# Investigating Pre-service English Teachers' Identity Construction Using Multimodal Discourse Analysis

**Yongqiang Ye\*, Zhili Peng, Yi Wang**

*Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang 330022 Jiangxi, China*
*\*corresponding author*

*Abstract:* The study of teacher identity has been booming since it was proposed in the last century, and the popularity has not subsided. Some scholars explored teacher identity from the macroscopic perspective using educational narrative and critical discourse analysis, while others explored it with micro-conversational analysis. Among the previous research, few studies focused on the process of pre-service teachers' identity construction with multimodal discourse analysis. Adopting multimodality design framework for identity construction, this multi-case study of two student teachers examined four dimensions of teacher identity including framing, selection, foregrounding and arrangement. The results indicated a variety of differences in the types of teacher identities which two student teachers constructed. Student teacher A was more inclined to construct authoritative and knowledgeable teacher identity, while student teacher B constructed guiding and amiable teacher identity. It was found that different student teacher identities had different effects on classroom teaching. On the one hand, constructing teachers' authority too much resulted in less teacher-student interaction and low student participation in the classroom. On the other hand, building an excessively intimate relationship between teacher and students led to poor classroom discipline.

## 1. Introduction

The question "who am I" opened a new page for teacher research in the 21st century [1]. Goffman (1981) [2] pointed out that identity not only refers to a person's fixed social attributes such as birth, occupation, power, etc., but also refers to the communicative image and identity actively constructed by the individual in a communicative situation. With the in-depth research on pragmatics and discourse analysis, researchers have gradually realized that identity is dynamically changeable. Moreover, it is constructed in the context of dynamic social communication. In other words, people often actively choose to construct a suitable identity based on current communication needs. Teacher identity has received more and more attention and discussion in recent years. It involves the recognition of teaching as a profession and the recognition of what kind of teacher you want to be in a certain environment [3]. In addition, teacher identity is a key component of teachers' professional development [4], and it is the core that determines teachers' professional motivation, self-efficacy and work efficiency.

Pre-service stage is an important period for the formation of teacher identity, but previous studies have mostly focused on in-service teachers, failing to fully explore the germination and construction of professional identity in the context of teacher education. At the same time, the rapid development of modern science and technology has brought various multimedia teaching technologies into classroom. In consequence, the traditional teacher classroom discourse is no longer a single modality, but shows a trend of multimodality [5]. However, previous studies have paid too much attention to teachers' language characteristics, while neglecting the influence of non-verbal characteristics on teacher identity, such as clothing, posture, movement, attitude, etc, thus the analysis of the process of teacher identity construction is far more comprehensive. Therefore, using multimodal discourse analysis, this research explored the types of teacher identity that these two student teachers constructed and strategies they used, so as to have a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the process of pre-service teachers' construction of teacher identity.

## 2. Literature review

The research on teacher identity can be traced back to the 1950s, and the popularity has not subsided since then. In China, the research on teacher identity has mostly appeared in this century. It is a new development trend in the field of applied linguistics in the past decade, and importance of teacher identity is apparent. Moreover, teacher identity is one of the core concepts in the field of teacher education, which has an important impact on teaching decision-making, teaching content and teacher-student relationship. Some scholars believe that the discourse construction of teachers' self-image plays an important role in teachers' teaching methods and future career development, therefore, the study of teacher identity is totally essential. At present, the research on the process of teacher identity construction at home and abroad mainly involves two perspectives, namely, macroscopic and microscopic.

The macro research mainly employed education narratives to explore and discuss the role of the social environment in shaping teacher identity [6]. In abroad, the research of Coldron & Smith (1999) [7] mainly focused on the conflict between the individual and the environment in the process of teacher identity construction. Moreover, Tsui (2007) [8] used the method of narrative research to trace and discuss the 6-year teaching career of a foreign language teacher. And the result of the research presented a complex coordination process between teacher identity and professionalism. In addition, Villegas et al., (2020) [9] analyzed the written and oral narratives of students and teachers and their teaching reflection diaries from the perspective of narrative research, concluding that the construction of teachers' identity involves a continuous process, and the development of its identity is constantly changing due to the influence of teaching experience and social interaction. In China, Kang & Cheng (2013) [10] employed a case study method to investigate the professional development of a normal graduate working in junior high school, and explained the reason why the theoretical knowledge and classroom practice of normal students are not completely consistent. Geng (2014) [11] also conducted a one-year follow-up survey of a novice teacher in a 985 comprehensive university and found that the construction of teacher identity is not an easy process.

