sense of language as fundamentally sociocultural phenomena,

and that bilingual or multilingual language use is an especially revealing and complex situation in which to investigate identity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2008).

The bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities in second language learners' experiences are also represented when they meet different social and cultural backgrounds, especially when facing the conflicts of a varied sense of values. Also, in Benson and Nunan (2005)'s collection, which is focused on second language learners' accounts of their experiences, they argue that there is a growing visibility of diversity in the current research of second language learners' identities. Their research reflects the fact that rich information about how bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities are presented and negotiated in individuals' experiences are not replaceable and neglected. So, in my research, the multilingual speakers' identities are collectively analyzed by discussing the same themes, which are shared by all participants but also are based on individual social and cultural contexts.

Also as Deckert and Vickers (2011) point out, "In one sense, the labels that have been created for these speakers have arisen not out of the everyday lives of various people, but out of the academic world that studies the processes of acquiring a second language"(p.27). For instance, the language identity is related to the audibility in the second language learning. As Jennifer Miller (2003) invokes in the research about immigrant children in Australia, audibility is superficially about being heard and also about a combination of right accent as well as the right social and cultural capital to be an accepted member of a community of practice. Since all my participants are studying and teaching English as their foreign language or second language for academic reasons, noticing the importance of learning one language would be necessary in this study. As Norton and Mckinney (2011) maintain,

Issues of types of terms used to refer to speakers of languages who also speak English or are in the processes of English providing an interesting site for considering the processes of identity construction. Also, in the second language acquisition field, identity is an important approach which we use it to study how a person understand his or her relationship to the world, how a relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understand about the future (p.76).

In this view, every time learners speak, they are negotiating and renegotiating a sense of self in relation to the larger social world and reorganizing that relation in multiple dimensions of their lives. Therefore, Norton (1997, 2000) argues that three characteristics of identity are particularly relevant to SLA: The multiple, non-unitary nature of identity, identity as a site of struggle, and identity as changing over time. Also, from the second language acquisition perspective, Bhatt (2008), in the research of analyzing the use of Hindi in English newspapers in India, argues the existence of negotiation and navigation between a global identity and local practices. In order to capture the complexity of linguistic hybrids with plural identities, the disciplinary discourse of theoretical studies of the global use of English must bring into focus local forms shaped by the local logics of practice. The result of the analysis of data reflects social members (re-) positioning themselves with regard to new community-practices of speaking, reading and writing. It also offers a new linguistic diacritic for class-based expressions of cultural identity. Bailey (2001) discusses the language of multiple identities through analyzing the discursive constructions of three “in-group/out-group” dichotomies identities among Dominican Americans, whose members must negotiate distinctive issues of identity in the United States. The result of this study reflects that Dominican Americans use linguistic forms from multiple varieties of two codes, Spanish and English, to activate various facets of their

multiple identities. Language is central to these negotiations, both as a symbol of identity and as a medium through which to construct and display local social meanings. Linguistic means for highlighting a specifically non-white identity include avoidance of marked white English forms, mocking use of white English, and extensive adoption of African-American vernacular English.

In regards to the previous research about bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities, it has become necessary to find a set of media to analyze bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities by considering all the possible constructs of identities. In the following section I will discuss the qualitative approach, which will be applied in my study.

### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

In the previous section, I introduced research about bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities. One of the important issues to consider about bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities is, not surprising, the language. To get a comprehensive understanding about how people think of using different languages and how they actually practice, it is important to find resources or information, which includes thick and rich data (Greertz, 1973). As Hansen and Liu (1997) point out, it is necessary to use various methodologies to understand different phrases and multiple layers of social identities, which inspired the sociolinguists to look for thick, rich and diverse data from bilingual and multilingual speakers. Therefore, I chose to use the qualitative methodology that meets the needs of my study.

**Narratives.** Narratives are the most basic of all discourse units (Linde, 1993). The use of narratives as a research tool has a long history in general education (Denny 1978). However, emergence of narratives as a research genre in language teaching has been discussed recently (Benson and Nunan, 2005). Narratives provide insights to human condition that are based on

human needs (Nunan, 2003). As Bell (2002) claims about narrative research is more than analyzing participants' stories but also eliciting the meaning that human imposed to their stories:

Participants construct stories that support their interpretation of themselves, excluding experiences and events that undermine the identities they currently claim. Whether or not they believe the stories they tell is relatively unimportant because the inquiry goes beyond the specific stories to explore the assumptions inherent in the shaping of those stories. No matter how fictionalized, all stories rest on and illustrate the story structures a person holds. As such they provide a window into people's beliefs and experiences (Bell, 2002, p.209).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison also point out that the importance to understand that narrative is a type of interpretation. The analysis of narratives cannot be separated from investigating the interpretation:

Words carry many meanings; they are nuanced and highly context-sensitive. In qualitative data analysis are fused and, indeed, concurrent. It is naive to suppose that the qualitative data analyst can separate analysis from interpretation, because words themselves are interpretations and are to be interpreted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.547).

Combining the ideas of Weedon (1996), Du Gay (1996), Layder (1997), Gee (2004) and Blommaert (2005), narratives may be seen as resources of identity construction. The advantage of taking semiotic theory as a point of departure for studying language learning is that another tongue can be seen as another way of creating, conveying, and changing signs, not only of acquiring new grammatical and lexical tools that are then put to use in a social context. Also, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state, narrative is a way of expressing thinking that is

shaping and shaped by people who are members of different discourse communities. Therefore, considering bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities, the "communities" of the different bilingual and multilingual speakers who are sharing the same constructs of identity could directly or indirectly display their identities through narratives.

**Interviews.** To get the most accurate and detailed data from the writers of the autobiographies, it was necessary to use interviews as a part of the methodology in this research. "Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.409). In this research, using interview in this research is to gathering information that is directly relevant to the research objectives, or to work as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships. Besides, the interview also can be used in conjunction with other method in a research undertaking (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.411). Since the analysis of the autobiographies may need participants to illustrate their social and cultural backgrounds that they mentioned in autobiographies, the interviews will be used as an "explanatory device" to support or extend the researcher's analysis of the autobiographies. On the other hand, the responses from the interviewees could extend the interviewer's previous analysis of their autobiographies

**Autobiographical narratives and research.** The current sociolinguistic researchers also consider how to use bilingual and multilingual speakers' autobiographies or other discourses in the analysis of identities. In Ortmerier-Hooper's (2008) study about the negotiation of second language writers' identities in the mainstream composition classroom, she argues that the different labeling identities for second language writers are problematic and mask a wide range of student experiences and expectations through analyzing three case studies of immigrant, first-

year college students. In this specific set of case studies, she combined participants' writing, class observations and interviews. From her discussion about the connection between second language learners' identity and their writings, she has drawn upon the work of Erving Goffman and his theories on performance and social identities in order to explain the connections that can be made between student identity negotiation and their writing in the composition classroom: First, writing is a key to developing a certain sense of identity. Second, writers often "perform" certain identities in their writing. Using case studies in her research offered a set of data with detailed information from individual participants in the research. However, the interpretation of the data only came from her analysis. In Ortmerier-Hooper's research, I believe investigating participants' perspectives on their identities is necessary if the researcher wants to study more about how exactly individual participants "perform" or "view" their own identities. Using the approach that includes not only the researchers' interpretation of identities but also participants'— second language writers' understandings about their identities might provide more valuable information that would help us to know more about second language learners. Therefore, it is a reminder that researchers in the future study could combine more research methods, which could help us to investigate the construction of bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities.

The importance of an individual's life story and experience in the analysis of autobiography cannot be neglected, especially when researchers are finding individual identities in certain media, like autobiographies or other narratives. Paul Kei Matsuda (2001), in his study about voice in Japanese written discourse implications for second language writing, argues that the difficulties that Japanese students face in constructing voice in English written discourse are due, not to its incompatibility with their cultural orientation, but to the different ways in which

voice is constructed in Japanese and English as well as the lack of familiarity with the writing strategies in English. Matsuda mentions his own language learning experiences:

That being “myself” did not seem to me to mean representing the “self” that I construct when I talk to myself English-speaking friends or the one I constructed I am with my teachers. Did I mean my Japanese self—how I generally see myself when I am in Japan? But I was also aware that, when I was in Japan, I constructed and represented my “self” in various ways because of the socially sanctioned values and codes of behavior that were not familiar with the context in which it was constructed (Matsuda , 2001).

Also in his data analysis of the participants’ written discourse, he focuses on how the “self” is presented in the writing. For example, he talked about the use of Katakana, self-referential pronouns and sentence-final participles, which I think are very necessary in the written discourse analysis.

Through analyzing autobiographical narratives, the negotiation of writers’ identity construction in different language, cultural and political contexts in their collection of papers could be found (Benson & Nunan, 2005). Benson and Nunan state that observing and analyzing autobiographies could also raise the awareness about “textual identities,” which should be highlighted in the second language writings: “Autobiographic research is beginning to show, however, the senses in these factors are integral and dynamic dimension of second language learning that are intimately are tied up of the construction of identity” (Benson & Nunan 2005, 174). Compared with Benson and Nunan’s focus on studying the difference and diversity in second language writing , Kramsch (2003) has developed the idea that discusses language learners’ identity construction through writing in the target language (TL). From her perspective, language learners are developing a sense of “self” in the TL writing context. She called this

sense of “self” as a ‘textual identity’ (Kramersch, 2003). In her discussion about ‘textual identity’, the starting point in the argumentation is how language learners use language as medium to express their identity construction that they impose on the text. Moreover, discussing “textual identities” in second language writing analysis, especially second language autobiographic narratives, could be a productive progress that enriches the exploration of multiple aspects of identity in second language writing. Specifically, in my study this will be important to view how and what identities that second language learners constructed from their autobiographical narratives. The similarities and differences between what they wrote and what they understand about “identity” will provide a new angle to see individual second language learners’ self-cognition of identity.

Plummer (1995, 2001) also argues that one essential feature of being human is our creation of stories to us and others, and these are essential features of research enquiry. Just as Plummer notes, autobiographies are one of the narratives that offer a media to the narrator to present the creation of “our stories”. Also as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) note, “

An autobiographical narrative, for all it is multilayered and selective, can be deconstructed at many levels: personal, cultural, interpersonal, ideological, linguistic and so on. It has facts, themes, actors, a sequence, agency, coherence, situations and a sense of audience, all of which elements of a true discourse (p.584).

In this research, I build up the analytical system, which is based on the analysis of bilingual and multilingual speakers’ autobiographies, and also discuss Pavlenko’s (2007) argumentation of framework about using autobiographic narrative as data in applied linguistics. To acknowledge the co-construction of narratives and identities, Pavlenko (2004) argues for an approach to study language-learning narratives that combines sociohistorical, sociocultural, and

rhetorical analyses of data. Also in 2007, she talks about seeking three types of information in autobiographical narratives: subject reality, life reality and text reality. She also argues that some analytical approaches, in particular content and thematic analyses, are insensitive to the interpretive nature of autobiographic data. Pavlenko lists three main benefits for using autobiographic narrative in the research. First of all, autobiographic narratives offer insights into people's private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide the insider's view of the process of language learning and teaching. Secondly, they highlight new connections between various learning processes and phenomena, and, in doing so, point to new directions for future research. Thirdly, autobiographic narratives constitute as a valuable information source for holistic and diachronic sociolinguistic research in contexts where others are scarce. Also in her discussion about analysis of bi- and multilingual speakers' autobiographies, she focuses on six steps, which she concluded in the theoretical approaches to analysis of autobiographies: Collecting linguistic autobiographies; transcribing oral narratives, analyzing language choice, analyzing content, analyzing context and analyzing the form in autobiographies.

In sum, previous studies have shown that autobiographic narrative can be a powerful textual resource in the investigation of second language writer's multiple identities through analyzing their social, textual and life reality through their writings. Collecting and analyzing the participants' autobiographies of their bilingual or multilingual learning experiences will increase the understanding of the varied identities of second language writers. Hence, it is necessary to study second language writers' bilingual or multilingual learning experiences through their social and personal life realities in autobiographies. Additionally, second language learners' self-reflections of identities could extend the way the researcher understands second language learners' identities. It may also help second language teachers to understand individual second

language learners from a more holistic view and improve the communication between teachers and students. Given these needs, my study attempts to discuss second language writers' multiple identities in their autobiographies and how second language writers construct their identities in their autobiographies.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I reviewed the historical research about identities in the first section. Through this review, identity could be understood in a co-constructed, multi-aspected conception through various communities of practice. Researchers note that the existences of varied construction, especially the gender, social, cultural and language constructions of identity, are highlighted in bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities. Analysis of autobiography has been used in the researching of second language learning, bilingual and multilingual speakers' negotiation in the use of languages and identity representations.

With regards to the research on bilingual and multilingual speakers' identities through analyzing autobiographies, most of them have been centered around how autobiographies are interpreted and analyzed by the researcher, with only a few studies presenting how bilingual and multilingual speakers illustrated their identities in autobiographies. Therefore, my study of analyzing how second language speakers construct their identities in autobiographies can contribute to the existing body of knowledge on second language learners' identities and autobiographic narrative analysis in the sociolinguistic field.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

In this study, second language learners' identity constructions are analyzed via their autobiographical narratives. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of how the research methods were applied in the study and highlights the methodology issue of previous research and literature. Additionally, this chapter also illustrates the rationale of why I choose using autobiographical narratives and interviews as a combined qualitative research method in this research.

#### **Qualitative Study**

This section addresses how data will be collected in relation to the understanding of how multilingual and bilingual learning experiences influence second language writers' identities as reflected in their narratives. Since the aim of this research is to study how individual ELLs construct identity in their autobiographies, the methodology that is going to be applied in this research will be focused on exploring each participant's autobiographical narrative through their bilingual or multilingual learning and educational experiences. Therefore, I will now give go into further detail about my methodology below.

#### **Research Site**

This study was based at a middle size, land grant university in the United States. Midwestern University<sup>1</sup> is not famous for its diversity. In the last few years, international students have been steadily increasing in this university. Therefore many second language writings specialists are conducting research. From second language writing research and second language teaching classes to all the departments that have accepted international students, the bilingual and multilingual speakers are a significant presence.

---

<sup>1</sup> All names and institutions are pseudonyms.

As the researcher, I am also located in the same university where my participants came from. I collect all the autobiographies through emails or email attachments between the participants and me. Since I have a recorded interview with each participant, I chose quiet sites for my interviews. For example, I set up my interview sites in participants' homes or in the individual studying room in library; my participants chose any relatively quiet place that could make them feel more relaxed in order to express their feelings.

### **Participant Selection**

Regarding the character of qualitative research method, I recruited four graduate students who come from the MA TESOL program, in which many graduate international students are studying. Many of the students in the pool of potential participants have previously written autobiographies for a class project. So, my criteria for selecting participants are as follows: 1) each participant claims to be bilingual and multilingual speakers who studied English as their second language or foreign language, 2) each participant completed their autobiographies in the spring of 2011 and enrolled in either the full-time or part-time ESL/EFL or second language acquisition program within the research site in the United States, 3) participants used to be English teachers or are future teachers in English. Based on these three criteria, I am able to discuss ELLs' identity construction through analyzing their past English learning and teaching experiences.

### **Methods of Selecting Participants**

Since the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was proved in November 2011, I started to search for prospective participants for this study. I contacted the prospective participants to see whether they showed interests in my study and also to get familiar with their language educational backgrounds. Later, by using the purposive sampling techniques (Bogden

& Biklen, 2003), I gathered valuable information from second language learners who have bilingual and multilingual learning experiences. In addition, the purposeful sampling gave me a chance to communicate with my prospective participants and increase their understanding about participating in this research as volunteers. By the end of December 2011, I had four participants who were interested in my research and met the criteria for my selection of research participants.

### **Initial Contact with Participants**

I sent emails (Appendix 1) as formal invitations to describe my research interests to prospective participants. I received replies from prospective participants and explained my research in more detail. The essence of sending this email is to help them understand my research better. I also introduced my general plan for the research, especially the data collection stage, which needs each participant to provide one autobiography and finish one interview, which would last no longer than 50-60 minutes. For each participant, I provided one consent form (Appendix 2, 3), which they signed and gave back to me when they handed in their autobiographies.

