

# *Discursive Construction of a Graduate Teacher's Pragmatic Identity at XISU*

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**Abstract:** As the central role in the process of education, the construction of graduate teachers' pragmatic identity has an important influence on teaching practice, teacher development and students' learning effect. It plays an indispensable role in the analysis of teacher's daily teaching activities, as a teacher can construct different identity while facing different teaching goals. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the discursive construction of teachers' pragmatic identity in classroom teaching, including the identities of an authoritative teacher, a knowledgeable teacher, a modest and an amiable teacher. As a qualitative research, it adopted the method of case study to analyze different types of pragmatic identity constructed by a graduate teacher, Emma, in the teaching process of Xi'an International Studies University through classroom discourses, thus to help graduate students gain a better understanding of their teachers' teaching activities and try to alleviate the anxiety they experience during the learning process.

## 1. Introduction

Based on professor Chen Xinren's theory of pragmatic identity, this paper adopted a case analysis method. It analyzes four types of pragmatic identity constructed by a graduate teacher in the teaching process of Xi'an International Studies University, which are knowledgeable teacher identity, authoritative teacher identity, modest teacher identity and amiable teacher identity. It hopes to shed some light on the learning of graduate students and make greater progress in the field of education.

## 2. Literature Review

Identity is a complex and abstract concept studied in many academic fields. It is "how individuals understand their relationship with the world, how this relationship is constructed in time and space, and how individuals understand the possibility of the future" (Norton, 2013)<sup>[1]</sup>. This study focuses on the identity in linguistics.

Teacher identity, as complex as identity, is hard to be given a uniform definition. For teachers, their identity would shape their performance in class and further influence their future career development. With regard to discursive construction of teacher identity, scholars at home and abroad have done many researches.

## 2.1 Studies Abroad

For scholars abroad, either written or spoken discourse has been analyzed in depth. Concerning written discourse, Starfield (2002) draws on systemic functional grammar to probe into how university students succeed or fail to develop an authoritative self in sociological essays<sup>[2]</sup>. She develops a detailed description of the processes of identity negotiation based on analysis of students' essays and interviews.

As for spoken discourse, Jacoby and Gonzales (1991) investigate the construction of expert-novice identity in scientific discourse through a conversation analysis approach. They finally stress the significance of the reciprocal relationship between social identity and surrounding interaction<sup>[3]</sup>. Miller (2002) explores the tension of teachers when they face the shift of identity in classroom<sup>[4]</sup>. As a teacher educator, she helps teachers understand the power of their discourse. The power operates in and through language to shape identities of the teacher, the students as well as families with whom they work.

## 2.2 Studies at Home

For scholars at home, this topic is relatively new and gradually attracts their attention. Concerning written discourse, Han (2010) examines the construction of writer's identity from three aspects: subjective voice, intertextual voice and intersubjective voice<sup>[5]</sup>. His study aims at exploring self-promotion in academic research articles. Wu (2013) combines Hyland's model of academic interaction and genre analysis theory to discuss writer's identity in research article<sup>[6]</sup>.

Besides that, Xu and Chen (2015) discuss teachers' identity from the perspective of pragmatics<sup>[7]</sup>. Based on videos of a teaching competition, they propose four types of identities and corresponding pragmatic strategies. Each type of identity adapts to physical, social and mental context in a certain way.

## 3. Research Methodology

The core participant of this study is a postgraduate teacher named Emma. In this study, case study is used to analyse Emma's identity construction process as a postgraduate English teacher, particularly in her interactions with students. Emma holds a doctoral degree, and her specialization mainly includes applied linguistics, foreign language education, and textbook research, and she has a harmonious relationship with her students.

The major data source is the audio recordings of Emma's class. The researchers attended Emma's class on Friday every week from May 17th to June 14th. Each class lasted 90 minutes with about 80 students attending. Total length of time of those recordings were about 6 hours.

The data for this study includes initial information obtained through participatory observation and interviews. Participatory observation involves observing the teacher's actual classroom sessions to obtain vivid and real-time qualitative data in authentic contexts. An open-ended classroom observation was conducted on Emma's class, where her teaching content, speech modalities, teaching behaviours were recorded in detail. A structured interview was conducted based on a pre-determined interview outline, where Emma was interviewed at a scheduled time, and her responses has been promptly recorded.