Compared to macro analysis, micro research mainly employs conversational analysis to study the construction process of teacher identity. For example, Taylor (2017) [12] employed a discourse analysis method to explore how normal postgraduate courses can help in-service teachers establish their status as teacher researchers by analyzing recordings, course blogs, and interviews. Lan & Han (2013) [13] adopted conversation analysis to analyze two teacher-student classroom communication fragments. The result showed that the teacher identity was jointly constructed by teachers and students through the use of conversational strategies in classroom interaction. From the perspective of adaptation theory, Xu & Chen (2015) [14] pointed out that college English teachers have

constructed four types of teacher identities, involving knowledgeable teacher identity, authoritative teachers' identity, amiable teacher identity, and companionate teacher identity.

## 3. Multimodality Design Framework for Identity Construction

Shi (2019) [15] proposed the framework of multimodality design framework for identity construction based on individuation theory and multimodality design principles. The framework mainly embodies four dimensions including framing, selection, foregrounding and arrangement. In the dimension of framing, the framing of modality has the characteristics of regulation and individuality, and cultural, individual and contextual factors all have an impact on the process of identity construction. In the dimension of selection, behavioral symbolic resources and non-behavior symbolic resources are all multimodal resources that affect identity construction. Behavioral symbolic resources mainly refers to language and paralanguage resources that includes tone, speed of speech, body language and etc. Non-behavior symbolic resources contain value symbolic resources and non-value symbolic resources. In the dimension of foregrounding, there are foregrounding resources and backgrounding resources. Foregrounding resources have a major role in identity construction, while background resources have an auxiliary role in identity construction. In the arrangement dimension, multimodal resources can either be coherent or incoherent in the sense of meaning [16,17] The coherence of modal arrangement can promote identity construction, but the incoherence of modal arrangement will weaken identity construction.

## 4. Research Questions

The research focuses on investigating pre-service English teachers' identity construction by using multimodal discourse analysis. Therefore, the author of the present study proposed the following research questions:

Q1：What types of teacher identity do student teachers construct?

Q2：How do student teachers construct teacher identity?

## 5. Methodology

Aiming to have a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the process of pre-service teachers constructing their teacher identities, the present research adopted qualitative methods, including multimodal discourse analysis and classroom observation. The participants were two student teachers who are doing a master's degree in English Education from Normal University in Jiangxi Province. On the premise of not disturbing the normal classroom teaching, these two student teachers' first classroom teaching videos were filmed. Subsequently, by applying the multimodality design framework for identity construction, teachers' classroom discourses in the video were analyzed in four dimensions including framing, selection, foregrounding and arrangement.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 The Types of Teacher Identity constructed

As a pre-service teacher who has just left university classrooms and then quickly works a student teacher in high school, the understanding of what kind of teacher identity to construct is mainly based on the self-setting of the teacher identity. These self-settings guide pre-service teachers to answer "What is a good teacher?" [18]. Due to the differences in personal learning and life

experiences, pre-service teachers often form different teaching images and potential teaching concepts, and thus construct different types of teacher identities during internship. By analyzing teaching videos of these two student teachers, it was found that pre-service teacher A mainly constructed authoritative and knowledgeable teacher identity, while pre-service teacher B mainly constructed the guiding and amiable teacher identity. However, constructing teachers' authority excessively led to a lengthened emotional distance between pre-service teacher A and her students, and the classroom atmosphere is not active, while pre-service teacher B's emotional distance with students was very close, so her students behaved actively, but the classroom discipline was poor.