Considering the confidentiality, using pseudonyms in this study is necessary for protecting my participants. They could choose to make up their own pseudonyms that related to their ethnic characteristics (Park, 2006) with their special preference to reflect their identities; if they did not want to make up their pseudonyms, I would assign pseudonyms to them. I would use their pseudonyms when displaying their autobiographic narratives and experiences after getting their permission. Finally, when I formally began collecting the data, I had a total of four participants with the pseudonyms: Yea-ting, Dewi, Teiba, and Thabang.

All these four participants are bilingual and multilingual speaker who finished their undergraduate study in their countries and enrolled into the Master of Fine Arts degree

specializing in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Dewi, Teiba and Yea-ting are female, and Thabang is the only male in this study. The age range for my participants was from 25-40. All four participants are in their second year of the MA TESOL program. As is shown in Table 1, Dewi, Teiba and Thabang have had formal English teaching experiences in their home countries before they came to the United States for their master’s degree. Yea-ting attended the MA TESOL program in the US after she graduated from undergraduate school in her home country.

Table 1

*Profile of Participants*

	<b>Thabang</b>	<b>Dewi</b>	<b>Teiba</b>	<b>Yea-ting</b>
Gender	male	female	female	female
Nationality and Region	South Africa	Indonesia	Ivory Coast	Taiwan
English Teaching Experiences	Yes	Yes	Yes	None
First Language	Xitsonga	Indonesian	French	Mandarin
Multilingual speakers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The aim of collecting the autobiographies from one course in the MA TESOL program was to guarantee those participants’ autobiographies would include their bilingual or multilingual learning experiences, which is the main sources for the data analysis in this study, and for their convenience. Following this purpose, I selected participants from the students of this graduate level class and provided them with a consent form. This autobiography is one of the required essays that need to be viewed by the professor in this class. Thus, the professor should be target as the reader for the participants ‘autobiographies.

**Method of Obtaining Data**

The data was collected in December 2011 and January 2012 over a period of three weeks. Two types of data were collected: autobiographies and interviews, which are recorded with a

digital audio recorder. However, due to the dynamic nature of individual recognition of identities, some of the participants' understandings of their identities and autobiographies may have changed during or after that period of time. Therefore, I tried to focus on analyzing how their identities were presented and constructed from the autobiographies and interviews during that certain period of time. These four participants provided the researcher with autobiographies completed in one class project. That assignment addressed their bilingual or multilingual language learning experiences. After collecting and initially analyzing participants' autobiographies, I conducted four separate interviews with participants using one digital audio recorder. In addition, interview questions were generated from my initial analysis of their autobiographic narratives and language learning and teaching backgrounds.

Analyzing autobiographies and interviewing participants allows me to better understand participants' educational journey through thick and richer data regarding the students' expression of their identities as well as concerning the nature of their experiences from the contents, contexts and texts in participants' narratives. Since autobiographic narratives completed in one language (English), interpretation of the same story can vary in detail, emotion, and structure. To get a deeper analysis of the second language writers' autobiographies, interviewing participants in this research can be used as an approach of inquiry about their identities from and beyond autobiographical narratives. Also, it cannot be neglected that these four participants come from different social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the questions that were asked in the interviews help the researcher to better comprehend participants' construction of identities within varied social and cultural backgrounds.

## **Procedure**

Five stages are included in the qualitative method of this study: collection of

autobiographical narratives, initial analysis of autobiographical narratives, autobiography highlighting, interviewing, and transcribing. All the data (participants' autobiographies and transcripts of interviews) will be presented in English.

**Stage 1: Collection of autobiographical narratives.** Bilingual and multilingual participants were asked to provide their autobiographies in paper or electronic version, which they had already written in one class project. In their autobiographies, participants described their language learning and teaching experiences.

**Stage 2: Initial analysis of autobiographic narratives.** I read and roughly analyzed the general information about each participant. This stage allowed me to overview participants' educational journeys in the autobiographic narratives and prepared the questions for the interview. In addition, I also focused on the theme and motif that participants mainly described in their autobiographies.

**Stage 3: Autobiography highlighting.** After collecting and analyzing participants' autobiographies, I prepared one copy of each autobiography and put it into a separate envelope with a highlighter and a direction (Appendix 4) about how to do the autobiography highlighting: In this stage, participants were asked to use the highlighter to mark any part of their own autobiographies that reflects their identities. Also, in case any misleading or preoccupied assumptions from the researcher might influence the participants' performances in this study, I did not give my participants' any definition to identity before participants highlight their autobiographies. Thus, I informed the participants could highlight any content that could be any word, phrase, sentence or paragraph based on their understanding to identity in their autobiographies.

I left two to three days for participants to highlight their autobiographies and collected all their highlighted autobiographies before each participant's interview. Then, analyzing the two versions of the participants' autobiographies and preparing the audio-recorded interview was the next step.

**Stage 4: Interview.** After the collection of highlighted autobiographies, I read all of the autobiographies with highlighted information and compared them with my analysis. Through the interviews, I got the chance to ask some questions based on their autobiographies. Also, I had further discussion with the participants about their autobiography rather than making assumptions about their written narratives. After Stage 3, I came up with four basic questions that I prepared to ask participants during the four digitally audio taped interviews:

1) I notice that you highlighted . . . in your autobiography, that you think it shows your identities, I'm also really interested in this paragraph. Could you explain to me more about that?

2) I'm very impressed with your description of the experience about . . . in this paragraph. Could you tell me about that?

3) In your autobiography, I found there are some sentences which I think they show me something about your identities, in my analysis, I thought it told me about . . . what do you think of that?

4) How do you feel about your identities?

Considering the related bilingual and multilingual learning experiences appearing in the contents of participants' autobiographies all the time, question 1, question 2 and question 3 were asked by the researcher several times during the interview. These questions are relevant to the research questions and allow me to get rich and thick data (Greertz, 1973). Additionally, follow-up questions during the interviews ensured that interviewees' responses could be as explicit and

detailed as possible. Moreover, this stage enriched my understanding about second language learners' identities in a holistic view. Each interview lasted for 50-60 minutes.

**Stage 5: Transcribing.** According to the participants' willingness, the interviews were conducted in English. For the purpose of data analysis, I transcribed all the digitally recorded interviews by using Express Scribe. As Bird (2005) points out, transcribing contributes to getting a comprehensive understanding about the data for the researcher when the researcher is also the transcriber. Also, in these four one-on-one interviews that I transcribed, I obtained many details that extended what I analyzed from the transcripts and enhanced my understanding about participants' use of languages in interviews.

### **Data Analysis Method**

As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) claim "qualitative research rapidly amasses huge amounts of data, and early analysis reduces the problem of data overload by selecting out significant features for feature focus" (p.237). Exploring the themes or motifs in participants' autobiographical narratives leads me to investigate the meanings that were imposed by participants in specific contexts in their narratives. I analyzed my data according to the theories of the notion of co-construction in identities (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995; Deckert & Vickers, 2011), second language and multilingual learners in second language acquisition (Saville-Troike, 2006; Meyerhoff, 2006), identity and community of practice (Tajfel, 1974, 1981; Wenger, 2000), identity and gender in language (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003) and second language autobiographic narrative analysis (Pavlenko, 2007, 2008).

To seek the "subject reality," "life reality" and "text reality"(Pavlenko, 2007) in the analysis of participants' autobiographical narratives, I focused on finding "what experiences reflects participants' construction of identity in their narratives," "what languages they used in

their autobiographical narrative to describe their experiences,” and “how participants construct their identity as English teacher” Moreover, to clarify participants’ construction of identities I relied on the theories of the language identity and gender (Eckert & McConnell – Ginet, 2003); Social identity and community of practice (Wenger, 2000; Tajfel, 1974, 1981) in examining how social identity in communities is presented and constructed in participants’ narratives.

Also, based on the framework of second language learners and multilingual speakers (Saville-Troike, 2006; Meyerhoff, 2006), I tried to identify how language learning and teaching experiences are related to their construction of identity (Norton & McKinney, 2011) by using the theory of co-constructions in identities ( Deckert & Vickers 2011; Jacoby & Ochs, 1995). Therefore, in the data analysis, I am able to theoretically investigate the construction of second language speakers’ identities across different participants by examining their narratives.

### **Conclusion**

In Chapter 3, I detailed the procedure of exerting autobiographic narrative analysis and interview within one combined qualitative research method in this study. I reported the methodology in data analysis and data collection. In particular, I introduced the research site and specified the advantages of using autobiographic narrative analysis and interviews. In addition, I described the procedure in the selection of participants, explained the design of my interview questions and ended this chapter by explaining the data analysis method that is used in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Schiffrin (1996) claims that “Narrative is a means by which to arrive at an understanding of the self as emergent from actions and experiences, both in relation to general themes or plots and as located in a cultural matrix, beliefs, and practices” (p.194). This quotation indicates that content and the performance of narratives offer a medium to understand how individuals see themselves within certain social and cultural settings. Also, the language used in the narratives signals the story tellers' positions and roles within their narratives. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how second language speakers construct and express themselves within the construction of their identities through their narratives. In addition, the chapter presents the finding of participants' identities through displaying the iconicity of participants' perspectives of being themselves (Linde, 1993). In this chapter, I display and analyze the data by generating the main themes and motifs of participants' language learning and teaching under varied social and cultural backgrounds to address the research questions addressed in this study through their autobiographical narratives and interview transcripts:

1. What aspects of identity are constructed in the bilingual and multilingual speakers' autobiographical narratives?
2. How do second language speakers perceive their learning experiences as contributing to their becoming language teachers themselves?

As explained in Chapter 3, two main sources for the narratives are the participants' autobiographies and interviews: Each participant's autobiography and interview verbalize and situate their language learning and teaching journey in detail. Also, among all these stories of learning and teaching English as a second or foreign language from different participants, varied

themes and motifs are addressed from different aspects which are closely related to the way they constructed their identities based on specific contexts. Considering the confidentiality of the participants' identities, the names have been replaced with pseudonyms to avoid any tracking of participants.

### **Yea-ting:**

#### **Language learning and teaching journey**

Yea Ting grew up in Taiwan and started to learn English in the fourth grade, and English became a part of her life. As she mentions in her autobiography: “English is like an old friend and good company for years.” English was one of the compulsory subjects during her study in school and also became her major when she started to study at her university in Taiwan. During her university study, she had a chance to be an international exchange student and come to the United States to study at Midwestern University for one year. She said this experience inspired her in learning English especially through the second language creative writing. Therefore, she decided to focus her master's degree by studying in the TESOL program at the same university and is still working on her graduate studies now. She developed strong interests in the research of second language creative writing and plans to be a teacher who is focused on teaching second language creative writing in the Taiwanese context.

#### **Main themes and Motifs: an English learner who is inspired by her exchange student's English learning journey**

According to the requirement of this autobiography from the professor, Yea-ting discussed two parts of her language learning and teaching experiences in her autobiography. Compared with the other three participants who wrote their autobiographies in a chronological manner, Yea-ting organized her autobiography under three subtitles—“Interview of exchange

student program”, “Life in America as an exchange student” and “My visions and plans as a prospective teacher”, which meant her autobiography was organized by the important issues rather than time. Reviewing Yea-ting’s autobiography and the transcripts of her interview, I found the connections between these three subtitles from her description in her autobiography. It is obvious to view her “exchange student” experiences as one important and necessary transition from being an English learner to becoming a future English teacher. It is also worthy of discussion how her exchange student learning experiences influenced her future English learning path. In the autobiography reviewing progress and Yea-ting’s interview, I find that this English learner who is inspired by her exchange student learning experience becomes the main identity which Yea-ting constructed in her autobiography and interview. In the “Life in American as an exchange student”, she reported how being an exchange student changed the way she learns English:

Excerpt1:

The composition courses in Taiwan are more form-based and most of the teachers regard good writing in specific formats and sophistic vocabularies or phrases. Teachers will tell you to write a five-paragraph composition with your topic sentences, and force you to memorize lists of idioms and words. From my own experiences, this kind of teaching is tedious and makes the students bored and uninterested in writing. Therefore, when I took both College Writing and Research Writing with an intelligent professor, Dr. Hansen<sup>2</sup>, I was surprised by the teaching style, which is much more interesting and motivational (Yea-ting, Autobiography, 2011).

In Excerpt 1, it can be seen that she holds different opinions of these two types of English writing classes: the composition classes in Taiwan for her are “tedious and make the students bored and uninterested in writing”, Yea-ting understands that the English composition class is

---

<sup>2</sup> All names and institutions are pseudonyms.

more “form-based” and is focused on “specific formats and sophistic vocabularies or phrases” (Autobiography, 2011). However, it can be seen that Yea-ting’s impressions of her composition class were changed when she had two writing courses at Midwestern University. Yea-ting’s experiences in College Writing and Research Writing made her feel “surprised and motivated”. Therefore, Yea-ting, both as an exchange student and English learner, started to be motivated and interested in English writing after she experienced a different teaching style through studying abroad.

Excerpt 2:

During these two semesters, I wrote one poetry book, the autoethnography, 15-page research paper, and 10-page science fiction. Moreover, with all these multigenre writing projects, I was proud of myself as a second language writer and found out that I love writing...With the idea to get a master degree for sure, I started to think about what program I should apply for. Then, Dr. Hansen (pseudonym)’s writing classes occur to me, and it makes me want to be someone like him to teach creative writing to ESL students and to motivate them into loving writing...( Yea-ting , Autobiography, 2011).

Excerpt 2 mainly illuminates more of Yea-ting’s reflection about her studying experiences in her exchange student experience. At the beginning of this Excerpt, Yea-ting described the writing she completed in her exchange student learning experiences. It can be seen that Yea-ting was proud of her achievement in her English writing. She said that “I was proud of myself as a second language writer and found out that I love writing”. All these descriptions prove how she, both as an exchange student and English learner, was influenced by this period of exchange student learning experiences which becomes the motivation to encourage Yea-ting to become an English teacher like Dr.Hansen. Therefore, Yea-ting’s past educational experiences

influenced her to think about language learning and teaching from a new angle, which she never had in her educational journey in Taiwan. In particular, Yea-ting's experiences of studying abroad encouraged her to be "someone like him (Dr. Hansen) to teach creative writing to ESL students and to motivate them into loving writing" (Autobiography, 2011). Before Yea-ting studied abroad, she did not have any teaching experience. Being an exchange student actually affected her career choice and her post-graduate studies.

In the interview, when I asked Yea-ting to highlight her identities in her autobiography, Yea-ting highlighted the pronoun "I" in her autobiography and explained each of the "I"s one by one. When we discuss the pronoun "I" in the "Life in America as an exchange student", she explained more about how her exchange student life influenced her English learning and her identity as a second language writer:

Excerpt 3:

Because the course I took is about like creative writing, so in that course we always talks about narrative and poetry like story ...un ...I marked here because there is an "I", as I told you, I was proud. It's kind of giving the reader . . . that I'm confident about myself being a second language writer. So here en "I" like a person, I feel confident about myself. And the second identity is second language writer (Yea-ting, personal communication, December 20, 2011).

Excerpt 3 was taken from Yea-ting's interview. Combined with her autobiography, her constructions of her identity as an exchange student and a second language writer became clearer. She constructed herself as an exchange student who gained inspiration in her studying experiences and encouragement to be proud of being a second language writer during her time at Midwestern University. Yea-ting explained that her identity as a second language learner is

influenced and shaped by her exchange student identity. Therefore, as an individual, Yea-ting felt that she is confident of herself as a second language learner and a second language writer. Additionally, she claimed that her exchange student identity plays an important role in her identity as a prospective teacher in excerpt 4:

Excerpt 4:

My visions and plans as a prospective teacher—As an ESL learner from Taiwan, I have experienced many difficulties when learning English, so these experiences make me qualified to teach Taiwanese students . As a prospective English teacher, my teaching interest is creative writing, which is still an innovative field for Taiwan. However, according to my own experiences of learning creative writing, it enables the students to be more confident and creative...After the lessons, I expect my students to be creative and confident as an ESL writer, enjoy and be interested in writing, and think outside of box (Yea-ting, Autobiography, 2011).

