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Legitimising Teacher Identity: Investment and Agency from an Ecological Perspective

Abstract

International higher-education systems position teachers in ways that require an ecological perspective to understand the complexities of identity formation. Accordingly, we apply a model of legitimisation that combines Positioning Theory and Bourdieu's analogy of capitals, means/codes, and marketplaces to investigate the roles, identities, and investments of six university teachers in Thailand. Findings from in-depth interviews show that our participants navigate the complexity and fluidity of their positions through a view of identity that puts holistic learning above content or language-related goals. Moreover, despite positioning themselves as individuals, their discourses reflect a common goal for ethical self-formation driven by emotion labour.

Keywords: English language teaching, EMI Thailand, emotion labour, identity agency, teaching-as-caring

1. Introduction

Research into identity has advanced our understandings of how ascribed, essentialist markers of identity (e.g., gender, nationality, race) combine with complex phenomena in time and space to conceptualise identity as *becoming* rather than *being* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). Research has also shown how, in these processes of "becoming", individuals have varying levels of control over how they are positioned in society and institutions, and in the ways in which these positions are legitimised (Block & Moncada-Comas, 2019). Being able to legitimise a position has important implications for teaching, as it can help teachers form identities that are recognized, affiliated, and secure, which are all key attributes "as a positive sense of the professional self is a central condition for their job satisfaction and resilience" (Ruohotie-Lyhty et al., 2021, p. 2).

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977, 1982) economic analogy, we believe that legitimisation can be achieved through *capitals* (e.g., knowledge/relationships) that give a teacher the *means/code* (ways of being/doing) by which to participate (and be accepted/rejected) in a *marketplace* (in front of a certain audience). However, interactions between capitals, means/codes, and marketplaces are multifaceted and complex, and what works for one teacher, may not work for another; this is becoming increasingly evident in

research that explores teaching at international universities where English-medium instruction (EMI) programs have become popular, and which, more often than not, also run alongside more established English as a foreign language (EFL) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programs (Thomas et al., forthcoming).

In the context of Thai universities, where our study is situated, EFL classes are often taught deductively, such as learning grammatical structures in a graded order, and learners typically use little English outside the classroom. In CLIL classrooms, we teach language and subject matter through English, and there is a dual goal of learning content and language. In EMI classes, content is taught through English, and there is no official time allocation for language instruction. However, despite these seemingly clear distinctions, which are reflected by researchers such as Rose et al. (2020), who place EFL, CLIL, and EMI along a language-focused–content-focused continuum, at the classroom level, such programs often blend into one another because students and teachers come with varying competencies and backgrounds (Bowen & Nanni, 2021).

Essentially, in many internationalised departments, teachers are confronted with challenges that they may not be trained for or accustomed to, such as not having sufficient levels of English to deal with complex topics (Macaro et al., 2018), having to adjust to new teaching practices (Hong & Basturkmen, 2020), or being asked to teach complicated subject matter when they are primarily EFL teachers (Bowen & Nanni, 2021). Teachers are also faced with increasingly heterogeneous student populations, where many EMI enrolled students are seemingly ill prepared for immersive study through English (An et al., 2021). Effectively, the drive to internationalise higher education through “Englishisation” (see Rose & Galloway, 2019) has seen existing and new teachers faced with ever fluid, hybridised roles, which leads to important questions about how teachers successfully position themselves and their identities, beliefs, and practices in these contexts.

However, despite increasing research into EMI (Macaro et al., 2018), there has been little research into teacher identity in our context aside from individual case studies (e.g., Ferguson, 2011) or teachers working in private schools (e.g., Loo et al., 2017). Moreover, as far as we know, there have been no studies—inside or outside Thailand—into the identities and positioning of teachers who teach across EFL, CLIL, and EMI platforms under one job description, which is increasingly common in internationalised departments (Thomas et al., forthcoming; Loh & Liew, 2016). Furthermore, few studies have explored how experienced language teachers successfully manage their identities (cf. Pappa et al., 2017a). We feel that these are important issues to explore in our context and elsewhere, because the demand for teachers shows no sign of abating (Mala, 2020) and turnover coupled with emotional burnout is high (Loh & Liew, 2016; Zhang & Zhang, 2008).

Therefore, using Bartlett’s (2008, 2014) expanded view of Positioning Theory—which incorporates Bourdieu’s (1982) notions of capitals, means/codes, and marketplaces—we advance a method for exploring identity that considers legitimisation in light of teacher investment and agency. By applying this method to in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with six experienced university teachers, we explore how they (a) accept or resist

EFL, CLIL, and EMI roles, (b) position themselves in relation to these roles and institutional constraints, and (c) invest in their teacher identities in terms of “fitting in”, career advancement, and achieving pedagogical goals. Overall, the paper provides further understanding of the interplay between agency and power in teacher identity, whilst also reflecting the importance of a view of teacher identity that puts holistic learning above content or language-related goals. Moreover, we highlight the continued importance of ethical self-formation in “successful” teachers in this context and others (see Miller et al., 2017).