## 6.2 The Construction of Authoritative Teachers and Strategies

Modal framing owns the characteristics of regulation [15], and the degree of modal framing in formal occasions is higher than that in informal occasions [16]. As a formal occasion, classroom teaching has many regulations. In middle school classrooms, teachers usually stand in front of the blackboard or PPT, and students sit in neat rows underneath. "The podium, blackboard, PPT, and teachers are visual objects of students. The desk and podium establish the authority and responsibility of teacher. A teacher usually looks down students from the podium in classroom. PPT and blackboard are the main tools for teachers to implement his authority" [19]. During the teaching process, pre-service teacher A stood on the podium most of the time, and only a few times did she walk off the stage to interact with students. In visual modalities, such kind of positional asymmetry helped pre-service teacher A construct an authoritative identity.

In addition, pre-service teacher A mainly constructed authoritative teacher identity through behavioral semantic resources, including language and sublanguage. Specific examples are as follows.

(1) Context: Teacher A used a video to teaching listening. This video is mainly about a girl sharing her English learning experience. In the video, when the girl said, "Some parts of the books were rather tough." Teacher A asked a student to answer the meaning of this word. The transliteration symbol T stands for teacher, S stands for student, ... stands for omission.

T: The last word "tough", I'd like to ask one student to answer the question that what's the meaning of this word. Tao Menghan, please. I have taught you the meaning of this word before. What is your answer?

S: It means...

T: No!!!

(2) Context: After explaining the whole video, student teacher A asked students to watch the video again, and then share their enlightenment for future English learning. In the process of watching video, student teacher A found that one student looked down and did not watch it.

T: What can you learn from this video? I guess you have mastered all the key information in this video, right? Otherwise, while the whole class was watching the video, you were the only one looking down. Come on, what did you learn from this video? If you can't tell us your opinions, just keep standing up.

In example (1), the implication of student teacher A's discourse "I have taught you the meaning of this word before." is that students should answer correctly instead of forgetting its meaning. When the student answered incorrectly, teacher A directly interrupted her and replied "No!", which showed that teacher A was extremely dissatisfied with this student's answer and even a little angry. Just replying "No", and rising tone in the intonation with a strong mood was an act which threatened the student's face and assisted teacher A in constructing an authoritative teacher identity. In example (2), teacher A's discourse "I guess you have mastered all the key information in this video, right? Otherwise the whole class is watching, you are the only one looking down" was full of

sarcasm and blame. Teacher A's paralanguage also helped him construct an authoritative teacher identity. For example, when teacher A said "If you can't tell us your opinions, just keep standing up," she stared at the student. In this scene, gaze was used as a para-language to help teacher A express her dissatisfaction in visual modality, so that students will realize that they should follow teacher's instructions in classroom and shouldn't challenge teacher's authority. However, since teacher A lacked effective interaction with students and overly established the authority of teacher identity, students didn't behave actively in the classroom and the atmosphere was not harmonious either.

## 6.3 The Construction of Knowledgeable Teacher Identity and Strategies

Classroom teaching is an audio discourse, and language acts as the foregrounding resource which plays a major role in the construction of teacher identity (Shi, 2019)[15]. In order to construct the knowledgeable teacher identity, student teacher, a mainly employed three strategies including teaching extracurricular knowledge, expressing personal opinions and suggestions. The transliteration symbol T stands for teacher, S stands for student, and ... stands for omission.

(3) Context: When the girl in the video said "This reminded me that English, like Chinese, is rich in literature and culture", student teacher A paused the video and then discussed Western literature works with students.

T: Do you like to read novels? Besides *Harry Potter*, what other classics do you read?

S: *Pride and Prejudice*

T: Fine, you can read Shakespeare's works, David Copperfield's works, *Oliver Twist*, and other such kind of literature works. Western culture is as extensive and profound as Chinese culture.

(4) Context: When the girl in the video said "My teacher compared parts of English novel with its Chinese translation." Teacher A paused the video and asked students some questions.