In Excerpt 4, she mainly discussed her visions as a prospective teacher. She identified herself as a prospective teacher who is qualified to teach Taiwanese students because of her ESL learning experiences in Taiwan. She said “My visions and plans as a prospective teacher—As an ESL learner from Taiwan, I have experienced many difficulties when learning English, so these experiences make me qualified to teach Taiwanese students” (Yea-ting, personal communication, December 20, 2011). In the previous quotation, Yea-ting constructed herself as an ESL learner from Taiwan and an ESL teacher who can teach in a Taiwanese context. As Yea-ting mentioned previously, her studying experiences as an exchange student inspired her to engage her students to approach English in multigenre, such as autoethnography, poetry writing and more. She presented herself as an ESL teacher who expects her students can be creative and confident as

ESL writers, which is exactly the same as what she believed as an exchange student. Thus, it is possible to build up the connection between her exchange student identity and her future Taiwanese ESL teacher identity. These two identities in Yea-ting's autobiography were co-constructed within her exchange student studying experiences.

Another important construction of her identity is the Taiwanese ethnicity Yea-ting wrote about in her autobiography. She identified herself as an ESL learner from Taiwan and a future teacher who wants to teach creative writing in Taiwan. In her autobiography, Yea-ting put herself into the teaching context in Taiwan or in the community of Taiwanese ESL teachers. This highlights that Yea-ting constructed her identity from her nationality and ethnic background. Her Taiwanese ESL teacher identity was influenced by her identity as an exchange student, so these two identities were co-constructed within her autobiography. Throughout Yea-ting's autobiography and interview transcripts, I have seen that Yea-ting constructed her identity as an ESL learner who was inspired in her exchange student learning experiences. This identity is also the main theme which combines her identities as a Taiwanese ESL learner and a prospective teacher in her autobiography.

## **Dewi**

### **Language learning and teaching journey**

Dewi, as an English learner who grew up in a less developed region of her country, rarely had the resources to learn English. Her initial contact with English was in casual situations. As a beginner in learning English, she had strong interests and curiosity in learning language. The formal English learning from class started in seventh grade. However, she felt disappointed because the class was heavily focused on grammar rules, which made her feel as though she didn't have an opportunity to practice speaking English in class. Therefore, she moved her strong

interests in learning English outside of the classroom: watching English speaking movies and communicating with her language partner in English. The way she learned English gave her confidence within her language ability.

Also, because of her outstanding performance in English learning, she received the opportunity to enter the normal university without passing the entrance exams. She started to learn English as her major, which aims to prepare students as English teachers. In the university, she was interested in reading the vast varieties of English fiction books like novels and short stories instead of text books. She also gained confidence when she got lots of opportunities to practice English speaking both inside and outside of the classroom.

However, she still felt she did not have a good foundation to be a good English teacher. That feeling began to change when she started to work as an English instructor. In her three-month teacher training she applied what she believed about teaching English in a class with students who had high motivation and enthusiasm to learn. Therefore, she felt what she taught in this class confronted her disappointment with English class from when she was in school. Then she applied and became employed as an English teacher in a newly established junior high school. During this period of teaching experience, she learned how to choose a text book that would be suitable for her students. However, when she implemented her teaching plan in her class, she found out that some of her students were not interested in learning English, and they had different language abilities. She realized that teaching is really context sensitive from that experience.

After that job, she took an offer to teach at a university, which made her feel that she needed to learn more about both teaching and the language itself. She had an opportunity to attend a short course in Australia to learn about teaching English to adult learners. In Australia,

she took all the seminars and workshops, but she felt that training and knowledge was not applicable to her teaching context. She felt she did learn a lot from the other teachers though. Thus, she applied to the MA TESOL program which aims to help her developing the teaching profession.

**Main themes and Motifs: an English learner and English teacher who is seeking confidence and uniqueness in her English learning and teaching journey**

Compared with Yea-ting, who constructed her identity as an English learner through her exchange student studying experiences, Dewi, in her autobiography, describes her English learning and teaching experiences. Reading Dewi's autobiography and transcripts of her interview, it is not hard to find how learning English actually influenced the way she constructed her identity and how she regarded herself as an English teacher. In Dewi's autobiography and interview, one significant feature is that she described how she as an English learner was seeking uniqueness and confidence during her English learning path which also had a strong influence on her English teaching experiences. Therefore, what she believed learning English meant to her and the way she learned English are coherently connected within the uniqueness and confidence she was seeking in the English learning and is reflected in her teaching. At the beginning of Dewi's autobiography, she pointed out that the way she began to learn English had a direct influence on her view of English learning in Excerpt 5:

Excerpt 5:

My first contact with English was very casual in the sense that there was no social or educational pressure that required me to learn English...I simply felt in love with English when I heard and read it for the first time. I remember my father who was studying in a university at that time brought home an English dictionary. I saw some strange words and

somehow they fascinated me. From then on, I asked my father to teach me some English words. When I tried to pronounce the word to my friends, I loved when they look puzzled and asked me what they meant. It made me feel that I am special because I know strange words that people do not know... (Dewi, Autobiography, 2011).

In Excerpt 5, Dewi wrote that she “simply fell in love with English” in her initial contact with the language, which suggests that Dewi actually had a strong interest in learning English as a language from the very beginning. Then, she spoke about how she first encountered English not in school but from the English dictionary her father brought home. She said her “first contact with English was very casual in the sense that there no social or educational pressure that required her to learn English” (Autobiography, 2011). English for her was more like a different language with “strange words” which fascinated her (Autobiography, 2011). The phrase “strange words” can be understood as an index that presents how she thinks of English as a special and exotic language in her language learning experiences. It also points out that uniqueness she experienced when she had contact with English. That was the motivation for her to pronounce the English words in front of her friends. This made her feel special. Therefore, Dewi constructed her identity as the individual who has a curiosity and interest in learning English. She started to find confidence and a sense of uniqueness as a language learner through learning English and its “strange words that people do not know” (Autobiography, 2011). Thus, Dewi constructed her identity as an English learner who believed English could bring her the unique and special feelings she craved. In her interview, Dewi also discussed the identity she constructed at the beginning of her English learning journey, and she read aloud parts of her autobiography:

Excerpt 6:

Maybe if I learn English in pressure I might not be who I am now, with English, like enjoying, like stuff like that. It's crucial. And also the second part, 'It made me feel that I am special because I know strange words that people do not know'. It's also like motivation, even now for me that help me learn English. It is the first, I think it is important that that is motivation guide me to be what I am today, en, what I felt about English today...The uniqueness, at that time, I see English as uniqueness. So that's why. Now I like it. So...That's why I want to be a teacher. That shapes my identity as a teacher. Because at that time I'm really interested it. And English makes me special, and I want to make other people special too by them learning English (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

In Excerpt 6, Dewi started to connect her English learning with how the multiple aspects of her identity were built up. She talks about the “non-pressure” environment as one reason why she enjoyed learning English in her life and constructed her identity as an English learner who was enjoying her English learning process. Dewi thought that was the way her identity was built up—an English learner who learns English without pressure. Dewi also explained that the special and unique feelings she gained from learning English became the motivation which encouraged her to love learning English and even to become an English teacher in the interview: “That's why I want to be a teacher. That shapes my identity as a teacher” (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012). Thus, it can be seen that Dewi's identity as a learner who is seeking uniqueness in English learning also influenced her identity as an English teacher since she believed that learning English can also make other people “special”. In Dewi's autobiography and interview, she constructed her identity within her English learning experience and even developed her identity based on her inquiry from English learning.

Based on Dewi's point of view, her identity as an English learner shaped the way that Dewi built up the other aspects of her identity, which she mainly discussed in Excerpt 3 from her autobiography. Dewi wrote that her English class "focused heavily on grammar", and that her excitement in learning English was "nowhere to be found" in her English class. Thus, Dewi, as an English learner started to explore her English learning outside of the classroom as is shown in Excerpt 7:

Excerpt 7:

I felt disappointed when I had never got a chance to practice the language, not inside the classroom or outside the classroom. I did try to use English with my classmate but they considered it as a show off and it was quite demotivating for me. I must have been so interested in English that I never gave up learning it ... Still, I felt the urgent need to practice my English because I wanted to know if I really could speak English. I was very lucky that I finally had a classmate who shared the same interest with me, and she was also looking for a partner to practice her English... The practice helped us a lot since, I guess, we carried out the practice in a non-threatening environment where we were not afraid of making mistakes. That definitely helped me gain enough confidence with my language ability. I gain enough confident to decide to take English Education as my major in my undergraduate degree (Dewi, Autobiography, 2011).

To Dewi's understanding, learning to speak is an important component of language learning which displays her English proficiency. In this part of her autobiography, Dewi explained that she felt disappointed when she realized she had few chances to practice speaking the language in class. She attempted to show that her "disappointment" indicated her identity as an English learner who had strong interests in learning English. This identity gave her the motivation to get

good grades in English class and encouraged her to insist on seeking the chance to improve her English. Also from this excerpt, I discover that as an English learner, Dewi displays the need of building up her confidence in English learning. This need is also presented in the form of writing in this autobiography, as well as in the frequency of vocabulary. As the writer, she said at the end of the paragraph: “That definitely helped me gain enough confidence with my language ability. I gain enough confident to decide to take English Education as my major in my undergraduate degree” (Dewi, Autobiography, 2011).

In Excerpt 7, Dewi used the words “confidence” and “confident” to describe how she needed to find the support to make herself believe that she was good at English learning. In addition, that “confidence” encouraged her to choose English education as her major. It also can be seen how that “confidence” led her to choose to become an English teacher as her profession. Therefore, I asked her questions about how she understands the relationship between the confidence she mentioned and her identity in this part of her autobiography, she explained:

Excerpt 8:

So that's really... English make me confidence. I get better grade than my friends. I'm very happy when people come to me and ask me...en ...to help them with English...un...homework or something. So that's maybe one part of identities. So that's what I said I must be so interested in English, part of it is because I can show off and gave me good grade...Whenever I find something to do, I want to do something make me feel confident. There are not many things in my life that I can be confident of. English, make me feel in that way... English is one thing that I can show it off, and I can be confident with. Especially, maybe English help me have confidence. Because I remember

when I was in High school, I won the competition of giving a speech in English. That makes me feel confident (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

As shown in Excerpt 8, it is worth discussing studying English as one part of what made her feel confident. She had the good performance in English learning, which boosted her confidence in English learning. For Dewi, the phrase “showing off” indicates her understanding of the confidence that she gained from English learning, because she could actually show other people that “She is a good English learner”. This “showing off” identity is still one part of her English learner identity who is seeking confidence in her English learning journey.

Moreover, Dewi’s English learner identity has another aspect: an English learner who believes learning English gives her uniqueness. As an English learner, Dewi felt that she was special because she was able to use English, which inspired her to work harder and gain more confidence from the learning process. So the identity as a learner who is seeking confidence in English learning was co-constructed with her identity as a learner who believed learning English is the uniqueness. This co-construction of the two parts of her identity is also shown when she spoke in her interview about how she was trying to practice her English inside and outside of the classroom:

Excerpt 9:

That’s why when I learn English, in the 2nd paragraph, I am special. Because I know language that people don’t usually know. At that time, I felt I really needed to show people that I can speak that unique or strange language at that time . . . I felt I knew some grammar but I don’t know how to use the language then. Because I felt I’m special, I need let people know. Then, in the classroom or outside the classroom . . . I don’t have, you

know. They don't really... they just treat it as a subject in school . . . (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

In Excerpt 9 from her interview, Dewi talked about her urgent need to show people that she could speak English, and how she constructed her identity as an English learner who believed English made her special or unique. This learner identity partially depends on her English speaking. Dewi also seems to be aware of this. For example, she talked about her “showing off” identity in Excerpt 4. When referring to this part of her autobiography, she also said: “I am special. Because I know language I that people don't usually know. At that time, I felt I really needed to show people that I can speak that unique or strange language at that time” (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012). Throughout Excerpt 5, it can be seen that Dewi views having opportunities to practice English as an important factor in her language learning. This belief also influences Dewi in her teaching. In one part of her autobiography, she described the following:

Excerpt 10:

I loved this job very much because it was actually giving me the opportunity to ‘confront’ my disappointment when I was in the school. I tried to employed different methods to engage students in classroom activities that permitted them to practice the language, one thing that my teachers in junior and senior high school rarely did. I did that because I was aware that classroom could sometime be the only opportunity to use the language, since outside the classroom people do not use the language. Besides, from my experience I learnt that the opportunity to practice is probably one of the most important aspects in learning a language. (Dewi, Autobiography, 2011)

At the beginning of Excerpt 10, Dewi presented the connection between her teaching and her English learner identity. In the first sentence of Excerpt 5, Dewi said she loved this job because it provided the chance to “confront” her disappointment that she had few opportunities to practice her spoken English when she was a student. Therefore, Dewi learned from those experiences and tried to provide more chances for her students to practice spoken English. This construction of Dewi’s identity as an English teacher shares something with her identity as an English learner in school. Thus, it can be seen that her identity as an English learner influenced the construction of Dewi’s identity as an English teacher. These influences are focused on Dewi’s beliefs about teaching. In the interview, she explained more about how her English teacher identity is related to her English learner identity:

Excerpt 11:

Maybe...I...I also said in my previous writing that I was disappointed, and how do I see English is important in my later life because I learnt: if you are excited about something you hope someone you can find that excitement that make you don’t feel disappointed.

So I think maybe my students feel in the same way at that time, I wanted to learn English and really practice English in the class but I’m disappointed. That’s why when I became a teacher I was determined to do that. Hehe, and ...I don’t want to let my students to be disappointed. Because I knew how it feels to be disappointed, you knew . . . So when I became a teacher, I was determined to not let my student disappointed by giving them opportunity that they deserve to. Because for me, the opportunity of practice, as I said, that’s why EFL context, it is difficult for me to practice inside the classroom or outside the classroom. (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

In Excerpt 11, Dewi mainly spoke about her expectation of being an English teacher who could make sure her students did not feel disappointed in her English class. She said “I wanted to learn English and really practice English in the class but I’m disappointed. That’s why when I became a teacher I was determined to do that, and ...I don’t want to let my students to be disappointed” (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012). This quotation presents Dewi’s wish of being an English teacher. This is a wish that came from Dewi’s past English learning experiences. Therefore, Dewi’s learning experiences became a part of the reason or motivation for her to become an English teacher. The connection between Dewi’s English learner identity and her English teacher identity encouraged her to offer more opportunity for practicing spoken English to her students inside the classroom. In addition, she spoke about how “practice for me is very important. Your language will become better and ...better if you practice that. So that’s why I don’t want my students disappointed” (Dewi, Autobiography, 2011). These two sentences also show how Dewi believes that it is important and necessary for an individual to practice using English frequently. As with previous excerpts in her interview, Dewi discussed how she believes practicing English is helpful in improving her English performance, and that she could gain uniqueness and confidence from having a better English performance. Dewi’s English learning path and her identity as an English learner indirectly influenced her English teaching and her identity as an English teacher, because she did not want her students go through the same disheartening English experiences as she did.

From Dewi’s descriptions of her English learning and teaching experiences in her autobiography and interview, it can be seen that the significant theme throughout both is how she as English learner sought uniqueness and confidence during the English learning process and how that finally led her to choose English teaching as her profession. The relations between

Dewi's past English learning experiences and her English teaching is collaboratively and coherently presented in her educational path. Dewi's identity as an English learner is more focused on how she is finding the feeling of specialty and confidence in learning English inside and outside of the classroom, which also influences her identity as an English teacher in the future.

## **Teiba**

### **Language learning and teaching journey**

As a girl who grew up in the north of the Ivory Coast, Teiba struggled with the pressure from the social and cultural assumption that females do not need to receive an equal educational opportunity as males. She was supposed to follow the routine for a female who only can be good at taking care of the family. She was better at studying than her brothers and most of the boys in her area at that time. Her outstanding performance in school caused her father to allow her to continue her education and send other girls in the family to school.

Teiba was born and grew up in multilingual society, so she could speak her mother tongue and French before entering the kindergarten. Also, she even learned Arabic for the purpose of religion. In her words: "I think this was my first step in language learning." After primary school, her initial contact with English was her junior high school. She believed English was attractive to everyone and grew her interests in learning English with her admiration of her first English teacher who motivate students to learn. However, at the same time, her first experience learning Spanish was "a total disaster" because her Spanish teacher did not care about students' feelings and ignored her culture and realities, which lead to a huge load of anxiety and stress in her Spanish class.