2. Teacher Identity, Investment, and Agency

2.1. Teacher Identity

When seen as a fluid concept, identity embraces the fact that who we are, and who we want to be (imagined identity), is shaped by a host of factors: some of which we have control over, and some of which we do not. Vähäsantanen (2015), for instance, defines a teacher’s professional identity as “a work-history-based constellation of teachers’ perceptions of themselves as professional actors” (p. 3). Likewise, in a qualitative synthesis of studies into university teachers, van Lankveld et al. (2017) state that after several years, “teacher identity is built on other identities, including those of a professional, academic, researcher, or intellectual” (p. 333). They also list five psychological processes that positively contribute to the development and maintenance of teacher identity: a sense of appreciation, connectedness, competence, commitment, and the imagining of a future career trajectory.

Research has also focused specifically on language teacher identities, where a wide range of studies have explored the sociological and ideological impacts of various individual forces such as gender (Appleby, 2014; Yoshihara, 2018), race (Dafouz, 2018; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2020), transnational movement (Higgins, 2011), “native speakerness” (Khatib & Monfared, 2017; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2020), and so on. Other studies have examined the impact of institutional demands (Duff & Uchida, 1997), dominant ideologies (Simon-Maeda, 2004), and educational reforms (Tsui, 2007). Although such studies have been incredibly valuable in raising awareness of hegemonic, discriminatory practices, there is often an implicit bias toward macro- and/or meso-level concerns, with few studies approaching the issue of identity negotiation from the bottom-up, namely between teachers and students.

Research that considers the co-construction of identity between teachers and students is exemplified in Reeves (2009) and Ollerhead (2011). Drawing on Norton’s (1995) seminal work on investment in language learning, which was inspired by the theorising of Bourdieu (1977, 1982, 1984), such studies emphasise the functions that identity, ideology, and capital play when individuals invest in a task they have a stake in, and how they can accomplish that task through various forms of investment. Reeves (2009), for instance, argues that teachers may invest in language learners’ identities in such a way as to establish or reinforce their own identities, such as positioning learners as “lacking ability”, which deflects responsibility to the learner and thus reframes the teacher’s identity in a positive light.

In more recent work, Darwin and Norton (2015) put forth a Model of Investment,

“which occurs at the intersection of identity, ideology, and capital” (p. 36). It has subsequently been used to investigate teacher identity and investment in digital initiatives (Stranger–Johannessen & Norton, 2017) and multimodal composing (Jiang et al., 2020). The model is primarily focused on how “learners are able to negotiate symbolic capital, reframe relations of power, and challenge normative ways of thinking, in order to claim the right to speak” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 47). Although we do not explicitly draw on this work, our approach is commensurate with its goals. Specifically, drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977, 1982) economic analogy, we explore how legitimisation of positions (taken up in storylines and reflected in acts) can be achieved by (a) investing in *symbolic capital* (configuration of cultural+economic+social capitals) that can afford a teacher (b) the *means/code* (ways of being/doing) by which to participate (and be accepted/rejected) in (c) a *marketplace* (in front of an audience who decide if [a] and [b] are valuable or not in a given context). As such, our model subsumes ideology (systemic patterns of control) as permeating all points on our model (see section 3.4).

2.2. Investment and Teacher Identity

As noted in the previous section, in the context of teacher identity, legitimisation can be achieved by investing in capital that can give a teacher the means/code by which to participate in a specific marketplace. In other words, investment “signals the tension between agency and structure” (Darvin & Norton, 2021, p. 3). For example, a professional teaching identity can be legitimised (enhanced/maintained) by increasing one’s academic knowledge and skills (Jiang et al., 2020), English proficiency (Trent, 2011), or social standing through cultivating relationships (Civis et al., 2019). However, legitimisation is multifaceted and complex—what works for one teacher may not work for another because investment “is a perpetually shifting site of struggle, where some voices are amplified, while others are silenced” (Darvin & Norton, 2021, p. 4).

In terms of language teacher capitals, one major area of investigation has been issues surrounding national identity and “native speakerness”. Many argue that without access to these forms of cultural capital, “non-native” speaking L2 English teachers have to invest in other capitals, such as high levels of learned English proficiency (Trent, 2011), multimodal composing (Juang et al., 2020), Western constructivist pedagogies (Nguyen & Hall, 2017), studying abroad (Lawrence & Nagashima, 2020), postgraduate certification (Treve, 2020), and so on. Other studies highlight the importance of social capital to legitimising teacher identity (e.g., Civis et al., 2019; Fox & Wilson, 2015; Vallente, 2020), whereby investment in social relations can increase relational agency, which is the capacity to enact relationships and cooperation among colleagues (see Pappa et al., 2017b).