T: What did her English teacher do? Compared parts of English novel with its Chinese translation, right? When you watch movies adapted from novels, which vision of movies do you watch, the Chinese dubbed version or the original version?

S: The original version

T: That's good…. If you watch Chinese dubbed version, you will find that they are very different from the original version. Even a very qualified translator can't translate all meanings in one language into another language. Just like our Chinese, when translated into English, there are many losses.... So everyone should watch original English movies in the future.

In example (3), when teacher A talked literature with students, she introduced Shakespeare, David Copperfield and two classics including *Oliver Twist* and *Harry Potter* in order to make students aware that she grasps a wealth of literature knowledge, which helped she construct the knowledgeable teacher identity. In example (4), teacher A asked whether students like to watch Chinese dubbed movies or English original movies, and then pointed out the shortcomings of Chinese dubbed movies. She believed that even an excellent translator cannot do a perfect translation. She also suggested that students watch the original English movie. Those verbal behaviors make students perceive that teacher A is also good at translation and she has a wide range of knowledge, which helps she to construct the knowledgeable teacher identity.

## 6.4 The Construction of Guiding Teacher Identity and Strategies

Promoting a "teacher-centered" traditional class to a "student-centered" class is one of the focuses of education reform. In this classroom, students are center of of the class, and student teacher B just played a role in instructing. In order to increase the amount of students' classroom discourse, student teacher B used the strategy of questioning to construct a guiding teacher identity. During the

teaching process, student teacher B issued a total of 15 questions, including "What happened to American English in the 19th century?" "When did English begin to be spoken in many other countries?" "Who gave American English its own identity" and etc. Appropriate classroom questions can increase classroom interaction and stimulate students to think. During the teaching process of student teacher B, the arrangement between language and paralanguage strengthens the coherence of multimodal discourse and promotes the construction of a guiding teacher identity. To remind students of the content of the question and attract students' attention, student teacher B raised their intonation when asking questions. At the same time, teachers used visual modalities to assist and strengthen auditory modalities. After the question was raised, in order to encourage students who know the right answers to raise their hand, student teacher used many body language. When students answered the question correctly, the teacher B expressed affirmation by nodding and smiling, and asked other students to respond with applause. After the students answered the questions, the teacher gestured to the students to sit down. The combination of verbal and non-verbal resources facilitate the construction of guiding teacher identity.

## 6.5 The Construction of Amiable Teacher Identity and Strategies

An amiable teacher identity can shorten the distance between teachers and students and improve students' classroom participation (Qiu, 2020) [20]. Student teacher B mainly adopted three strategies including cracking a joke, praising and increasing interaction in classroom to construct an amiable teacher identity. The transliteration symbol T stands for teacher, S stands for student, ... stands for omission.

Context: Before teaching the text, student teacher B wanted a student to read the words in the vocabulary list.

T: Who can read the words in the vocabulary list, put your hands up, try it, I will help you if you have any problems. After reading these words, I believe you have basically memorized most of the words in this unit.

S: ... Subway...

T: It's great. Give him some applause. Very good. Well, I believe you will never forget these words in your whole life. (Students and teachers begin to laugh)

In example (5), teacher B created a pleasant classroom atmosphere through cracking a joke and shortened the emotional distance between teachers and students. Throughout the teaching process, the teacher kept smiling and established a harmonious teacher-student relationship. When a student answered questions, teacher B would walk to him, interacted and communicated with him, so as to give the students a sense of security and encouragement. What's more, teacher B would lean forward in order to be closer to the student, so that the student would feel that the teacher was listening to him carefully and he was respected by the teacher. In the teaching process, the teacher often went off the podium, and had an interaction with students, which gets rid of the traditional teacher's stereotype of "high above the top". In terms of voice modalities, teachers encouraged students with praise words such as "Very good", "That's right" and "Excellent!" However, through classroom observations, it was found that teacher B interacted actively with students, but did not establish teacher authority and classroom discipline was not good.