Before she entered university, she met another English teacher, Antigone, who helped her be more interested in learning English. The way she taught English to students became Teiba's source of inspiration and influenced her future studies in university. In the university, Teiba started to learn English and French as her major. She felt that she scarcely had the opportunity to practice her English outside the classroom. After she earned her bachelor's degree, she had the chance to teach volunteers in the American Peace Corps French and Dioula<sup>3</sup>. She found out it was stressful for these volunteers to only communicate with French and Doula. At the same time, she also wanted to practice her English. Therefore, she sometimes communicated with these volunteers in English.

The idea of becoming another "Antigone" (the second teacher who helped her) encouraged her to become a junior and senior high school teacher. In her teaching, she has been struggling in applying the communicative language approach in her EFL teaching context. This became one of the motivations which led her to the MA TESOL.

### **Themes and motifs: a female English learner and multilingual speaker who succeeded in the North of the Ivory Coast**

Compared with the other three participants, the outstanding and unique theme in Teiba's language learning and teaching journey is how she as a female struggled to get her education under a social and cultural background which used to have a negative attitude toward females' educational development. This theme can be seen at the very beginning of Teiba's autobiography when she introduced her cultural and social background. This section of her autobiography emphasized the inequality of the attitudes directed at females and males in the educational context. In her first paragraph, she wrote:

---

<sup>3</sup> An ethnic language in Ivory Coast

Excerpt 12:

I'm from the north of the Ivory Coast and in the culture of this part of my country; girls were not meant for school because in everybody's mind, at that time, girls were just good for the housework because girls were seen as inferior human beings and not intelligent enough to be sent to school. Therefore, the role of the mothers was to prepare them not only for marriage, that is, to be submissive and respectful wives to their husbands, but also good mothers for their children. This situation could be found everywhere in Africa, but in my country, it was more accentuated in the northern part than in the other parts. Boys were seen as the guarantee of the family whereas girls as temporary members of it (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011).

In Excerpt 12 of Teiba's autobiography, gender became a significant issue in Excerpt 12: As "a girl" from the north of the Ivory Coast (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011), Teiba was supposed to be prepared to be one of the "submissive and respectful wives to their husband" or "mothers for their children" ( Teiba, Autobiography, 2011), which she identified herself as in her autobiography. She states one of the aspects of her identity is "a girl" who grew up in a community in which people believe the best position for a female is to be a wife and a mother. In this community, Teiba explained, "girls were not meant for school because in everybody's mind" being "a girl" meant that "she" was supposed to follow the tradition—giving up her educational opportunity. Teiba's position in her autobiography involved two layers: Teiba is the girl who was supposed to give up schooling earlier; she was also a pioneer who broke the rule in the community and finally experienced success in school. If Teiba chose to follow the traditional role for females in her community, she would not have had the chance to be an English learner today. Therefore, the value of Teiba's educational opportunity is highlighted in her learning and

teaching path. It is not hard to understand why Teiba has to state her identity as a female who embraces her social and cultural background, the gender issue that she experienced and what education opportunity means to her. In the interview, she also further explained why she highlighted her identity as a girl and points out the importance of how she thinks of the gender differences in the north of the Ivory Coast.

Excerpt 13:

And I'm girl, with everything it can mean: you knew, inferior being, you know, somebody who should who should respect her husband, who should make children, who should cook, but go to school? It is culture...un...what is the destiny. I mean what was my destiny. What I was plan for as a girl in my cultural. As a girl, you cannot go more than that. You cannot beyond that. You are a girl, you are bonded to be a mother, you are bonded to be a wife and very submissive one (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012)

A central aspect of Excerpt 13 is Teiba's explanation of being a female in the North Ivory Coast. Teiba constructed her identity as a young girl who grew up struggling under "family pressure" and the social and cultural traditions of her gender. Teiba claimed that she is a product of that "gender issue" which affected her deeply "inside and outside her family" (Teiba, *Autobiography*, 2011). This excerpt from her interview also illustrates how she as a female actually chose a different life path which led her to break her "destiny" and become an English teacher. Thus, her identity as "a female" is highlighted in her autobiography. The way she identifies herself reflects how she understands her identity in specific social and cultural contexts and how this identity actually influenced her life path as she wrote about in her autobiography.

From her description of the gender issues that she experienced in the North of the Ivory Coast, Teiba's understanding of "being a girl" played a remarkable role in her educational journey, and the construction of her identity as a girl should not be ignored. It is very difficult for a female to get the chance to go to school, so Teiba presented herself as a girl who wanted to have an education and had to be special or distinct from other girls and boys. All those experiences led her to a different journey—a girl who succeeded in school in the North of the Ivory Coast. On the other hand, because Teiba's opportunity of education was valuable and precious, the fact of her "being a girl who succeeded in school in North of the Ivory Coast" became the motivation for Teiba to study hard at school and finally become an English teacher. In Excerpt 14, Teiba started to describe her studies in school and position herself as a pioneer:

Excerpt 14:

My first challenge as a girl was to prove that I could be good for studies, that is, study hard to stay at school, because obviously, the only fate that was known for girls was to drop school after some years and I was determined not to follow that common path and prove all the proponents of that idea that they were misleading ways of thinking about girls. From that time, despite my age, I started considering myself a pioneer for all the girls of my family first, and at a broader scale, of my village, for I knew that girls, if given their chance, can do better than what people can expect. Hopefully, my performances at school were not bad at all. I was even better than my brothers and most of the boys in our area at that time (Teiba, *Autobiography*, 2010).

Teiba explained that her challenge in going to school is to prove that a girl could be good at studies and become "a pioneer" "who was determined to not follow that common path" (Teiba, *Autobiography*, 2011). It can be seen that Teiba motivated herself to study hard and finally gain

successes in school. Therefore, Teiba's construction of identity as a female is highlighted in her educational journey because her success in school is the origin of being an English learner and teacher. In addition, Teiba started to self-identify as a pioneer: because Teiba's father trusted her and allowed her to be the first girl who went to school in her family, she became a test for whether girls could be good at school or not and also became a pioneer as the first girl who continued her education in the family, even in the village. In her interview, she also explained her construction of identity as a pioneer:

Excerpt 15:

I'm the pioneer... If I failed, there will no more girl go to school in my family. If I succeed, girls are considered to be...like..."oh my god, they can be intelligent, let's try the first one succeeded ...why not? Let's try the other one." And I knew that my many sisters and I want my sisters to go to school too. Ok ... un ... that's why I have to show people that. I have to satisfy my father and show people: girls can be good at school too (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012).

As Teiba spoke about her "pioneer identity", as "a girl", or a female, she had to face the pressure of gaining success in school to prove her father and other people that "girls can be good at school too" (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011). This "pioneer" identity is closely related to her identity as "a girl" in her family and even in her village. Thus, Teiba has to succeed and became a "pioneer" in her context. Therefore, Teiba expressed that she needed to follow another path, which "was to be a pioneer who would not fail, who should not fail, who must not fail" (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012). Teiba used "would not", "should not" and "must not" to express her eagerness for success in school. This also explains why Teiba believes that her construction of identity as "a pioneer" affected herself and other family members.

Because Teiba's performance at school was even better than her brothers and most of the boys in her area at that time, she had the opportunity to continue her education. As she mentioned, in a broader scale, this caused her to become a pioneer in her village. She struggled and succeeded, even under the pressure to giving up education. In the interview, she said that "Things that they say: 'that was not for girl. She will drop off school after some years.' And then I said: 'No way. I shouldn't take that path. I should take another path'" (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012). Finally, Teiba's hard work in seeking her educational chance led her to an opportunity for higher education and endless learning as well as a teaching journey.

Besides this outstanding female identity which Teiba constructed at the beginning of her autobiography, Teiba also described her language learning and teaching experiences which she used to directly show readers that she has a multilingual speaker identity.

Excerpt 16:

I cannot say anything about my learning experience in French, a language I was speaking in addition to my mother tongue before entering kindergarten. I understand now that I have been multilingual since then. I even learned Arabic at that time for the purpose of prayer and I am stunned that I still remember what I learned there. It was mainly based on memorization and every day, we were taught to memorize at least two verses a day and we had to be able to repeat them on the following day. I think this was my first step in language learning (Teiba, *Autobiography*, 2011).

As the writer of this autobiography, Teiba in Excerpt 16 used the term multilingual to identify herself as a person who can speak more than two languages. In the autobiography reviewing and highlighting process, Teiba also highlighted the word "multilingual" as one aspect of her identity. This word "multilingual" is not a only a label to show readers that she has

multilingual competence, but is also used to show people how she sees herself as a language learner and speaker in her context. Additionally, the world multilingual has a strong connection with how she positions herself in different language learning experiences, especially for English. Therefore, she also gave the explanation of how she understands her multilingual speaker identity:

Excerpt 17:

En...I think that multilingualism identity is kind of . . . imposing to me. I didn't choose to be multilingual. I happened to be multilingual. Because ...the first thing in me was that don't speak the language. So my mom was speaking her language to me, and my father was speaking another language to me. My mom is from another part of the country. And my father is from another part of the country. And they get married, so, you know, I have that two languages when I go to my mom's side. I have to speak the way they speak...And French is the national language. Everybody speak French. So...you have no choice...the language of communication (laugh)...en...Arabic...I learn Arabic to pray, just to pray. I knew how to pray in Arabic (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012).

At the beginning of Excerpt 17, Teiba described her multilingualism as an identity assigned to her. Teiba stated that, "I think that multilingualism identity is kind of imposing to me. I didn't choose to be multilingual. I happened to be multilingual" (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012). It can be seen that the term "multilingual" applied to her due to her family and political and religious contexts before she realized that she was a "multilingual speaker". Teiba described how she learned languages because of family, social and religious reasons. "Multilingual" became a title she had to accept, and an identity inside of her.

This “multilingual” identity also influenced her English learning, or her “English learner” identity. English for her became a foreign language which is special compared to other language learning experiences she had. As she described in her autobiography, “I had my first contact with English when I was admitted to junior high school right after primary school. I was really excited to know about that language which is attractive to everybody” (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011). Therefore, compared with all these languages, learning English for Teiba was special and attractive at that time. As an English learner, she started her language learning journey with that strong motivation and excitement. Teiba further explained why she was excited to learn English:

Excerpt 18:

I have been speaking French all the time since I was in primary school. The primary education was done in French. When I started the secondary school, they said “Ok, you started to learn English.” I was thinking “Oh my God, English, I like English.” I don’t know what English sounds like. But I like English. I think I’m excited because I knew I was going to learn a new language. You see what I mean... Comparing to others, it was kind consciously learning... You know. But others, I don’t even know when I started it. You know what I mean? ... You see. You know English, it was, and it was in the syllabus (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012).

In Excerpt 18, Teiba said she felt learning English was like learning a new language which she could consciously learn, compared to French, Arabic or other languages she had learnt. She identified herself as an English learner who had strong interests in learning English as a new, different language. Thus, her multilingual speaker identity indirectly influenced her English learner identity in her language learning and teaching experiences which was displayed in her autobiography and interviews.

Reviewing her autobiography and interview, the female identity as a learner and multilingual speaker she constructed is especially outstanding compared with the other four participants. However, her identity as a female who struggled under the pressure of gaining educational opportunity also becomes the key for her later English learning. That was the way Teiba constructed her identity since being a female in the North of the Ivory Coast played a significant role in her learning and teaching journey. This female identity shaped the way she identified herself within the other aspects of her identity, such as English learner and multilingual speaker, or being an individual from the north of the Ivory Coast. These multiple aspects of her identity are co-constructs with each other and present as one unit in Teiba's autobiography. That is how Teiba constructed her identity in her autobiography, with the other participants also utilizing something similar in their construction of identity.

## **Thabang**

### **Language learning and teaching journey**

Thabang has been learning English as his second language since he was in grade five. English was a compulsory subject in the education system of South Africa which has different and diverse ethnic groups within one multilingual society. In South Africa, English is seen as a medium which helps different ethnic groups to communicate with each other.

Thabang grew up in a community in which Sepedi<sup>4</sup> is regarded as the first language that should be taught inside and outside the school since the majority of the community members are native speakers of Sepedi. His native language is Xitsonga though, which is the minority in the community. He said learning English was challenging for him who was exposed to the three different ethnic languages. He had no contact with English at home, so he started to expand his learning through independent reading of English, watching TV and communicating with his

---

<sup>4</sup> An ethnic language in South Africa

friends in English. From grade 10 to 12, his experiences of participating in school extra-mural activity and being a member of the School Representative Council provided many opportunities to practice his English. He actively participated in class discussions and became a student leader who led the discussions in English class, which built up his confidence both at home and at school.

As a learner who learnt English as his second language, Theban was influenced by the communicative language teaching of his English teacher. This also affected his undergraduate studying of English teaching in college to enhance his proficiency. After he graduated, Theban became a high school English teacher at a public rural high school which consisted of diverse cultures and ethnic languages. As a second language teacher, under his teaching context, he believed it is important for a teacher to create a friendly, autonomous, support-based and cooperative learning environment for learners to develop in. He tried to use improvisation while teaching. This was very effective in his teaching environment which had very few resources. Theban tried to use different teaching to help his students to be motivated in English learning. He believed in previous years of teaching he also learned a lot from his students, which helped him to be flexible and reflective in his teaching. He became more sensitive and aware of students' individual needs. In order to improve his English teaching, he came to the United States and continued his graduate study.

**Themes and motifs: a second language learner and ESL teacher who struggled in a multilingual society.**

As with the other three participants, Thabang grew up in a multilingual society where many different ethnic languages are used and taught. Thabang started to learn English when he was in grade 5. As a member of his community, he had few chances to communicate with other

people in his first language—Xitsonga and he has to learn Sepedi (another ethnic language in South Africa). Therefore, Thabang identified himself as a minority in his community. As an English learner, Thabang had to negotiate different ethnic languages in his community and improve his English proficiency inside and outside the school. Being an ESL teacher, Thabang wrote about trying to help his students who are learning in the same context as he had before. At the beginning of his autobiography, He introduced the ESL education background in South Africa:

Excerpt 19:

I think it is important to introduce the reader to my country's education background regarding ESL to better understand the link between my learning and teaching experiences. English as a second language to South African learners and the society at large is integral to academic achievement, career development and functioning in a multilingual society... (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011).

In Excerpt 19, Thabang directly introduced the ESL education background in South Africa which indicates that English is the second language and an important medium in South African society. Although English plays an important role in South Africa, the majority of the population is not first language speakers of English. This fact requires ESL learners in South Africa to learn English as the medium of instruction and learning throughout the whole schooling system from the elementary school to college level. Thabang pointed out that he was one member of this education system which required him to learn English in the community even though he did not have any direct communication in English outside the classroom. Therefore, Thabang's identity became a learner who had to struggle under the pressure of learning English

in a multilingual society. In his interview, he further explained the reason for his language learning experiences in his community:

Excerpt 20:

English is used as a means to integrate that entire different ethnic groups or different tribes within my country enable to communicate each other. I'm pretty sure it presents my identity which I have been deprived at school where by my native language, you know. It is not taken seriously. Even the dominancy language which should to go over...and that by itself bring a new identity that I'm proud of. I have been identifying a Sepedi speaking person...Yeah, that was another pattern of my new identity when I went to that school... (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

As Thabang described in Excerpt 20, English is used between different ethnic groups and tribes and is required to be taught in schools. However, contradictory to the way that English and other ethnic languages were treated, Thabang thought that his native language was not taken seriously either in his school or the community in which he grew up. This fact brought about “a new identity” that Thabang is proud of. As a second language learner of English, Thabang also claimed that learning English was related to his construction of identity:

Excerpt 21:

Also again, being taught in English as a second language. Somehow being forced to learning everything in English. By that by itself introduce me...it forced me to identify myself as an English speaking person (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

Excerpt 21 shows that Thabang's belief that he was “forced to learn everything English” made him feel that he is “an English speaker.” Therefore, from the narratives in his

autobiography, it can be seen that Thabang constructed his identity as an English learner who had to struggle and negotiate in a multilingual society which required him to adapt some ethnic language. To allow himself to fit into educational system better, Thabang tried to improve his English performance inside and outside of the classroom:

Excerpt 22:

I only had contact with English at school because at home I spoke my first language since there was no one to help me to expand my linguistic opportunities... Participating in school extra-mural activities and being a member of the School Representative Council had an immense contribution in my English acquisition because I had to write and present SRC report to students and school administration in English because English was the only language that everyone at school could understand since we had students and teachers whose mother tongue was different from each other and are familiar with each other's first language (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011).