Other studies have investigated the effects of shifting reforms and the subsequent investments teachers make. Liu and Xu (2011), for instance, focused on how one EFL teacher dealt with moving from a traditional, authoritarian, knowledge-diffusion pedagogical model to a participation-based one. They highlight how she reconciled the personal construction of herself (actual identity) with the institutional construction of herself (designated identity) by

investing in liberal teaching practices. Although their study highlights how actual (imagined) and designated (assigned) identities do not often align through a lack of agency to enact an imagined identity, agency can be a means by which to enact power by investing in capitals that can be used to negotiate an identity.

Of note, however, is that few studies have explored the identities of older/more experienced university-level language teachers, who arguably possess a different configuration of capitals than younger/less experienced teachers, and perhaps, therefore, different levels of agency with which to enact their identities.

2.3. Agency and Teacher Identity

From an ecological perspective, teacher agency is an emergent phenomenon that encompasses a consideration of teachers' contexts, histories, and individual capacities, which is “*achieved* in and through engagement with particular temporal-relation contexts-for-action” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p.136, emphasis in original). In this view, agency is influenced by the past, oriented to the future, and executed in the here and now (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). As Priestley et al. (2012) note, “this renders the question ‘What is agency?’ sterile, supplanting it with questions of ‘How is agency possible?’ and ‘How is agency achieved?’” (p. 196).

As a field of study, teacher agency is vast (see Etapellto, 2013). With regard to agency and identity, studies have examined how agency interacts with identity commitment in terms of acceptance, ambivalence, or approval of educational reforms (Sannino, 2010; Tao & Gao, 2017; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009). Research has also explored career advancement through investments in classroom teaching (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), doing research (Hökkä et al., 2012), professional development (Eteläpelto et al. 2013), and co-teaching (Valdés-Sánchez & Espinet, 2020). Other studies have highlighted the idiosyncratic nature of identity agency in developing teachers as they switch from “their previously formed identities - this is *who* I am, and their habitual agency - this is *how* I am” to “*who* they could be and *how* they could be” (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2020, p. 102, emphasis in original).

In other words, identity agency “represents the habitual patterning of social behavior and it captures the identity commitments we have internalized. These identity commitments motivate our actions, and we exercise agency in the very performance of those identities” (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 58; see also Hitlin & Elder, 2007). In essence, teachers believe they are accountable to themselves and others based on identities they have internalised, and thus exercise various kinds of agency in performing those identities (Pappa et al., 2017b).

For instance, whilst not explicitly framed in terms of identity agency, Miller and Gkonou's (2018) work on emotion labour is interesting here. Emotion labour is the management of one's emotions in relation to how one actually feels and how one should feel according to societal expectations (Hochschild, 1979). By critically reflecting on and investing in emotions, teachers can exercise agency over competing discourses, which in turn can lead to ethical self-formation (Foucault, 1989/1997; Miller et al., 2017)—“an orientation to identity and agency which involves self-reflection and making choices regarding how best

to live and act in the world” (Miller & Gkonou, 2018, p. 51). Emotion labour has important implications not only for identity development but also for teacher education as it is a powerful means by which to combat teacher burnout (Loh & Liew, 2016; Zhang & Zhu, 2008).

2.4. Teacher Identity in Internationalised Contexts

As noted in the introduction, international university departments often run a number of different English programs that are traditionally conceptualised in terms of EFL, CLIL, or EMI. However, many teachers in these departments do not have clearly defined roles and are increasingly asked to accommodate a broad range of approaches, courses, and students. This has important implications for identity work. For example, Block and Moncada-Comas (2019) recently examined how one EMI teacher, who despite teaching in an L2 context for three years, positioned himself as a content teacher and not a language teacher. Although strict adherence to a disciplinary identity has been a prevalent theme in the EMI literature (Galloway et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2013), there is increasing evidence that EMI lecturers often blur “the distinction between content knowledge and linguistic proficiency, EMI and CLIL” (Baker & Huttner, 2019, p. 91). However, to date, there has been little research into how the increasing Englishisation of university departments is affecting the teaching identities, positions, investments, and practices of those working in such contexts. Moreover, there has been little research into how experienced language teachers legitimise their increasingly fluid roles so as to maintain job satisfaction and a sense of worth. Accordingly, we use the following questions as a means to guide our analysis and discussion:

1. What roles do our teachers accept or resist in the pursuit of their daily duties?
2. How do our participants position themselves through identity agency with respect to the institutional constraints placed upon them?
3. What types of investment do teachers in our context draw upon in order to “fit in”, advance their careers, and achieve pedagogical goals?