## 7. Conclusion and Limitation

Teacher identity construction has always been paid much attention in the field of applied linguistics. Based on the multimodality design framework for identity construction, this study conducted multiple case studies on two education masters in a normal university in Jiangxi province from the angle of synchronicity. The results showed that the two student teachers constructed different

teacher identities in the initial stage of internship. Student teacher A was more inclined to construct authoritative and knowledgeable teacher identity, and student teacher B tended to construct guiding and amiable teacher identity. Educational internship is a process of continuous construction and reconstruction of teacher identity. Since the corpus collected in this study is two classroom teaching videos of two student teachers, there are certain limitations of this research, for example, the corpus is small and this research did not involve the reconstruction process of the teacher identity. In the following research, the process of identity reconstruction and the strategies employed by pre-service English teachers will be explored from a diachronic angle.

## Acknowledgments

## References

[1] *Zhang Qian. (2012) The Construction of Pre-service Teacher Professional Identity: a Report Based on Western Empirical Research on Pre-service Teacher Professional Identity. Journal of Fujian Normal University and Social Sciences Edition), (2), 154-160.*

[2] *Goffman, Erving. (1981) Form of Talk. Oxford: Blackwell.*

[3] *Gu, M. and P. Benson. (2014) The formation of English teacher identities: A cross-cultural investigation. Language Teaching research, (1), 1-20.*

[4] *Varghese, M. B., Morgan, B. Johnston and K. Johnson. (2005) Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. Journal of Language, Identity and Education, (1), 21-44.*

[5] *Delu Zhang and Yuxiang Li. (2012) A Study on Modal Coordination of Multimodal Classroom Discourse. Foreign Languages and Their Teaching, (01), 39-43.*

[6] *Yueting Xu. (2011) A Narrative Research on the Change of College English Teacher Identity in Assessment Reform. Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice, (02), 41-50.*

[7] *Coldron, J., and R. Smith. (1999) Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities. Journal of Curriculum Studies, (6), 711-726.*

[8] *Tsui, A. (2007) Complexities of identity formation: A narrative inquiry of an EFL teacher. TESOL Quarterly, (4), 657-680.*

[9] *Villegas, D. F, Varona, W. H., and Sanchez, A. G. (2020) Student teachers' identity construction: A socially-constructed narrative in a second language teacher education program. Teaching and Teacher Education.*

[10] *Yan Kang and Xiaotang Cheng. (2013) Looking at the professional development of normal graduates from the classroom teaching of novice English teachers. Shandong Foreign Language Teaching, (01), 52-59.*

[11] *Fei Geng. (2014) Identity Construction of College English Novice Teachers Based on Classroom Teaching. Foreign Languages and Their Teaching, (006), 19-24.*

[12] *Taylor, L. A. (2017) How teachers become teacher researchers: Narrative as a tool for teacher identity construction. Teaching and Teacher Education, 61(3), 16-25.*

[13] *Liangping Lan and Gang Han. (2013) Construction of Teacher Identity: Conversational Analysis of Classroom Questioning Silence. Foreign Language World, (02), 59-68.*

[14] *Min Xu and Xinren Chen. (2015) The Identity Construction and Adaptation of College English Teachers in the Context of Classroom. Foreign Language Education, (03), 54-58.*

[15] *Chunxu Shi. (2019) Multimodal design for the identity construction of prosecutors from the perspective of individualization. Modern Foreign Languages, (02), 243-253.*

[16] *Kress, G. (2010) Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication. London: Routledge.*

[17] *Painter, C., J. R. Martin and L. Unsworth. (2013) Reading Visual Narratives: Image Analysis in Children.*

[18] *Shiyuan Zhang, Xiangming Chen and Xiayan Qiu. (2015) Construction of the Professional Identity of Student Teacher.Teacher Education Research, (04), 74-79.*

[19] Delu Zhang and Lu Wang. (2010) The Alignment of Modalities in Multimodal Discourse and its Manifestation in Foreign Language Teaching. *Foreign Language Research*, (02), 97-102.

[20] Qing Qiu. (2020) Diversified Reading and Writing and the Construction of International Talent cultivating Mode. *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, (06), 248-253.