In Excerpt 22, Thabang described how he practiced English learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom because, he claimed, of the lack of contact with English in his ethnic community. Thabang had to face the challenge of lacking any contact with English while being exposed to other ethnic languages most of the time. Thus, Thabang situated himself as a learner who had to face negotiation and struggle in a multilingual learning environment where he did not have enough English learning resources. Additionally, Thabang also wrote of his experience as a student leader in class and on the School Representative Council, and how it provided more chances for him to use English in the communication between different ethnic groups. Thabang's negotiation and struggle across different ethnic groups in his English learning experiences also inspired him when he became an English teacher:

Excerpt 23:

My experiences as a high school teacher when I was teaching English as a Second Language in the listening and speaking class at a public rural high school consisted of diverse cultures in terms of different ethnic languages (first languages). Certainly, I believe that every individual learner needs a secure, caring, conducive and stimulating learning atmosphere to grow emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially...I taught at a school where most learners came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the school itself was in an area which was not well taken care of by the government. I believe that learning happens not only in a resourced environment, but also in an environment where improvisation is used as a teaching method. I am actually a product of this environment and I am a living testimony to the effectiveness of such schooling (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011).

At the beginning of Excerpt 23, Thabang introduced his teaching environment where he taught English as a second language at a public rural high school which consisted of diverse cultures in terms of different ethnic languages. Thabang stated that he believed a friendly, autonomous, support-based, and cooperative learning environment could really help “learners who come from disadvantage background”. This ESL teacher identity is closely related to his learning experiences in a disadvantaged learning environment which did not have enough resource and was less developed. In addition, Thabang said, “I am actually a product of this environment and am a living testimony to the effectiveness of such schooling” (Autobiography, 2011), so Thabang started to self-position as an English learner who used to study in a disadvantaged learning environment and succeeded under teaching which utilized improvisation a lot. Therefore, Thabang’s identity as an English learner and his learning experiences inspired

him to construct his identity as an ESL teacher who tried to create the suitable learning environment for students. Throughout Excerpt 23, it can be seen how Thabang's past learning experiences contributed to his identity as an ESL teacher through viewing Thabang's teaching philosophy and approaches. In the interview, Thabang explained how he understands that he is "a product of this environment and am a living testimony to the effectiveness of such schooling" (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011).

Excerpt 24:

Honestly, you know I feel proud of being in that school environment. That makes me feel who I am today and also prepares me to certain challenge that I come across. So I will know what I can provide in certain teaching environment. To make sure my students have something to learn and at the same time it helps me as a teacher or scholar to know ... (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

In Excerpt 24, Thabang presented himself as an English learner who is proud of being one member of the school environment which is not rich in learning resources. He claimed that being an English learner in that environment made him become who he is today. This directly illuminates how his past learning experiences are connected with Thabang's identity as a teacher today. It can be seen that Thabang's construction of the multiple aspects of his identity includes two parts: An ESL teacher in a public rural high school and his identity as a second language learner who came from a less developed learning environment. These two identities were co-constructed together in this part of his autobiography. He further explains his being an ESL teacher in his teaching environment:

Excerpt 25:

Because based on my experiences as ESL learner, I have decided that would be appropriate for me to be able to teach my students the way they love to be taught and also make sure they go through the same rule that I went through, especially after I did some needs analysis of my students...But what can I do? That is to share the experience with them. ‘This is how I learnt English and I would expect you and I love to see you doing the same, which eventually help you’ . . . So when students present their projects, others listen and must give the feedback. So there will be a lot of communication is going on between my students. That by itself enforces their ability to learn English and use outside the classroom. And that is what happened to me when I was learning English” (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

In Excerpt 25, Thabang spoke about how his ESL learning experiences actually influenced his teaching. Thabang constructed himself as a second language teacher who cares about second language learners’ needs. This construction of his identity can also be regarded as a reflection of the construction of his second language learner identity. After he wrote about his teaching approach in the ESL classroom in his context, Thabang said: “That by itself enforces their ability to learn English and use it outside the classroom. And that is what happened to me when I was learning English” (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012). In Excerpt 6 from his interview, Thabang connected his English teaching beliefs with his English learning experiences. Therefore, it can be seen that the construction of his identity as an ESL learner is related to his identity as an ESL teacher, especially in a teaching environment such as a public rural high school where students speak different ethnic languages. For Thabang, his language learning and teaching environment share similar features such as one multilingual speaking

community which encourages Thabang as an ESL learner to give his students more opportunities to communicate in English and build up learners' confidence. This is also what Thabang thinks is necessary and important to be a successful English learner in a multilingual community. In Thabangs' interview, he spoke more about his construction of identity as an ESL teacher in a rural public school in a multilingual community. This "ESL teacher" identity seems to be more complex and diverse than I expected, especially when he spoke about his position in class:

Excerpt 26:

Because I see myself as the transmitter of knowledge, someone just transmit and unpacked the knowledge to the students. And I see myself who generate knowledge to give them to students. In my class, is always about the teaching content... I also think I'm not only teaching language, I also hope my teaching have positive effect on the way they conduct themselves in and outside the classroom... I want them to see me as a brother, as a father, you know someone who cares about them beyond my teaching ... (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012).

In Excerpt 26 Thabang claimed himself as an ESL teacher in the classroom through different roles. The connection between Thabang's past educational experiences and his construction of identity as an English teacher can be seen from the complexity of his constructions of identity as a teacher. Thabang regards himself as the "transmitter of knowledge" and the person "who generate knowledge to give it to students" (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012). "Transmitter of knowledge" indicates that how Thabang understands his profession helps his students to study in class. In addition, I understand that Thabang tries to explain that he hopes his teaching is student-centered instead of teacher-centered. Thabang constructs his identity as an ESL teacher who prefers to see himself in

different roles beyond his profession such as brother, father or a model students can follow and learn something positive from. It also can be seen that Thabang identifies himself as a model and a guide who affects his students positively both inside and outside of the classroom. This complexity in his construction of identity goes beyond the single ESL teacher position and leads Thabang to view himself as the person who can influence his students positively. Thabang also pointed out the importance of being sensitive and aware of students' needs. This also shows that he constructs himself as a person who is not only an ESL teacher but also takes care of students' needs and wants to bring positive effects to his students' lives.

Compared with the other three participants, I found multiple aspects in Thabang's identity construction: Thabang constructed himself as an ESL learner whose first language was not taken seriously in his multilingual community; He also identified himself as the English learner who had to struggle under the pressure from his multilingual community where he rarely had the chance or resources to learner practice his English. On the other hand, the construction of his identity as an ESL teacher is also complex in the different roles or positions he constructs: As an ESL teacher, Thabang is influenced by his ESL learning experiences. He identifies himself as the person who should care for students' needs like a brother, father or a model beyond his teacher position in class. From the multiple aspects of identity which Thabang constructed in his autobiography, it can be seen that Thabang's construction of identity is related to his life experiences in a multilingual community and his past English learning experiences. As stated in Thabang's interview and autobiography, Thabang learned the importance of caring for students' needs and offering a supportive learning environment to individual learns , which reveals how Thabang's identity as a second language learner was generated within his experience in a

multilingual community and reflects the connection between his past educational experience and Thabang's identity as an ESL teacher.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I present my findings about the identities that are constructed by these four participants in their language learning and teaching experiences through their individual life stories and the main themes and motifs in their narratives. Through locating personal experiences in participants' narratives which are focused on language learning and teaching, I found a connection between participants' past educational experience and their construction of identity as shown in Table 2. Also, the details in their narratives are helpful for understanding their language learning and teaching experiences. The information in Table 2 is produced and organized from each participant's autobiography and interview and facilitate my analysis of the data in the following chapter.

As presented in Table 2, participants' teaching experiences are related to their learning experiences: In participant's autobiographies, they all wrote the reasons and motivations that influenced their choice of English teaching as their profession. It also can be seen that their past learning experiences are reflected through their teaching philosophy and their identities as scholars. All four participants spoke about how their identities as English teachers were generated from their past English learning experiences. Participants' autobiographies and interviews display the connection between how participants, as English learners, studied in the past and how they think English should be taught as English teachers in their individual contexts. In addition, as it shown in Table 2, Yea-ting, Dewi and Thabang discussed how they as English teachers or prospective teachers tried to confront the disappointments in their past English learning experiences. Compared with these three participants, Teiba talked about how her

English teachers and their teaching influenced and encouraged her to be an English teacher in particular. This illustrates those participants' identities as English teachers were co-constructed with their identities as English learners.

Table 2:

*Constructions of Participants' Identities*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Yea-ting</b>	<b>Dewi</b>	<b>Teiba</b>	<b>Thabang</b>
<b>First Language</b>	Mandarin	Bahasa Indonesia	Dioula	Xitsonga
<b>Multilingual competence</b>	Mandarin, Taiwanese and English	English and local ethnic languages	French, Arabic, Dioula, English	Xitsonga, Sepedi, English
<b>English learning experience</b>	1. An ESL learner who grew up and learned in Taiwan , 2. An exchange student who was inspired in her studies in the US	1. An English learner who learned English casually 2. An English learner who was seeking the uniqueness and confidence from English learning	1. Female English learner who succeeded in the North of the Ivory Coast	1. An ESL learner who had to struggle with the pressure from his multilingual community;
<b>English teaching experience</b>	1. Prospective Taiwanese teacher who wants to teach creative writing 2. A future teacher who has strong beliefs which were inspired by her exchange student experience	1. An English teacher who wants to motivate her students 2. An English teacher who is looking for the appropriate approach for her teaching context 3. A teacher who was influenced by her English learning experience	1. A teacher who wants to use a communication approach in her class 2. A teacher who is looking for the suitable teaching approach for her teaching context. 3. A teacher who was influenced by her English learning experience	1. A teacher who cares about students' learning backgrounds and needs 2. A teacher who expects his students to have more chances to communicate in English. 3. A teacher who was influenced by his English learning experience
<b>Graduate students</b>	MA TESOL student	MA TESOL student	MA TESOL student	MA TESOL student
<b>Scholar</b>	Interested in creative writing	Curriculum designer	EFL teaching in large classes	Communicative approach
<b>Sense of community</b>	Taiwanese English learner and perspective teacher	Learner who learnt English in a less develop region of her country	A female in the North of the Ivory Coast	A member of the multilingual ethnic language community whose first language is ignored

Therefore, the discussion of participants' identities as English teachers that appears in this chapter is crucial for understanding how second language learners' past learning experiences contributes to their construction of identities as English teachers. In addition, based on the analysis of participants' autobiographies and interviews, I found that it is hard to generate a simple "English learner" or "ESL learner" identity to label different participants but ignore the difference in their language learning paths.

By presenting the main theme and motifs in participants' autobiographies and interviews, this chapter reveals how some factors are related to their constructions of identities: For example, all four participants spoke about their identities as English teachers in different contexts, and how a specific sense of community is connected with their identities as English teachers and learners. Moreover, participants' construction of identities as English teachers is built up from their past educational journeys, social and cultural backgrounds and their self-development. In particular, participants' language learning experiences are closely related to their English teaching practices and expectations as English teachers.

Besides these participants' construction of identity as English teachers, I found that some new aspects of their identities are highlighted by their language learning and teaching experiences where they talked about in the autobiographies and interviews:

For example, in Teiba's autobiography and her interview, she highlighted her identity as "a girl" which co-constructed with her other identities as an English learner and English teacher. Gender is an important and significant construction of her identity. Thabang pointed out the construction of his identity as a minority who struggled in a multilingual ethnic language community. This encouraged him as an English teacher to care for his students who shared the same learning environment he experienced as a language learner. Also, in Yea-ting's

autobiography and interview, she spoke about her identity as an exchange student which played an important role in her English learning path and influenced her construction of identity as a prospective English teacher. Compared with the other three participants, Dewi spoke more about how her English studying experiences influence the way she constructed her identity and even her teaching in the classroom.

These multiple aspects of participants' identities show readers how the constructions of their identities are complex and diverse in nature. Moreover, the discussion of their multiple aspects of identity is collaborated in their construction of identity as English teachers under their varied educational backgrounds and experiences.

In the next chapter, I will explore these four bilingual and multilingual learners' identities through their language learning and teaching experiences in their education journeys, which were presented in this chapter, and further discuss the data by examining the constructions of identities across each participant grounded in co-construction of identity theory, community of practice theory and social identities theory.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

#### **Introduction**

In this study, I explore four bilingual and multilingual speakers' constructions of identity through participants' language learning and teaching journeys. Conducting this research by using Pavlenko's (2007, 2008) autobiographical narrative analysis method, I collected and analyzed participants' autobiographies and the follow-up interviews which offer a rich data resource to utilize in order to unfold these four ELLs' language learning and teaching experiences inside and outside of school and to help me explore how their multiple aspects of identity are related to their identities as English teachers. In this chapter, I use the notion of Co-construction and Community of Practice Theory to speak about these four participants' identity constructions through their autobiographical narratives and interviews.

By collecting and analyzing participants' autobiographies and interviews, I have the ability to view these four participants' educational journeys. Connecting this to the notion of co-construction, participants' language learning and teaching journeys unpack their constructions of identities. In addition, the data that I gather from participants' narratives includes different communities of practices for language learning and teaching. The major themes emerging from these four bilingual and multilingual speakers' narratives include gender, social and cultural contents, language, language communities in bilingual and multilingual society and the influence from these factors on identity (re)constructions. Based on these data, I discuss those factors (gender, social and cultural context, language, language communities in bilingual and multilingual society) (re)shape ELLs' multiple aspects of identity construction. I study participants' construction of identities in their autobiographical narratives and interviews to find

out how they perceive their learning experiences as contributing to their becoming language teachers. I also strive to understand the complexity in the construction of participants' identities as they presented in their narratives. The current findings from Chapter 4 are mainly descriptive and not conclusive or exhaustive. In this chapter I discuss and analyze these findings from the theorizing themes to which I referred in Chapter 2.

The data analysis in this study shows the connection between the findings and the previous theoretical framework I presented in the literature review. Therefore, I organize this section around the themes I summarized from the current study: Identity as co-construction and complex in nature; construction of identity as "English teacher"; language identity and language community; gender, social and cultural identity.

### **Identity as Co-construction and Complex in Nature**

As Jacoby and Ochs (1995) point out, the meaning of co-construction is the "joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion or other culturally meaningful reality" (p. 171). Deckert and Vickert (2011) assert that, "It is important to notice, however, that while the 'co-' prefix does imply that more than one individual is responsible for the construction, it does not imply that all of the constructions are necessarily affinitive or supportive" (p.11). This quotation explains that the understanding of co-construction includes collaboration, cooperation, and coordination but not necessarily affiliation or support. Based on these perspectives about co-construction of identity, it can be seen that multiple aspects of identity are included in individual participants' construction of identity in their autobiographies and interviews.

The four participants identify themselves as English learner, English teacher, graduate student, and scholar in their narratives. The collaboration and coordination between each

participant's multiple aspects of identity can be found in the data analysis. These four bilingual and multilingual speakers were consciously and unconsciously influenced in the formation of their identities. For instance, all four participants spoke about how their English learning experiences in the classroom affected them by causing them to reshape their notions of English teaching or to choose English teaching as their profession. In addition, it can be seen that when these four participants spoke about the aspects of their identity of scholar and English teacher, all of them explained how their teaching in the classroom are connected to past learning experiences.

Wenger (1998) states that community of practice illustrates groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. In particular, these four bilingual and multilingual speakers discussed what they experienced, struggled with and how they understood their identities which were generated or reshaped in different communities of practice. For example, in participants' autobiographies, they significantly emphasized their writing on how they learned English as a second language or a foreign language inside and outside the classroom: Yea-ting spoke about her English studying experiences in an exchange program; Dewi shared her English learning with her conversation partner; Thabang wrote about how his English was improved through practicing writing and speaking with his friends. Those language learning environments where my participants were situated can be regarded as the "community of practice". Through these communities of practice for English learning and teaching, they presented that the construction of their identity was influenced or reshaped by their relations to the community. In this study, it also can be seen that participants constructed their identities from their memberships in communities of practice for English learning and teaching, which influenced their construction of identity as teachers. Thus, I discussed participants' construction of identity as related to their community of practice.