3. Method

3.1. Research Context

Interviews were conducted with six lecturers at a large university in Bangkok, where one researcher worked as a lecturer (British national), and two were enrolled as postgraduate students (Thai nationals). The fourth researcher (American national) was enrolled in a PhD program in the United Kingdom but had extensive teaching experience in Thailand. This combination gave us diverse, insider perspectives on the affordances and constraints of the study’s context.

The university where the study took place delivers a range of courses in Thai and English and it is ranked amongst the top ten universities in Thailand. At the time of the study, the university had approximately 33,500 enrolled undergraduates and 2082 full-time teachers. The university has a four-year English undergraduate program, 35 EMI programs, and a number of individual courses using EFL and CLIL approaches.

At the Faculty of Liberal Arts, where the majority of EFL/CLIL/EMI courses are

administered, there are 33 Thai and 12 non-Thai teachers. Non-Thai teachers come from diverse societal and cultural backgrounds and predominantly have English as their first language. Many of the teachers in this department have taught at all levels of the Thai education system. Their qualifications range from Master's degrees in Asian Studies to PhDs in Applied Linguistics. As is customary in this context, most non-Thai teachers have completed a 120-hour TEFL/TESOL certificate, whereas the Thai teachers generally have no standardised English teaching qualification.

3.2. Participants

We used purposive sampling to enlist a somewhat representative range of teachers in terms of L1/L2 English, nationality, age, gender, qualifications, and expertise (see Farrell, 2013). This resulted in a sample of six teachers, as shown in Table 1. Only one of our teachers (Decha) possessed a postgraduate degree in education.

Table 1

Participant demographics

	English	Nationality	Gender	Education	Experience
Somchai	L2	Thai	Male	PhD	30 years
Sumana	L2	Thai	Female	PhD	24 years
Decha	L2	Thai	Male	PhD	20 years
Claire	L2	Filipino	Female	Master's	10 years
Mike	L1	American	Male	Master's	51 years
David	L1	Irish	Male	Master's	6 years

Note. We have given our participants pseudonyms to protect their anonymity

To contextualise our analysis, we also present the participants' teaching commitments at the time of the interviews. We used course outlines to categorize each course as EFL, CLIL, or EMI, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Courses taught

	EFL	CLIL	EMI
Somchai		Trends in American Literature; Creative Writing	Literary Appreciation
Sumana	Critical Reading	Academic Reading; Business Report Writing (2 classes)	
Decha	Presentation Skills; Listening & Speaking		Seminar in Business Issues (2 classes)
Claire	Critical Writing; Listening & Speaking (2 classes)	English for Secretaries	Critical Thinking
Mike	Critical Writing Listening & Speaking	Intercultural Communication; Business English Writing;	Literary Appreciation; Business Ethics
David	Critical Writing (2 classes)	Readings in Arts & Culture	Journalistic Writing; Critical Thinking; Integrated

3.3. Data Collection and Preparation

We interviewed each participant once, with recorded interviews lasting between 38 min and 1 hr 20 min ($M = 53.33$ min, $SD = 14.53$). In conducting interviews, we matched up

gender, L1/L2 English, and credentials where possible between interviewee and interviewer in an effort to build rapport (see Perera, 2020). Five interviews were conducted in English and one in Thai (the preferred language of that participant). The interview schedule was adapted from an earlier study (Thomas et al., forthcoming) and was piloted with a Thai teacher who was not a part of the current study. We conducted the interviews in early 2021 via video conferencing software due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. All six interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interview conducted in Thai was translated into English by the second and third authors, with each checking the other's accuracy.

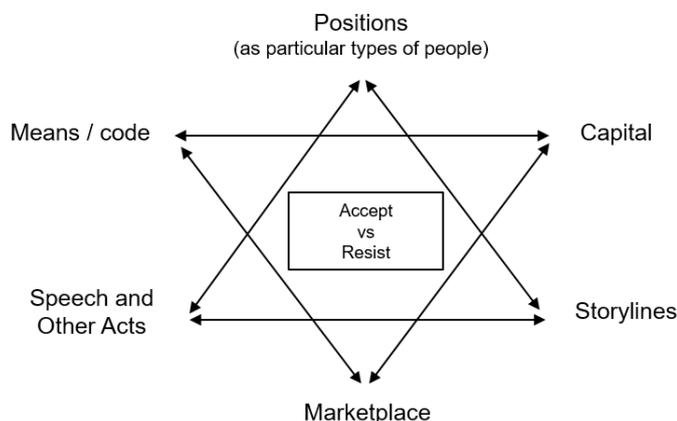
3.4. Data Coding and Analysis

Transcripts were saved as MS Word documents and placed in a shared Dropbox folder. All four researchers began working individually, using inductive content analysis as a shared method (see Selvi, 2020). We commented on each transcript and responded to each other's comments with reference to our research questions, conceptual framework, and data.