## 4. Analysis and Findings

This part provides an in-depth analysis of the linguistic choices made by the teacher in classroom discourse, highlighting four distinct categories of teacher's pragmatic identities.

## 4.1 The Identity of an Authoritative Teacher

Teachers with an authoritative identity highlight their authority in class and exhibit a high level of confidence in the rationality of their discourse (Xu & Chen, 2015)<sup>[7]</sup>. As a teacher, authority is an important aspect to display in classroom. Emma's identity of an authoritative teacher can be illustrated in the following classroom discourse.

### •Extract 1:

Emma: "While choosing a case study, the case can be a person (..), but this will not only (.) be criticized by people (.) who don't know much about qualitative research, because you don't know whether the teacher who will guide you in the future (.) will do qualitative research. Some people believe that qualitative research cannot finally draw a conclusion. Then we can increase the number of cases through (2.0) for example, choosing three to five people, but it does not mean that a conclusion cannot be drawn if there is only one person to be the case. If there is only one person, it is necessary to do more detailed interview." (Classroom observation-20240517)

First of all, Emma foresees possible doubts and challenges in doing the research, which shows teachers' comprehensive understanding and experience in the research field. Secondly, when faced with possible research difficulties, Emma gives specific solutions. She shows her professional quality and problem-solving ability as a teacher by proposing how to solve the problem, which further strengthens her authoritative identity.

Furthermore, Emma also emphasizes a rigorous and serious attitude when guiding students to collect data. By doing this, it will undoubtedly affect students and make them more cautious and meticulous in their future research.

To sum up, Emma has created an authoritative teacher identity with her profound research experience, foresight of research problems and effective solutions. While imparting knowledge, Emma is also guiding students how to face and solve the difficulties in research so that students can make further progress in their research.

## 4.2 The Identity of a Knowledgeable Teacher

Teachers with a knowledgeable identity often extend and expand the content of textbooks, offering students more relevant information and displaying their wealth of knowledge by quoting the classics abroad and at home (Xu & Chen, 2015)<sup>[7]</sup>. Emma's identity of a knowledgeable teacher is constructed through the following classroom discourse.

### •Extract 2:

Emma: "The problems that you guys have are as follows: firstly (.) (abstract) is too short to present the core content of your article. This is the first (problem). The second biggest problem is that (.) background information and context are introduced in too much detail, with only one or two pages, and two-thirds of the space is devoted to introducing (.) background knowledge. Conclusion and findings are the most important, but just one sentence is given, which is not advisable. ↓ For a dissertation, like your master's thesis, (abstract) should be at least one page. (2.0) You can briefly introduce research background, value and significance in three paragraphs, and the middle part is the core, which is to write what kind of methods you have used and what kind of conclusions you have reached." (Classroom observation-20240614)

Emma has profound professional knowledge and in-depth understanding of students' thesis writing, and can clearly point out the problems that students have in the process of writing. This shows that Emma has a clear understanding of the structure and writing requirements of academic papers.

Besides that, Emma not only points out the problems existing while students are writing abstracts, but also gives concrete suggestions for improvement, which shows her strict teaching attitude. She

evaluates and guides the abstract written by students, paying attention not only to the content of the paper, but also to its structure and expression. This will be helpful to cultivate students' academic accomplishment and professional writing ability.

To sum up, this classroom discourse shows that Emma is a knowledge-based teacher with profound professional knowledge and strict teaching attitude, thus her identity of a knowledgeable teacher can also be revealed clearly.

#### 4.3 The Identity of a Modest Teacher

Teachers with a modest identity can also narrow the distance between the teacher and students, and teachers with this identity sometimes show their uncertainty about specific topics (Zhang & Chen, 2023) [8]. Emma's identity of a modest teacher is constructed during the following extract of the classroom discourse.