## **Identity Construct as an English Teacher**

Among these four participants, three of them, Dewi, Teiba and Thabang worked as English teachers before they studied in the United States, and Yea-ting reported that she wanted to be an English teacher after graduation. These four ELLs highlighted their identities as English teachers and future teachers in their autobiographical narratives. Through participants' narratives, it can be seen that four participants directly or indirectly spoke about how their English learning contributed to their identities' (re)construction. Their narratives about English learning and teaching experiences can be used as tools for understanding how their identity constructions as English teachers were generated from their educational journey. As Nieto (2010) explains, "learning emerges from the social, cultural and political spaces in which it takes place, and through the interactions and relationships that between learners and teachers" (p.4). By connecting this idea to the theory of community of practice, language learning and teaching could be situated in worldwide contexts. In this section, I focus on discussing how each bilingual and multilingual speaker perceived their identity and past language learning history as contributing to being an English teacher. These four participants, in particular, presented their identities as English learner and English teacher in a complex, coordinated and collaborated structure in various communities of practice. As Table 2 shown in Chapter 4 displays, their identities were generated in varied co-constructions from different social and cultural settings, repeated here for convenience:

Table 2:

*Constructions of Participants' Identities*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Yea-ting</b>	<b>Dewi</b>	<b>Teiba</b>	<b>Thabang</b>
<b>First Language</b>	Mandarin	Bahasa Indonesia	Dioula	Xitsonga
<b>Multilingual competence</b>	Mandarin, Taiwanese and English	English and local ethnic languages	French, Arabic, Dioula, English	Xitsonga, Sepedi, English
<b>English learning experience</b>	1.An ESL learner who grew up and learned in Taiwan , 2.An exchange student who was inspired through studying in the US	1. An English learner who learned English casually 2.An English learner who is seeking the uniqueness and confidence from English learning	1. Female English learner who succeeded in the North of the Ivory Coast	1.An ESL learner who had to struggle under the pressure from his multilingual community;
<b>English teaching experience</b>	1. prospective Taiwanese teacher who wants to teach creative writing 2. a future teacher who has strong beliefs which are inspired by her exchange student experience	1.An English teacher who wants to motivate her students 2.An English teacher who is looking for the appropriate approach for her teaching context 3. a teacher who is influenced by her English learning experience	1. A teacher who wants to use the communication approach in her classroom 2. A teacher who is looking for a suitable teaching approach for her teaching context. 3. a teacher who is influenced by her English learning experience	1. A teacher who cares about students' learning backgrounds and needs 2. A teacher who expects his students to have more of a chance to communicate in English. 3.A teacher who is influenced by his English learning experience
<b>Graduate students</b>	MA TESOL student	MA TESOL student	MA TESOL student	MA TESOL student
<b>Scholar</b>	Interested in creative writing	Curriculum designer	EFL teaching in large classes	Communicative approach
<b>Member of community</b>	Taiwanese English learner and perspective teacher	Learner who learned English in a less develop region of her country	A female in the North of the Ivory Coast	A minority member in the multilingual ethnic language community whose first language is ignored

As is shown in Table 2, all four of these participants identified themselves as an “English teacher” in their narratives during participants’ English learning and teaching experiences. They

spoke about how their experiences and struggles while on the path toward becoming an English teacher. Moreover, these four participants presented their past language learning experiences across different communities of practice. Therefore, participants' identity construction in their narratives contains gender roles, language, and social and cultural backgrounds.

**Yea-ting: “Exchange Student” and “Prospective Teacher”.** Distinct from the other three participants, Yea-ting highlighted her experiences about actively participating in the study abroad program as an exchange student in her autobiography. Yea-ting stated that being an “Exchange student” should be regarded as the main theme and a large issue in her educational journey: Yea-ting chose to emphasize her learning experiences as an exchange student and how she as a prospective teacher is related to her experiences of being an exchange student. In Yea-ting's narrative, she highlighted that “being an exchange student” is one of her identity constructs. Studying English in the United States abroad created a “community” for Yea-ting to improve her English. Yea-ting also explained that studying as an “exchange student” refreshed her understanding of English writing and English teaching, which is connected with how Yea-ting understands being a “future teacher”. Yea-ting wrote about the writing that she completed when she studied abroad:

During these two semesters, I wrote one poetry book, the autoethnography, 15-page research paper, and 10-page science fiction. Moreover, with all these multigenre writing projects, I was proud of myself as a second language writer and found out that I love writing”( Yea-ting, Autobiography, 2011).

Through the previous quotation from her autobiography, it can be seen that Yea-ting experienced different writing projects in the exchange program. She also claimed that “With all these multigenre writing projects, I was proud of myself as a second language writer and found

out that I love writing” (Yea-ting, Autobiography, 2011). The word “multigenre” indicates how Yea-ting experienced the variety of writing projects in the exchange program, which built up her confidence in being a second language writer. Yea-ting chose to use “second language writer” to identify herself as an ELL. It can be seen that her community of practice for English learning in the exchange program refreshed her idea of being an ELL and her attitude toward English writing. Yea-ting constructed one aspect of her identity as a “second language writer” who loves writing. Related to Yea-ting’s English writing, it can be seen that how Yea-ting chose to present her learning experiences as “an exchange student”, is related to her identity construct as a “second language writer”. In addition, Yea-ting did identify herself as a “second language writer”, which signals how she self-positioned in the English learning. It can also be seen that Yea-ting also connected the changes in her identity construct as a “second language writer” with her learning experiences in the exchange program. In Yea-ting’s interview, she compared two different types of composition courses that she experienced as an ELL:

The composition courses in Taiwan are form based and most of the teachers regard good writing in specific and sophistic vocabularies or phrases. Teachers will tell you to write a five paragraph composition with your topic sentences, and force you to memorize lists of idioms and words, From my own experiences, this kind of teaching is tedious and make the students bored and uninterested in writing. Therefore, when I took both college writing and research writing with an intelligent professor, Dr. Hansen<sup>5</sup>, I was surprised by the teaching style, which is much more interesting and motivational (Yea-ting, personal communication, December 20, 2011).

Compared with Yea-ting’s comments to Dr. Hansen’s courses that were “much more interesting and motivational”, Yea-ting seemed to carry the impression that composition courses

---

<sup>5</sup> All names and institutions are pseudonyms.

in Taiwan are “tedious and make the students bored and uninterested in writing (Yea-ting, personal communication, December 20, 2011)”. Yea-ting presented herself as an English learner who experienced two different English writing teaching styles: In her description of composition class in Taiwan, she used words like “force”, “tedious”, and “uninterested” to express her impression and attitudes of the teaching style in Taiwan. However, her description of Dr. Hansen’s courses includes words such as “interesting” and “motivational”. This indicates how Yea-ting constructed herself as an ELL to reflect her preference of one English teaching style over the other. Moreover, Yea-ting also indirectly stated that her experiences studying abroad influenced or changed her understanding of English learning. Reading through Yea-ting’s autobiographical narratives of being an “exchange student”, it can be found that Yea-ting built up the connection between her exchange experiences and her understanding of English teaching that she wrote about in her autobiography.

Therefore, Yea-ting also constructed herself as a prospective English teacher who wanted to teach creative writing in Taiwan: “As a prospective English teacher, my teaching interest is creative writing, which is still an innovative field for Taiwan. However, according to my own experiences of learning creative writing, it enables the students to be more confident and creative” (Yea-ting, *Autobiography*, 2011). Yea-ting constructed herself as “a prospective teacher” in Taiwan who is interested in teaching creative writing. By stating that teaching creative writing “enable the students to be more confident and creative (Yea-ting, *Autobiography*, 2011), Yea-ting brought her own “experiences of learning creative writing” into her teaching as a prospective English teacher. From Yea-ting’s choice of words such as “confident and creative” and “innovative field”, she indirectly expressed her belief that teaching creative writing could change the English composition teaching style in Taiwan’s context. It can be seen that her

identity construct of a “prospective teacher” who believes that teaching creative writing could benefit the English learners in Taiwan is associated with her identity construction as an “exchange student”. Furthermore, in this excerpt, Yea-ting identified herself as a prospective teacher who wanted to bring her previous learning experiences into her teaching. Therefore, Yea-ting constructed her identity as a “prospective teacher” and an “exchange student” through displaying her exchange student learning experiences. Moreover, these two aspects of her identity are co-constructed and collaborated in her narratives. It can be seen that Yea-ting’s identity construction as an “exchange student” (re)shapes her identity construct of being a “prospective English teacher”. Yea-ting’s past learning experiences in the exchange program, which could be regarded as her community of practice for learning English, contributed to her identity construction, which she presented as a prospective English teacher.

**Dewi: “English Learner” and “English Teacher”.** Similar to Yea-ting’s language learning journey, Dewi also established that her identity construction as an ELL is related to her identity construct as an English teacher. However, different from the Yea-ting, who was focused on displaying how she was inspired by her English learning in the community of practice in an exchange program, Dewi chose to present her struggles and reflection on seeking a better English studying methodology in her autobiography, which Dewi regarded as contributing to her teaching in the future: She wrote that “my experience in learning English influenced my preference in choosing the book. I choose the books that enabled the students to practice the language rather than the one that focused heavily on grammar” (Dewi, Autobiography, 2010). It can be seen that Dewi consciously noticed that her past learning experiences actually had an impact on her identity construct as an English teacher, and she expected the readers of her autobiography to notice that. Dewi prefers the “books that enable the students to practice the

language rather than the one that focused heavily on grammar” (Dewi, Autobiography, 2010).

This could be connected to her past English learning experiences in a grammar focused English classroom:

I felt I knew some grammar but I don’t know how to use the language then. Because I felt I’m special, I need let people know. OK. Then in the classroom or outside the classroom I don’t have, you know. They don’t really... they just treat it as a subject in school. And you need to learn and memorize that’s it” (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

Dewi emphasized her past English learning experiences, which caused her to believe that practicing using English is important both inside and outside of the classroom. Dewi stated that she was not “satisfied” by only studying grammar. In particular, as an English learner, Dewi expected that she should be able to use English as a language both inside and outside of the classroom, not just study it as a “subject” in school. She recognized that studying English is more than memorization. In this quotation, Dewi constructed herself as an ELL who expected to show people she could use English both inside and outside of school. It can also be seen that Dewi’s identity construction as an English learner is related to her construction of identity as an English teacher when Dewi explained her motivation of being an English teacher: “I love this job very much because it was actually giving me the opportunity to ‘confront’ my disappointment when I was in the school” (Dewi, Autobiography, 2011). The word “confront” represents the connection between her identity construction as an ELL and as an English teacher. In addition, it also can be seen that Dewi constructed herself as an English teacher who struggled to make up for her “frustration” or “disappointment” in her English learning journey to create more opportunities

for practicing English for her students. Based on Dewi's understanding of English teaching, she explained her "disappointment" in English studying:

I wanted to learn English and really practice English in the class but I'm disappointed.

That's why when I became a teacher I was determined to do that...I don't want to let my students to be disappointed. I did that because I was aware that classroom could sometime be the only opportunity to use the language, since outside the classroom people do not use the language. Besides, from my experience I learnt that the opportunity to practice is probably one of the most important aspects in learning a language (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

Dewi self-positioned herself as a teacher who was avoiding letting her students feel disappointed in English learning. The word "determined" signals Dewi's belief and rationale in English teaching. Also, the connection between her identity construct as an English teacher and as an ELL was revealed. Dewi went on to state that what she learned from her English learning experiences encouraged her to create more opportunities for her students to practice English in the classroom. She valued the opportunity to practice as one of the most important aspects of learning a language because she expected more chances to use English in class than she had and felt "frustrated" when she was an English learner. She stressed that her reason for becoming an English teacher reflected how her identity construction as an English teacher is collaborated with her identity as an ELL. Therefore, it can be seen that her construction of identity as an English teacher is complex and co-constructed with another aspect of her identity - an English learner. Different from Yea-ting's case, Dewi's identity construct as an English teacher includes more reflection from her teaching practice. Therefore, Dewi spoke about how the construction of her identity as an English teacher changed once she had teaching experience in an English classroom:

But it is ideal, you are a new teacher and you don't have much experience. You want the ideal things, you know. What I think is the problem is: I want the students to learn as what I want me to learn. Then I realized that students have different personalities and they have different interests. So maybe I wrote here what I see English should be taught and how English should be learnt it's not the way how people see it. You know, maybe I learnt better in the non-threatening experiences, maybe some students are not. They need to be threatened and to be motivated (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

As Dewi explained in her interview, she identified herself as a "new teacher" who "wants the ideal things" and expected students to learn English as she did as an ELL. It also can be seen that being a "New teacher" in Dewi's construction of identity is dynamic and changing: "I want the students to learn as what I want me to learn. Then I realized that students have different personalities and they have different interests. So maybe I wrote here what I see English should be taught and how English should be learnt it's not the way how people see it (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012)". As an English teacher, Dewi realized the importance of understanding students' different needs in studying English. Dewi's reflection was that both her English learning and English teaching experiences contributed to (re)constructing her identity as an English teacher. In addition, Dewi wrote "I need to have more ground on teaching and learning English. I feel that teaching jobs required me to be able to be material developers, curriculum or syllabus designers, and researchers. I want to keep developing myself in this teaching profession" (Dewi, Autobiography, 2011). It can be seen that multiple aspects of Dewi's identity construct as "material developers," "curriculum or syllabus designers," and "researchers" are collected and coherent as a unit in her identity as an English teacher. This

shows how Dewi's identities are co-constructed and changing throughout her educational journey.

**Teiba: The path to be an “English Teacher”.** Compared with Yea-ting and Dewi's learning experiences, Teiba stated that her identity construction as an English teacher was influenced by her English teachers, whom Teiba regarded as models in English teaching. This was represented in Teiba's description of her English teacher, Antigone<sup>6</sup>, who used to teach her English in junior high school, helped her learning English and had a strong influence on her further teaching: “During all this time, the idea of being like Antigone was still haunting me and I decided to go back to school” (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011). As this quotation indicates, Teiba explained how her identity construct as an English teacher is connected with past English learning experiences, especially the English teachers she used to work with as a student. She recalled how Antigone taught English in class:

She encouraged students to talk. Generally, in the English class we were all silent, saying nothing, just listening to the teacher and taking notes. And she came with that way of teaching involving everybody in speaking. At the beginning, everybody was like “oh No, No, No, I cannot speak.” And she encourages us to do it and we started to get really interested in the language. That was...en grade 13th, the last class before I go to the college . . . She was really...getting us involved. Forgive...not too much about correcting... she was not picky about mistakes...she was...was tolerated. And she is encouraging everybody to speak, to participate” (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012)

It can be seen that that period of English learning experiences with Antigone impressed Teiba in the way Teiba thought English should be taught: In the interview, Teiba stated that

---

<sup>6</sup> All names and institutions are pseudonyms.

Antigone's teaching encouraged her and other students to participate in the English learning. She highlighted that Antigone "encouraged" students to speak English in class and "tolerated" students' mistakes, which changed the "silent" English class, and caused students to be "interested "in the language. Teiba's description of Antigone's teaching indicated the model of English teaching that Teiba preferred to follow:

She was a native speaker but she never frustrated us. She took us with our differences and we felt comfortable with her. She became my source of inspiration. I like the way she spoke English and I liked the way she made her students feel at ease. With her, learning English was no more a constraint, rather, it was a pleasure. She helped me face and realize my second challenge which was to know what I wanted to do (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011).

It can be seen that Teiba pointed out that Antigone's teaching influences her evaluation of successful English teaching and a successful English teacher. Teiba regarded Antigone as the "sources of inspiration," which signals how Antigone influenced both her English learning and teaching. As an English learner who studied English as a foreign language successfully, Teiba began to see Antigone as a successful teacher who could be followed. Moreover, "being another Antigone" became one important factor which (re)shaped her identity construct as an English teacher, which is built up from her construction of identity as an English learner. Therefore, having Antigone as her successful "example" and "model" on her path to becoming an English teacher became one necessary construct in her identity as an English teacher.