To examine teacher positioning and investment, we drew upon a model of discourse in action that combines Positioning Theory (a three-way relationship between speech/other acts, positions, and storylines; see Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) and a model of higher-level constraints based on Bourdieu's (1977) economic analogy of capitals, means/codes, and marketplaces (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Positioning Star of David (adapted from Bartlett, 2008, 2014)



By using this approach, we were able to model teachers' *positions* (acceptance or resistance to identities) in relation to their *speech/other acts*, as displayed in their emerging *storylines*. Bourdieu's (1977) economic analogy enabled us to model an ecological view of identity agency, where "the achievement of agency depends on the availability of economic, cultural and social resources within a particularly ecology" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137). Namely, identity agency can be legitimised or not in terms of (a) investing in *symbolic capital* (configuration of cultural+economic+social capitals) that can afford a teacher (b) the *means/code* (ways of being/doing) by which to participate (and be accepted/rejected) in (c) a *marketplace* (in front of an audience who decide if [a] and [b] are valuable or not in a given context).

To code teachers' roles (Research Question 1), we focused on interviewees' explicit and implicit references to tasks they performed whilst at work, such as language editor, translator, content teacher, and so on. To answer Research Questions 2 and 3, we isolated sections of talk that reflected positioning or investment (open codes) and further coded these sections as per the points on our Positioning Star of David model (axial codes; Figure 1). The procedure is exemplified in Tables 3 and 4:

Table 3

Coding of Positioning Triangle

Interview extract (open code = positioning)	Position	Axial code	
		Storyline	Speech / other act
I've never really thought about it. To me, it's a business choice. It's marketing. I don't take it very seriously academically	Acceptance (passive recipient)	Increasing presence of EMI programs	Doesn't think about it; doesn't take it seriously
Sawitri [program head] called to ask me if I would teach it [=EMI program] ... But I said I don't want to travel to the other Campus... so I asked Sawitri to contact David.	Resistance	Senior teacher with power to say "no"	I said I don't want to travel ... I asked Sawitri to contact David

Table 4

Coding of Investment Triangle

Interview extract (open code = investment)	Cultural Capital	Axial code	
		Means/code	Marketplace
I sympathize with Thai teachers whose ability in English, I mean, it's okay, but you know, we see the same sorts of fossilized errors appearing again and again ... they don't have the native speaker competence that you and I do to spot these things, or to self-correct.	L1 speaker	English proficiency	English reading and writing classes
The first move I made towards teaching was when I did my CELTA course.	Teaching certification	Skills to teach English	English language teaching

In addition to this process of open and axial coding, all identified codes and subsequent themes were compared within and across the transcripts. Disagreements were discussed, and only codes/themes in which all four researchers showed agreement were investigated further. To ensure the validity of our findings, we also used member checks. This involved inviting our participants to comment on our analysis of their individual transcripts and thus helped refine our final interpretations.

4. Findings

4.1. Individual Fluidity: Roles

In this section, we consider identity and role as a question of perspective: *Identity* looks inward and encompasses the internalised meanings and expectations connected with a role (the habitus in Bourdieu's terms); whilst *role* looks outward to the interactional arrangement expected in an organisational setting (see Barley, 1989; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

As teachers who are asked to teach EFL, CLIL, and EMI courses, it is somewhat unsurprising that all participants show fluidity in accepting/resisting roles. As Somchai, a

Thai teacher with 30 years' experience states, "most English teachers in Thailand, regardless of your expertise, have to do skill-based [English-language] classes". Somewhat surprisingly, though, Somchai is the only participant who assumes a preferred role that is tightly tied to a disciplinary identity: a literature¹ teacher (EMI). He affirms: "my focus is literature, and that's what I mainly do".

David and Claire also assume the role of EMI lecturers when required, yet their goals are quite different. For David, "the *raison d'être* of the course was that they understood something about Indian philosophy rather than learning English", whilst for Claire, her expectation for the students "is to at least raise the level of their English". These two quotes highlight one of the key issues surrounding EMI, something David mentions in Extract 1:

[1]

for an EMI course, this is where the lines between CLIL and EMI kind of blur into each other ... obviously, the goal is for them to learn content ... I don't spend any time on the English language ... but when I'm producing materials, I'm very conscious of simplifying the language. (David)

David's views stem from his current status as an MA student in the ELT field where he has read about the issues in detail. Hence, he recognises the need for flexibility in his role: "if somebody said you're going to teach a CLIL course with us, then you know its content and language integrated. So then your job as a teacher becomes something different" (David).