•Extract 3:

Emma: "This part is relatively straightforward. (1.0) It is relatively easy to operate only if you learn statistics. (.) It's very difficult to understand statistics, and people like me cannot understand it well ↓ I don't like it, so I won't do it. ((laughing)) Like our classmate who is engaged in quantitative statistics, a little data...can come out with a particularly high sense of accomplishment, and he or she just considers this feeling as particularly good. (1.5) But people who do qualitative research say that there is nothing to be achieved with such an indifferent data, right? ((laughing)) So different people will have different feelings, and both qualitative research and quantitative research have their own advantages." (Classroom observation-20240614)

First of all, Emma did not give the answers directly with an authoritative attitude, but led the students to review and restate their assumptions, which showed her respect for the students and her concern for the learning process. Secondly, Emma frankly admitted that she did not understand statistics very well, and expressed her dislike of statistics, which allows her students to see that teachers are not omniscient and also have their own shortcomings as well as preferences.

In addition, Emma also emphasized that different people will have different experiences and viewpoints by comparing the different perspectives of quantitative and qualitative researchers, and expressed that both of them have their own advantages, which reflects her comprehensive understanding of research and respect for different research methods.

To sum up, Emma shows the identity of a humble teacher by revealing self-awareness, respecting different viewpoints and fully understanding subject knowledge. Her teaching method not only helps students to learn, but also helps to establish a harmonious relationship between teachers and students.

#### 4.4 The Identity of an Amiable Teacher

Teachers with an amiable identity narrow the distance between the teacher and students and create a harmonious and friendly teaching atmosphere (Xu & Chen, 2015) [7]. Emma's amiable image is constructed through the following extract of the classroom discourse.

Extract 4:

Emma: "During the interview, you should be clear about (.) what is anxiety (..) as conducting the interview for this research object. ↓Is it an emotion? (.) Then when you read the literature, you should know (.) what emotion is and how comes from, right? ↑Emotional things must be invisible, and it is manifested through behaviour, right? (.) If there is a ready-made scale, ↓ in fact, some questions of the scale can be the best question reference for the interview. (1.5) Besides that, when you interview the other one, you should follow them. (.) That means you have to put aside your own presupposition. Some students said, 'I wanted him to say this, but he didn't do as what I said, so I

didn't know what to do.' ((laughing)) Qualitative research focuses on your research participants, and what others say is your real data. (.) Don't think about how you presuppose it. If it meets, it's good. If it doesn't, it's actually better. This shows that you have more points to say during the conversation. You have to put aside your own presupposition." (Classroom observation-20240517)

Firstly, by using the plural personal pronoun "we", Emma created a community including all students, implying that all students are part of the research and learning process. Emma emphasized the common exploration and learning between teachers and students by not only telling students what to do or learn, but also exploring and discovering new knowledge with them. This expression can narrow the distance between teachers and students and make students feel that they are part of the classroom, not just passive recipients of knowledge.

When talking about the difficulties that students may encounter in interviews, Emma did not directly criticize the students' presupposition thinking, but explained the characteristics of qualitative research with an inclusive and understanding attitude. Although there are no words of encouragement or affirmation directly expressed in the classroom discourse, Emma has sent positive messages to students through her attitude and behavior.

To sum up, this classroom discourse reflects Emma identity of an amiable teacher. Her teaching style makes students feel relaxed and comfortable, which is conducive to stimulating their interest and enthusiasm in learning and research.

## 5. Conclusion

Concerning major findings, this paper reveals Emma's four types of pragmatic identities, namely authoritative teacher identity, knowledgeable teacher identity, modest teacher identity and amiable teacher identity through discourse analysis, and certain linguistic choices are explained in constructing each type of identity.

This paper demonstrates a relatively dynamic picture of the construction of teacher identity. It is hoped that this approach can also be applied to identity construction in other contexts in the future.

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## Appendix

- (.) Short pause, no more than one second
- (..) Longer pause, close to one second
- (1.0) Longer pause, the number in the bracket indicates the length of interval,

measured in seconds

Underlining	Stress on a word or word phrase
↑	Markedly rising pitch
↓	Markedly falling pitch
(( ))	Additional information which could not be recorded
...	Unrecognizable utterance content