Besides Teiba's construction as an English teacher, another remarkable co-construction is her construction of identity as female in her situated community. As seen in Chapter 4, Teiba identified herself as a "girl", a "mother" and a "wife" within her identity as a female. In Teiba's

interview, she explained “being a girl means a lot in the North of Ivory Coast... And I’m a girl, with everything it can mean: you knew, inferior being, you know, somebody who should who should respect her husband, who should make children, who should cook, but go to school” (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012). As indicated in this quotation, Teiba’s construction of identity as a female learner encompasses different roles (girl, mother, and wife). Also, “North of Ivory Coast” could be regarded as a community which shared the same beliefs, in particular, for gender differences. Being a female who desires to continue her educational journey, Teiba had to coordinate and collaborate her multiple roles (girl, mother, and wife) inside and outside the family. This means that Teiba’s path of being a teacher involved more of her struggling and hard work across the different roles (girl, mother, and wife) that she presented. Moreover, the vocabulary in her autobiography such as “girl”, “wife”, and “mother” intensively reflect how Teiba identifies herself under the social and cultural influence from the “North Ivory Coast” community. It can be seen how these multiple roles from her female identity are co-constructed in Teiba’s narratives and cannot be neglected from Teiba’s identity construction as an English teacher in the “North of Ivory Coast” community. Distinct from other participants, Teiba stated her identity construction as an English teacher was (re)shaped by her identity as an ELL, which is generated from her language learning experienced with her English teacher, and struggling under the social and cultural pressure to her gender as a female, which contributes to her becoming a teacher.

**Thabang: Multiple roles in being an “English Teacher”.** In Thabang’s narratives, one of most impressive features is how Thabang’s identification of his identity construction as an English teacher encompasses multiple roles in the English classroom which are co-constructed and collaborated with each other. Similar to other participants, Thabang stated that being a

“teacher” is connected with his past English learning experiences in “public high school” which could be understood as the community where he grew up. However, different from other participants, Thabang talked more about how he as a teacher shared the same learning environment with his students. Thabang also presented that his expectation was to be the person who can guide and facilitate students learning in the class instead of controlling all the learning in class: “My role was to guide learners and provide access to information rather acting as the primary source of information so that they can construct knowledge themselves and discover learning opportunities, as well as, practicing skills in authentic situations” (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011). Thabang said his role in class is to “facilitate students’ learning” and saw himself “as the transmitter of knowledge”, and hopes his teaching will “have a positive effect on the way students conduct themselves in and outside the classroom” (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011). It can be seen that Thabang constructed his identity as an English teacher who is sensitive and aware of students’ needs and expected students could see him “as brother or father”. Therefore, Thabang showed his identity construction as English teacher was more complicated, and co-constructed with multiple roles (the transmitter of knowledge, brother and father), which were generated from his educational journey and social background. Thabang also stated that: “I am actually a product of this environment (rural public high school in South Africa) and I am a living testimony to the effectiveness of such schooling” (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011). This indicated that Thabang self-positioned himself as a student who grew up in a rural public high school in South Africa, where he acquired English learning experience to help him to become an English teacher in the same teaching environment (rural public high school in South Africa).

From Dewi, Teiba and Thabang’s educational journeys, it can be seen that participants’ identity construction as English teachers is closely related to their past English learning and

teaching: The identity as an English teacher consists of multiple aspects of their identities (English learner, prospective teacher, exchange student and so on) which are generated from individual educational experiences. Also, these multiple aspects of identity are collaborated and coordinated in construction of identity as a teacher, which makes their identity more complicated. Varied social values, beliefs and personal educational experiences can be reflected in their identity construct as English teachers. Participants' identity construct as English teachers are (re)constructed by the schooling, teachers, social and cultural factors and influenced by the changes from different learning and teaching experiences. Participants' identity as English teacher in this study is not defined as one subject that is isolated from other aspects of identity but is a collaboration of other aspects. Even though not all the participants tried to reproduce their past language learning experiences in their English teaching, their educational journeys are still used as resources when participants tried to enrich their English teaching.

All four participants studied English as foreign language or second language, so it is therefore important to understand that they constructed their identities based on their varied learning environments and experiences: Most of the participants studied English in a community where they did not easily have contact with English, even the learning materials. Some participants needed to adapt to the learning environment, like English speaking with the rare assistant from their native language; some of them as English teacher in class have to teach students from multilingual backgrounds, which requires them to keep updating their understanding of being an English teacher. Moreover, being an English teacher in certain communities also means they must consider gender, social status, and other cultural and social values. Therefore, it is hard to find a unifying identity as an "English teacher", which could be suitable for all the participants who are bilingual and multilingual speakers in this study.

However, this study cannot generalize the entire population of ELLs because it only involves these four participants, who have been studying English as a second language or foreign language in different learning backgrounds. Through reading participants' autobiographic narratives and interviews, and exploring their educational journeys, these data truly reflect these participants' educational journeys, language learning and teaching experiences and emotions. The finding regarding participants' identity construction proved that participants' past language learning experiences are connected with their identity as English teachers. Participants' identity construct as English teachers are (re)shaped by their multiple identities which are generated in their language learning and teaching experiences.

### **Language Identity and Language Community**

In addition to the previous discussion of participants' identity construct as English teacher, ELLs who have been learning English in a multilingual society as a second language or foreign language present language identity in their educational journey. As Silverstein (1979) defined, language community "is related to sharing and claiming the belief to certain language, dialect or sociolect which all members in the community should adhere" (p.412). In examining my participants' language learning and teaching experiences, language identity is one of the important identity constructs. According to Tajfel (1974) social identity is "part of an individual's self-conception which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (p.69). This means that individuals could construct their identities from the community of practice with which they share the same belief system, emotional significance or other social perspectives. For the participants who come from multilingual societies, in their narratives I found that they frequently described their identities in relation to the communities where they learned and used

other languages, and how certain language communities are related to their identities. Therefore, I argue that language identity and language community (re)constructed participants' identity construction.

In this study, all four participants come from multilingual societies, Thabang and Dewi talked more about their identities across different language communities in their language learning experiences; Teiba wrote about her experiences in learning other languages which shows her languages identities in different communities. In this section, by analyzing these three participants' narratives, I will discuss participants' language identities through varied communities of practice.

**Thabang: Language identity and language community.** As introduced in Chapter 4, Thabang grew up in a multilingual community in South Africa. This factor caused him to have contact with different ethnic languages and language communities in his educational journey. At the very beginning of Thabang's autobiography, he started the first paragraph by introducing his "country's education background regarding to ESL". He wrote:

English as a second language to South African learners and the society at large is integral to academic achievement, career development and functioning in a multilingual society. Most learners learn English as a school subject because 91% of the population are not first language speakers of English (Thabang, Autobiography, 2011).

In this passage of his autobiography, Thabang focused on displaying the fact that he learned English as a second language in South Africa, where the majority of the population are not first language speakers of English. As the writer and an English learner, Thabang constructed himself as a second language learner of English. In his interview, after I asked about the reason

why he thinks the background of English learning in South Africa is necessary in his autobiography, Thabang began to share his experiences in his language community:

We have diverse culture, where people speak other languages except my native language. People speak Sepedi, the language I don't belong to, others who speak Venda, Zulu, Tsonga, Tswana...in the same community. When I went to school, I was taught in Sepepdi, my native language was not taught at school... (Thabang, personal communication, 2012)

In the previous passage from Thabang's interview, Thabang revealed the fact that he regarded himself as a native speaker of Xitsonga<sup>7</sup>. However, he began his education and grew up in a community where the majority of the population used Sepedi as their first language. It can be seen that Thabang demonstrated that he came from a community where his native language does not belong. Thabang presented that his native language, Xitsonga, was not taught either inside or outside the community. Therefore, he claimed that he lost contact with his native language inside and outside the school. He spoke about feeling like a "minority" in that language community: "At the school the minority is my native language, so they cannot teach my native language at school because we are in minority. . ." (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012). As Thabang's interview indicated, Thabang had the feeling of being a "minority" in the community because of losing contact with his native language, Xitsonga, inside and outside school. He constructed his feeling of being a "minority" as part of his language identity in the community where he grew up. Thabang claimed that he was regarded as a Sepedi speaking person in the community. In contrast, Thabang constructed being a native speaker of Xistonga as one aspect of his language identity in that community of practice, although he could only have contact with Sepedi. Thus, his identity as a native speaker of Xitsonga, a "minority" who grew

---

<sup>7</sup> An official ethnic language in South Africa

up in the Sepedi speaking community, was constructed when he explained the multilingual society and educational background in South Africa. This presents that his language identity is strongly connected with the language community in which he grew up. This reshaped his entire identity construction.

In addition, it can be seen that Thabang's language identity as a Xitsonga speaking person is dynamic and changing through his educational journey. His reflection indexes Thaana's feeling toward his language identity within his experiences in the language communities and other language identities which he had inside of himself:

I think somehow I was losing my identity. Yeah...about my ethnic, somehow even I live back home. You knew in my community, the dominance of English, even my commitment to my education all those things. So somehow I see myself losing my identities. Yeah, I see myself moving away from my identity. And somehow I see myself being westernized. Yeah, that's what I see in the most cases...And I started a new identity which is confusing. That even you cannot tell who you are. Sometimes I want to say certain things in my native language and I don't know how to say that. But in the principles, senses of value I still embrace them. But how can I see it in my native language? I have no contact with my native language. So I'm losing my identity in my native language. (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012)

In this quotation of his reflection about his language identity, Thabang constructed his feeling of "losing" and "moving away" from his identity, and saw himself was "westernized" (Thabang, personal communication, January 20, 2012). Because he had no contact with his native language inside or outside of the community, and was geographically "moving away" from his native language and ethnic language community, as well as the fact that he had been

studying English outside of South Africa, Thabang felt he had a new identity, which confused him. This confusing identity could be regarded as one part of the construction of his language identity. At the same time, as a multilingual speaker, it can be seen that Thabang also realized his language identity in his native language. In addition, Thabang demonstrated that his language identity should include the principles and sense of value which are shared by members of a certain language community. Therefore, losing his identity in his native language meant losing contact with “principles” and “senses of values”. This indicates that Thabang understands that his language identity is (re)constructed and reflected within the varied language communities he has experienced and been a part of. Thabang’s language identity is not limited to the community where he grew up, but is connected to his notion about his native language. Therefore, the language identity is one necessary part among his multiple aspects of identity construction in his language learning and teaching journey.

**Dewi: Language identity and language community.** Compared with how Thabang discussed the loss of the identity of his native language and generating a new identity through different language communities, Dewi reflected how she constructed her language identity through changing from different language communities. Dewi also spoke about her feelings about membership, sense of values and the interaction with different community members which was reflected in her language identity construction:

In my life I move a lot. So moving from one part of country to another, you need to learn a local language...people don’t know where I come from, the accent, the people from my area should have (accent)...because when I say I came from this are of the county, people say: “No, you don’t.” My accents are not fossilized. I don’t know that’s good or not.

Because you don't have the identity people from that country... (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

It can be seen that Dewi's understanding of the "accent" is connected with being identified as language community member. Dewi stated that "accent" was one feature which people used to recognize whether she was a member of any language community. In addition, the word "fossilize" indicates that Dewi used the knowledge from second language acquisition that she has learned before. "Fossilize" means an apparent cessation of learning in her language learning path (Saville-Troike, 2006). Therefore, Dewi presented that although she kept learning local languages across different language communities, she was still not attached to any accent or any identity from the language communities. Dewi's feelings about being flexible in local language learning made her think about whether she had any language identity within herself. Thus, Dewi constructed herself as the person who does not have a specific language identity which is shared in a language community. This identity construction is also one part of her language identity as a person who is not attached to any language identity from any language community which is significant and should be recognized. Moreover, the way Dewi constructed her language identity was not limited to the languages which are shared in certain language communities, but was also related to the sense of value and the influences to her behavior:

Also I mean I can be flexible in the value. Like how you can get along people very well, because you understand people are different when I move from one area to another. I see people are different and I become more acceptable...to people's differences. That also influence who I am now, I mean ...I'm not like... 'My way is the best way' (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012).

Dewi explained in the interview that “because you understand people are different when I move from one area to another,” (Dewi, personal communication, January 12, 2012) indexes that learning different languages actually influences the way she understands other people. The identity she constructed from different language communities inspired her to see people’s differences. Therefore, I argue that Dewi constructed her language identity as the product of her language learning experiences from varied language communities, which influenced her behavior and the way she sees other people and her entire construction of identity.

**Teiba: Language identity and language community.** Distinct from how Thabang and Dewi constructed their language identities from their interaction with language communities, Teiba directly pointed out that one of her constructions of identity is “multilingual identity” in her autobiography. As an individual who grew up in a multilingual society, Teiba displayed her experiences of learning different languages through different language communities. Thus, it can be seen that the multilingual society where Teiba learned different languages could be regarded as a large community where Teiba actually had the language learning practices. Moreover, she claimed that her “multilingual identities” were generated from her language learning experiences:

I think that multilingualism identity is kind of imposing to me. I didn’t choose to be multilingual. I happened to be multilingual... My mom was speaking her language to me, and my father was speaking another language to me. My mom is from another part of the country. And my father is from another part of the country. And they get married, so, you know, I have that two languages when I go to my mom’s side. I have to speak the way they speak. Because my grandmother, my grandfather, they don’t know how to speak another language. For them to hear what my mom said, I have to speak the way what I mom speaks. And when I go to my father’s side, I speak the way my father speaks. And

French is the national language. Everybody speak French. So...you have no choice...the language of communication...un...Arabic...I learn Arabic to pray, just to pray. I knew how to pray in Arabic (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012).

Teiba explained how her “multilingualism identity” was “imposed” on her because she had to learn the languages that her parents spoke and French as the national language. As a language learner in the Ivory Coast, she had to accept being a multilingual speaker even before she realized and understood what “multilingual” actually means. This also indicated that Teiba understood that her multilingual identity was associated with her multilingual competence, which she both adopted and adapted in her language educational journey. On the other hand, it also can be seen that her language identity as a multilingual speaker was (re)constructed from her social and cultural backgrounds. Teiba had to learn French to communicate with other people, and Arabic for religious reasons. This fact reflects what she pointed out in her autobiography: “I cannot say anything about my learning experience in French, a language I was speaking in addition to my mother tongue before entering kindergarten. I understand now that I have been multilingual since then” (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011). Therefore, Teiba identified herself as a French speaker who grew up in a French speaking community which required her to learn that language. Being a French speaker is one of her language identities which she adopted and constructed from her educational journey. Due to the requirement of education, Teiba learned Spanish and English also, which caused her multilingual competence to develop. Therefore, Teiba constructed her language identity as a multilingual speaker with multilingual competence which is represented through her experiences in different language communities.

This study addresses four multilingual speakers’ identities in their autobiographic narratives, and it therefore provides the possibility for investigating their experiences in different

language communities and the identities which are constructed by participants. From the data which participants present in their narratives, Thabang, Dewi and Teiba constructed their language identities from their language learning experiences in the varied language communities where they had their language acquisition, interaction with community members and emotions that are attached to the language during the interactions. Therefore, I discussed how participants' language identities are constructed through their practice within a language community. Participants' reflections about the construction of language identity consist of their cognition and notion of their membership in language communities, and the emotional significance they experienced and shared with other community members. These reflections about their language identities offer remarkable perspectives on how bilingual and multilingual speakers construct their language identities through their language learning practices in language communities.

### **Gender, Social and Cultural Identity**

Besides the language identity, which was discussed in the previous section, the identities of gender, society and culture cannot and should not be ignored in these data. Through analyzing participants' narratives, I explored my participants' identity construction in their language learning and teaching journeys. In this section, I focus on some participants' gender, social and cultural identities which are highlighted in their narratives. This shows how participants' identities are constructed in their autobiographies and interviews. Rather than displaying participants' gender, social and cultural identities, I discussed how these identities are generated within different social and cultural backgrounds and explored the participants' construction of these identities.

As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) demonstrate, gender is embedded in our institutions, our actions, beliefs and desires, which appears in a natural way. In this study, gender

identity was present in some participants' writing and narratives which provides enough resource for discussing how gender identities were constructed and shown in the narratives; Social identity is a portion of an individual's self-concept derived from, and perceived in, a relevant social group (Turner & Oakes, 1986), and regarded as a way with which to explain intergroup behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Cultural identity is the identity of a group of culture, or an individual as far as it is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture (Horowitz, 2000). Among these four participants, Teiba constructed her identity as a female who grew up in the North of the Ivory Coast, which involved her construction of gender, social and cultural identity, which was most outstanding. Although one participant was male, he did not overtly construct his gender identity as male. But it is implicit in his work, of course, being a "brother" and "father" as he describes in his interview. Compared with the other three participants, Teiba started her autobiography by introducing the gender issues in the North Ivory Coast:

I'm from the north of the Ivory Coast and in the culture of this part of my country; girls were not meant for school because in everybody's mind, at that time, girls were just good for the housework because girls were seen as inferior human beings and not intelligent enough to be sent to school. Therefore, the role of the mothers was to prepare them not only for marriage, that is, to be submissive and respectful wives to their husbands, but also good mothers for their children (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011).