In terms of the more experienced teachers, their approach to EMI is similar in some respects, although they have varying views on its purposes and goals. Sumana, who is currently the Associate Dean, states, "I don't really care about EMI. I care about being a teacher". She goes on to say: "If the course is from the international program, I can refuse. I don't like to teach it because I feel I cannot apply anything according to my interests".

For Decha, however, EMI can be linked to his personal interests and does not need to be tied to disciplinary identities:

[2]

EMI is just using English as a medium of instruction. We do that all the time ... I have to teach seminar in business issue. But I could do that because of my personal interests; I study on my own. I like business, too ... I used to work at a bank, and I know about business. (Decha)

This conceptualisation of EMI as something to engage with on a personal level ties into Decha's preferred teaching role, where he is there to facilitate the students learning—"to help my students learn better, try to challenge them with problems, help each other to think to do problem solving". This facilitating role is somewhat echoed by Somchai: "I don't expect them to be an expert in literature ... All I want is to turn them into readers".

Mike also assumes a facilitative role but does so by linking his view on learning to his own sociocultural experiences:

¹ He used the word "literature" 48 times during his interview.

[3]

Various Buddhist teachers that I've had ... talk about the dharma, have opened up worlds for me, helped me, given me keys to help me open the world ... that to me is the pedagogical challenge ... not a finite amount of material. (Mike)

In terms of the roles our participants orient toward, none of them seem fixated on a “finite amount of material”, and thus none of them seem tied to teaching content or language. Instead, in their own unique ways, they navigate the fluidity of their designated identities (institutionally assigned roles of EFL, CLIL or EMI teacher) by drawing on personal constructs that affirm their actual identities (teachers as facilitators and caring individuals).

We return to Mike as an example of this in terms of emotion labour. Mike's goal for the students is a holistic one, “having those aha moments ... when complex ideas finally gel ... and suddenly there's a new gestalt way of seeing ... I mean that's the fun part ... igniting that spark of understanding”. Here, Mike is positioning his goals for learning as being somewhat intrinsically motivated, where he gains emotional pleasure from his relationships with students. This finding is increasingly common and can be related to teaching-as-caring (Miller & Gkonou, 2018). We see similar positive emotion labour from our other teachers. Sumana, for example, remarks, “What I care about the most is whatever makes them learn and stays with them happily...They must be happy”. Claire has similar sentiments: “when I encounter a weak student, I'm actually happy that they're in class ... I feel like they need to be in class”; and Decha, when he states: “we give them the opportunity to see things in different ways, especially in Seminar in Current Issues. I love that class”. Overall, our participants reflected a lack of strongly perceived tensions as to identity negotiations (as per Pappa et al., 2017a). This clearly relies on a certain level of agency, which we discuss in the next section.

4.2. Positioning Selves and Others: Practices

In this section, we draw on Harré and van Langenhove's (1999) Positioning Theory as a means by which to examine how these teachers position themselves and others in relation to emerging storylines.

In discursive interactions, positions are made sense of with respect to the storyline in which they take place and the acts that accompany them. For example, as the youngest teacher in our sample (mid-thirties; six years' experience at university level), David's identity epitomises one of “becoming” rather than “being”, as he positions himself in a storyline where he seeks to be an academic in the ELT field: “I want to be in a place where I can produce research and produce knowledge for the field”, and: “I think we have a lot of work to do as a field ... we, academia as an industry”.

David goes on to say how he appreciates the amount of freedom he gets when teaching but would “appreciate a little more, maybe, rigidity, and you know, some advice on what's come before”. The storyline here appears to be one of resistance to the level of pedagogical agency he is afforded and a desire for increased relational agency (collaboration among colleagues). This is somewhat echoed by Claire, a 40-year-old Filipino female, for whom this is her first university teaching job and has been working at the department for ten

years. In the following extract, she clearly welcomes the increase in relational agency in the form of additional support from her department:

[4]

Right now I'm teaching communications in business ... I get everything from the coordinator. So I got the book, the PowerPoint. I follow whatever it says. The program I'm teaching with is very organised. And I'm very happy about it. Because basically, I'm there to teach. (Claire)

Later on in the interview, David goes on to accept that a certain level of reduced relational agency is just the way it is and positions himself as belonging to a group of individuals: "In general, we tend to just mind our own business and do things our own way; we don't really question each other's techniques too much". We find it interesting here that in the face of increased pedagogical agency, relational agency seems to have decreased and has become the acceptable norm (cf. Pappa et al., 2017b). Sumana, for instance, states: "I will always be well-equipped by myself. I will not ask for any assistance from anyone", whilst Somchai remarks, "things that didn't work, I had to get rid of, and keep things that work better". Whereas in Extract 5, Decha, yet again, draws on his life experiences to scaffold himself into a new teaching situation, reflecting his capacity for what has come to be known as identity-agency—the use of experiences and participation to develop a professional identity (see Eteläpelto et al., 2013):