As indicated in the first paragraph of her autobiography, Teiba constructed her identity as a girl who grew up in the north of the Ivory Coast, a girl who was supposed to be a "mother" or a "wife" who took care of her family instead of going to school to continue her studies. Teiba constructed her identity as a female who struggled under the pressure both from her family and society, which pushed her to succeed in her educational journey. It can be seen that Teiba co-

constructed her gender identity as “a female”, and social and cultural identity construction of “being a female in North of Ivory Coast”. Teiba, as a girl who was supposed to play the roles of a female, who should have been submissive to men and given up her education early, actually was good at studying and finally became the “pioneer” (Teiba, Autobiography, 2011) in her family and village, which is a significant identity that Teiba constructed. In addition, in Teiba’s narrative, it can be seen that being a female in her community—the North Ivory Coast, means to accept some “stereotype” or labeling for her female gender , such as to be “submissive to males,” to “take care of family” (Teiba, personal communication, January 19, 2012). However, Teiba stated that she became the female who actually broke that “stereotype” and label which she learned from the community of practice for education in the North of the Ivory Coast. Thus, the fact that her gender identity was connected with her social and cultural identity that were encompassed with her identity construction as a female who succeeded in her education in the North of the Ivory Coast, made her identity construction more complex.

Compared with Teiba, other participants did not construct their gender identity as large an issue in relation to their language learning and teaching experiences in the narratives. For example, in Dewi and Yea-ting’s interviews, Dewi says she was a daughter in her family the same as Yea-ting mentioned in her interview. It can be seen that gender identity is not highlighted and not as closely related to their language learning journey as Teiba’s was in her autobiography. Therefore, I argue that the gender identity is one important construct in Teiba’s entire construction of identity which is closely related to individual’ social and cultural identity constructions.

## **Conclusion**

Through analyzing participants' narratives within the theoretical framework that is based on the notion of co-construction, community of practices, gender, social and cultural identities, it can be seen that participants' multiple aspects of their identities are co-constructed and complex in nature. These four bilingual and multilingual speakers who constructed their identity as English teachers were connected to their communities of practice for English learning and teaching. Participants stated that their past educational journeys (re)shaped their identity construct as English teachers. Participants claimed their identity constructions as English teacher are not isolated but closely related to other identity constructions such as English learner. Their communities of practice for English learning and teaching enable them to construct their identity as English teacher in such a way that it encompasses their gender, social and cultural identity constructions. Individual participants constructed identity as English teacher based on participation and non-participation in a varied community of practice for English learning and teaching, such as school, ethnic language community and so on. Therefore, it also can be seen that participants' identity as English teacher is dynamic and changing with the development and extension of their educational journeys or the changes from their communities of practice for English learning and teaching.

Participants' constructions of identities in the narratives indicated that their language identities constructions will be affected by their multilingual studying practices across varied language communities. Some participants stated that studying language itself modified their language identity construction, added new aspects of identity that is brought from the language communities they are situated in. Besides, some participants from multilingual community constructed "multilingual speaker" as one part of her language identity construction. Moreover, for different participants, the construction of their identity index gender, social, and cultural

identities are necessary constructs which enriched participants' identity construction as English teachers. They are necessary identity constructs which cannot and should not be neglected in exploring bilingual and multilingual speakers' identity construction.

By analyzing participants' narratives, this study mainly focuses on exploring bilingual and multilingual speakers' language learning experiences within varied social and cultural backgrounds, and how their identity construct as English teacher is constructed in their educational journeys through various communities of practice. I reveal the construction of these four participants' identities through their narratives, in particular identity construct as English teacher through each participant's English learning and teaching experiences. Therefore, it can be seen from the analysis that individual participants constructed their identity as English teachers and learners with different concerns and focuses, although they all studied English as their second language or foreign language. This discussion of bilingual and multilingual learners' identities as English teachers encourages me to question any homogeneous identities for ELLs because of the complexity and uniqueness found in their constructions of identity, and to realize the importance of individualizing bilingual and multilingual speakers' language learning and teaching journeys.

### **Remaining Questions in this Study**

Analyzing participants' responses allows me to investigate the construction of bilingual and multilingual learners' identities through their autobiographic narratives and interviews. However, as is shown in Chapter 5, I realize that other factors and elements can be explored in this study: for instance, examining participants' identity within their family could be considered in a more extensive study. Also, I believe the construction of participants' identities can be investigated in-depth with more narratives from participants. As noted earlier in this study, these

four participants appeared to be rather special cases in their various communities of practice in their English educational journeys. Participants' uniqueness and complexity in their construction of identity intrigued me. Since their autobiographical narratives were required to be focused on English learning and teaching experience, in order to gain a more precise understanding of how participants' identities are constructed through their language learning and teaching journeys, it is crucial that researchers collect participant narratives which include their other experiences learning other languages. For example, among these four students, only one participant shared her other language learning experiences in her autobiography. Therefore, future studies might include participant narratives with experiences of learning other languages for an in-depth look at their complex constructions of identity.

### **Implications**

In this study, I found some tendencies among participants among participants that can be used to better understand their identities: The importance of raising awareness of the complexity and uniqueness in second language learners' construction of identities can be seen; this study also illuminates the need to respect second language speakers' multilingual competence which is closely related to their language learning journeys. These tendencies may be helpful in the creation of second language learning materials with more focus on learners' social and cultural learning environments; in addition, the reflections on participants' construction of identity might contribute to ESL teaching practice and help educators to create an appropriate learning environment with which to help second language learners and second language teachers both inside and outside the school content and facilitate second language teachers to adapt to a bilingual and multilingual teaching environment. As a second language speaker who shares the many of the same language learning experiences as the participants, the analysis of their

language learning and teaching experiences offers me an opportunity to review my educational journey and inspire me to extend my research interests in the future.

## References

- Bailey, B. (2001). The language of multiple identities among Dominican American. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 10(2), 190-223.
- Bell, J. (2002). Narrative inquiry: More than just telling stories. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36(2), 207-213.
- Benson, P., & Nunan, D. (2005). *Difference and diversity: Learners' stories*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhatt, R. (2008). In other words: Language mixing, identity representations, and third space. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12(2), 177-220.
- Bird, C. M. (2005). How I stopped dreading and learned to love transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(2), 226-248.
- Block, D. (2006). *Second language identities*. London, UK: Continuum.
- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (4th ed., pp. 110-120). New York, NY: Pearson.
- Bucholtz, M. (2003). Sociolinguistic nostalgia and authentication of identity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(3), 398-416.
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2008). Finding identity: Theory and data. *Multilingual*, 27(1/2), 151-163.
- Cameron, D. (1995). Rethinking language and gender studies: Some Issues for the 1990s. In S. Mills (Ed.), *Language and gender: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 31-44). London, England: Routledge.
- Cameron, D. (2005a). Language, gender, and sexuality: Current Issues and new directions.

- Applied Linguistic*, 26(2), 482-502.
- Cameron, D. (2005b). Relativity and its discontents: Language, gender and pragmatics. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 2(3), 321-334.
- Davies, B., & Harre, R. (1999). Positioning and personhood. In R. Harre & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Positioning theory* (pp. 32-52). London, UK: Sage.
- Deckert, S., & Vickers, C. (2011). *An introduction to sociolinguistics: Society and identity* (pp. 10-27). New York, NY: Continuum.
- Delanty, G. (2003). *Community*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Denny, T. (1978). Storytelling and educational understanding. Occasional Paper #12, College of Education, Western Michigan University.
- Du Gay, P. (1996). *Consumption and identity at work*. London, UK: Sage.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1995). Constructing meaning, constructing selves. In Buchholtz and K. Hall (Eds.), *Gender articulated: Language and the culturally constructed self* (pp.469-507). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Eckert, P. (2006). Communities of practice. In Brown, K. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics* (pp. 683-695). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.
- Gee, J.P. (2004). Social linguistics and literacies: *Ideology in discourse* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London, UK: Falmer.
- Greertz, C. (1973). *Thick description: Toward an interpretive of culture*. New York, NY: Basic books.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Anchor.
- Harris, R., & Rampton, B. (2002). Creole metaphors in cultural analysis: On the Limits and possibilities of (socio-) linguistics. *Critique of Anthropology*, 22(1), 31-51.

- Hansen, J. G., & Liu, J. (1997). Social identity and language: Theoretical and methodological issues. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 567-576.
- Horowitz, D. (2000). *Ethnic groups in conflict*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2003). Metaphor and the subjective construction of beliefs. In P. Kalaja & A.M.F Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp.109-128). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University press.
- Layder, D. (1997). *Modern social theory*. London, UK: Longman.
- Le Page, R. B., & Tabouret-Keller, A. (1985). *Acts of identity*. London, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Linde, C. (1993). *Life stories: The Creation of Coherence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2001). Voice in Japanese written discourse: Implications for second language writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 35-53.
- Mendoza-Denton, N. (2008). *Homegirls: Language and cultural practice among Latina youth Gangs*. London, UK: Wiley/Blackwell.
- Mercer, K. (1990). Welcome to the jungle: Identity and diversity in postmodern politics. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Culture, community, difference* (pp.43-71). London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Meyerhoff, M. (2006). *Introducing sociolinguistics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Miller, J. (2003). *Audible differences: ESL and social identity in schools*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

- Nieto, S. (2009). *Language, culture and teaching: Critical perspectives*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Norton, B. (1997). Language, identity and the ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31(3), 409-429.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.
- Norton, B., & McKinney, C. (2011). An identity approach to second language acquisition. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition* (pp.73-94). New York, NY: Rutledge.
- Nunan, D. (2003, March). Learner narratives in research and teaching. Plenary presentation, *TESOL Illinois Annual Convention*, Chicago, IL.
- Numrich, C. (1996). On becoming a language teacher: Insights from diary studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(1), 131-153.
- Ochs, E., & Jacoby, S. (1995). Co-construction: an introduction. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 28(3), 171-183.
- Ochs, E. (1992). Indexing gender. In A. Duranti & C. Goodwin (Eds.), *Rethinking context* (pp.335-358). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Ortmeier-Hooper, C. (2008). English may be my second language, but I'm not ESL. *CCC*, 59(3), 389-419.
- Park, G. (2006). *Unsilencing the Silenced: The Journeys of Five East Asian Women with Implications for TESOL Teacher Education* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1903/3950>.
- Park, G. (2009). "I listened to Korean society. I always heard that women should be this way..."

- The negotiation and construction of gendered identities in claiming a dominant language and race in the U.S. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 8(2), 174-190.
- Park, G. (2011). Adult English language learners constructing and sharing their stories and experiences: The cultural and linguistic autobiography writing project. *TESOL Journal*, 2(2), 156-172.
- Pavlenko, A. (2003). "I Never Knew I was Bilingual" Reimagining teacher identity in TESOL. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 2(4), 251- 268.
- Pavlenko, A. (2007). Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(2), 163-188.
- Pavlenko, A. (2008). Narrative analysis in the study of bi- and multilingualism. In Moyer, M. & Li Wei (Eds.), *The Blackwell guide to research methods in bilingualism* (pp.311-325). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004). *Negotiation of identities in multilingual context*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling sexual stories: Power, change and social worlds*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Plummer, K. (2001). *Documents of life 2: An invitation to a critical humanism*. London, UK: Sage.
- Saville-Troike, M. (2006). *Introducing second language acquisition*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Schiffrin, D. (1996). Narrative as self-portrait: Sociolinguistic constructions of identity. *Language in society*, 25(2), 167-203.
- Silverstein, M. (1979). Language structure and linguistic ideology. In R. Clyne, W. Hanks, & C.

- Hofbauer (Eds.), *The Elements: A parasection on linguistic units and levels* (pp.193-247).  
Chicago, IL: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Silverstein, M. (1998). Contemporary transformations of local linguistic communities. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27(1), 401-426.
- Smart, B. (1997). *Facing modernity*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behavior. *Social Science Information*, 13(2), 65-93.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity of intergroup behavior. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social psychology of intergroup relations*. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.
- Turner, J., & Oakes, P. (1986). The significance of social identity concept for social psychology with reference to individualism interactionism and social influence. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(3), 237-252.
- Weedon, C. (1996). *Feminist practice and poststructuralists theory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Community of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization*, 7(2), 225-246.

## Appendices

Appendix 1. Sample E-mail Communication

Appendix 2. Informed Consent Form A

Appendix 3. Informed Consent Form B

Appendix 4. Guideline for Highlighting Autobiography

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **E-mail Communication**

Hello,

Thank you for your time. This is Tong Zhang. Now I'm writing my MA thesis about second language learners' identities in their autobiographies and looking for voluntary participants who are interested in this study. Since you have rich bilingual/Multilingual learning experiences which could be really important for this study, I'm inviting you to take part in this study as the participant. The aim of this thesis is to discuss second language writing and second language learners' identities; I believe you will have an enjoyable learning experience and valuable information which could be helpful to you. Plus, in this study as the researcher I only need to collect your autobiography which you have already completed in ENGL 694 class and have a short audio-typed interview for you about your autobiography. The interview will only last for around 30-40 minutes. So if you would like to be the participant that will be really helpful for this study. The details about this study and your rights and responsibility are covered in the consent form which is attached with this mail. If you have any questions about my study, you are welcome to email me or call me by the contact information in the consent form. I appreciate your help. Have a nice day!

All the best,

Tong Zhang

## APPENDIX 2

### Informed Consent Form A

You are invited to participate in this research study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask. You are eligible to participate because you have bilingual and multilingual learning experience and study English as a second language learner. You had in XXX class at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) in spring 2011 and completed one autobiography in this class.

The purpose of this study is to study second language learner's identities in autobiographies. First you will be asked to submit your autobiography which you have completed in XXX class to the researcher. Next you will be asked for a 30-40 minutes digital audio-taped interview which is based on your autobiography.

You may find the learning experience enjoyable and the information may be helpful to you become more aware as a bilingual or multilingual writer and learner. The information gained from this study may help us to better understand second language learners' identities in autobiographic narratives which maybe provide important pedagogical suggestions for English instructors who teaching English as an second language.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or IUP. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the Dr. Sharon K. Deckert via email or informing the researcher. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the University. Your response will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below and turn it to me. Take the extra unsigned copy with you. If you choose not to participate, take both copies with you.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

**Project Director**

Tong Zhang  
Candidate for MA TESOL  
English Department  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
No.29 Regency Square  
Indiana, PA 15701  
Phone: (724)732-1838  
Email: [znrr@iup.edu](mailto:znrr@iup.edu) ,

**Project Co-Investigator**

Dr. Sharon K. Deckert, PhD  
Professor of English  
English Department  
Leonard Hall 111A  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Indiana, PA 15705  
Phone; (724)357-4878  
Email:[sdeckert@iup.edu](mailto:sdeckert@iup.edu)

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).

**APPENDIX 3**

**Informed Consent Form B**

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:**

**I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.**

**Name (PLEASE PRINT)**

**Signature**

**Date**

**Phone number or location where you can be reached**

**Best days and times to reach you**

**I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.**

**Date**

**Investigator's Signature**

## APPENDIX 4

### **Direction for Highlighting Autobiography**

To my dear participant:

Thank you for reading these directions. Firstly, I sincerely appreciate your help in my thesis. Thank you very much for being a member of this study. The aim for these new directions is to clarify the process of my research. As you saw in this envelope, I prepared one copy of your autobiography that you have already sent to me by email. To achieve the goal of this research, I friendly ask you to use the highlighter (the one in your envelope) to mark any part of your own autobiography that you believe reflects your identity. The information that you highlight could be words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs. More specifically, you can highlight any information showing your identities from your point of view. To prevent any misleading assumptions of the researcher that may affect the study, I will not give any definition of identity to you in this research.

Also, I will mention the following information again: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or IUP. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. All information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the University.

Thank you again for your participation. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.