[5]

Formerly, my department never asked a Thai teacher to teach Public Speaking ... My expertise is in reading ... I think the reason they trusted me was because, at that time, I was the Dean, and I had a lot of experience in terms of public speaking and presenting at conferences. (Decha)

Here, Decha's identity-agency is reflective of his symbolic capital, which is an amalgamation of increased cultural and social capital (experience in public speaking and status as the Dean). This highlights the mutually constitutive nature of the positioning and investment triangles, which we discuss further in the next section.

A similar level of confidence is also evident in our experienced Thai teacher, Sumana: "I never follow the mainstream because I think the mainstream designs a curriculum for general people to learn ... a straightjacket ... We should individualise it". She goes on to say, "I position myself as a normal teacher who wants to make students grow and become good people in society using any methods". As per Decha above, we see how identity-agency helps Sumana negotiate who she is as she positions herself as a *facilitator* and *change agent* (see Lee, 2013), where her identity is not just one of doing but also feeling (teaching-as-caring)—"a normal teacher" as she states. Moreover, by drawing on a discourse of resistance—a critical attitude to mainstream teaching in Thailand—she also positions herself as a socio-political change agent, highlighting that a teacher's role often extends beyond the classroom (Ruohotie-Lyhty et al., 2021).

A similar facilitative position is evident in Claire, who comments, "I don't just feed

them or teach them what they need to know. I want to see their level first... it's important to see the starting point of the class". Here, she is positioning herself as facilitating and accommodating, yet, in the next sentence, she returns to the importance of structuring: "that's always the thing that can ruin your preparation: the gap of the class". Thus, whilst she is happy to accommodate the lower-level learners, she is also wary of how they may impact her control of the classroom sequence.

Somchai, who is approximately the same age as Sumana, positions himself as "at that point in my life where I get to teach what I like ... I guess I'm just looking forward to the day that I can retire". In this storyline of approaching retirement, he rejects courses that are not literature based—"sometimes I was offered or invited to do things like that [=teach other courses] ... In those instances, I typically say no" (Somchai). As per Sumana, Somchai seems to possess the valued cultural capital (seniority and age) that enables him to go against the grain, which is also something we see in Mike as he states: "I'm not presenting a finite, fixed body of material, but a lot of teachers approach it that way". In essence, he is resisting the designated notion of an EMI/content teacher, where knowledge is a commodity to be acquired, and his positioning further supports his role of adapting to the student in the moment, guiding them on their quest, "to help them learn to think" (Mike).

This theme of nurturing positive change regardless of the content seems prevalent amongst the more experienced teachers. As Sumana states, "I like using an inductive approach ... [it] makes them think first and leads them to the conclusion that we want them to learn". Mike, on the other hand, who self-identifies as a Buddhist, takes up a position as a nurturer of positive change. His role is one of taking students' positive responses and amplifying them, as he states, "I grade up when I see effort". This emphasis on the process of learning is exemplified in Extract 6.

[6]

If they're picking it up, I can go further with it. Yes, there are inhibitions and barriers. I try to deal with those barriers and explicate it for them to help them understand it. I guess I take learning as a lifetime activity, not as a product that you produce in a classroom. (Mike)

On a number of occasions, he mentions that learning is a lifelong process and that a teacher's role is to accompany the student on the beginning of this journey: "You can put out your hand and try to reach, but if no one reaches back, you can't reach further and grab their hand and say, okay come along with me. You can't do that". This view is clearly not one of regulating or controlling the students' behaviour, but one of guided discovery.

4.3. Adapting to a Fluid/Hybrid Marketplace: Investments

In this section, we examine the relationship between agency (a key aspect of the *how*) and identity (the *who*) from an ecological perspective, where agency is conceptualised as something that can be negotiated through investment and not just possessed by an individual (Tao & Gao, 2017). Specifically, we add another layer to our analysis in terms of Bourdieu's (1977) economic analogy (see above) so that we may explore affordances/constraints in terms

of (a) capital (speaker's status), (b) means/code (speaker's competence), and (c) marketplace (audience(s) who decide if [a] and [b] are valuable or not in a given context).

We begin by returning to David's imagined identity as a member of the research field. His future-self centres on his investment in education: "I did the masters, because I really felt there was a gap in my knowledge". This move to increase his cultural capital seems to have been initiated through what he perceives as three constraints that have removed his agency in terms of career advancement. First, he perceives a lack of agency in terms of his ability to publish on his own—i.e., he sees publication as a co-constructed investment between experienced and junior researchers (see Hökkä et al., 2012), as he states, "it would be nice to be surrounded by more productive colleagues". Second, David believes that there is a glass ceiling in terms of advancement for non-Thai lecturers, as evidenced in Extract 7.

[7]

When you look at the faculty pages from universities in Singapore and Hong Kong, there's a large number of foreigners, which suggests to me that that they're meritocratic in a way that our universities aren't. (David)

Here, David clearly positions advancement in terms of "merit" and believes that advancement in Thailand is based on something else.

Third, David believes "there's definitely a professional divide that nobody seems interested in bridging". However, despite his efforts to combat what he perceives as reduced agency in terms of advancement, he has yet to see the benefits of his investment: "I'm trying to better myself and there's been no hope whatsoever". Hence, in relation to our framework, David is attempting to accrue the capital and thus the means/code to advance his position, yet his marketplace (a Thai institution) is not yet receptive to his positioning. In other words, this example highlights how his investments are necessary but not sufficient for this marketplace.

Mike, however, seems able to span "this implicit separation—these invisible walls between Thais and non-Thais" (Mike) through investment in Buddhism and the Thai language, which has increased his relational agency: "I've made an effort to learn their language". This has given him the means/code to access the marketplace of translation work ("I do lots of editing of translations") and helped him acquire social capital in the form of friendships with Thai colleagues, as per Extract 8.

[8]

Now the translation teachers, they'll call me once a week, four or five calls ... We discuss possible translations from English to Thai or Thai to English ... they often complain about each other to me, gossip ... So there I am, in the middle. (Mike)

Here, Mike has effectively increased his relational agency, going against the departmental norm where most non-Thai teachers are isolated individuals. This is further highlighted in Extract 9, where Mike positions himself as a counsellor, helping a younger, non-Thai teacher with emotion labour.

[9]

I talk to Steve fairly frequently, about once a week, and he always has a rant about something. It's just venting and I understand that, so I let it go. He needs to try to let the air out, but he encounters a lot more problems with this way, and it bothers him. It doesn't bother me. (Mike)

Here, the storyline turns to the theme of letting go: “it bothers him; it doesn’t bother me”. This was a common thread in Mike’s interview and possibly emanates from his investment in Buddhism and mindfulness (cultural capital), which gives him the means/code (patience and calm) to deal with difficult situations. However, it is unclear if he is positioning himself as accepting/resisting constraints by changing himself. For instance, in one anecdote, he initially shows resistance by walking out on a disruptive class, yet he goes on to say:

[10]

Later they came and apologised. To me, the onus was with me to apologise ... but ... I realised that this doesn't work. So again, take a deep breath. Be mindful. I learned this from reading about U Thant ... I will take very deep breaths and be mindful and just go about my work ... Don't let my frustrations get in the way of my job. (Mike)

This extract gives a vivid description of how Mike moves between designated and actual identities through the metacognitive strategy of “being mindful”. This strategy is common in the literature on experienced teachers, as it helps them manage emotion labour and thus ethical self-formation—“an orientation to identity and agency which involves self-reflection and making choices how best to live and act in the world” (Miller & Gkonou, 2018, p. 51). Through calmly acknowledging and accepting his own feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, Mike highlights the importance that emotion labour and metacognition play in his teacher identity (see Yuan & Zhang, 2020). Moreover, by apologising, Mike’s students (his audience/marketplace) are further legitimising his position as a caring teacher, even though he says, “the onus was with me to apologise for losing it”. Overall, this extract highlights that such metacognitive strategies are not just born from experience, but are socioculturally constituted in line with discourses of good teaching that are agentively and dialogically constructed between teachers and students.

In another instance, Mike shows clear acceptance of a top-down constraint that reduces his pedagogical agency, where “because of the constraints on the answer keys, that [=teaching an EFL reading course] was a little frustrating” (Mike). The storyline here is the integration of a new curriculum, which has resulted in new discursive formations being established. This seems to be due to a changing environment where Thais and non-Thais both teach the same courses. Consequently, the use of textbooks and rigid answer keys seems to be a means by which Thai teachers can gain capital, but, in turn, this has diminished the value of Mike’s existing capital (L1 English proficiency). As he states: “I didn’t look at the answer key ... I know the language” but “they [=Thai teachers] don’t have the same native speaker [*sic*] competence that you and I do”.

This notion of “native speaker competence” resurfaces toward the end of Somchai’s interview, when we are discussing EMI programs. He remarks, “Some of them come to us with a sophisticated level of English. And if you stand in front of a classroom with very little knowledge of English, I mean you will lose all of your confidence, and you will not want to be there”. Again, this highlights the constitutive role of the marketplace (student audience) in legitimising (or not) a teacher’s perceived notion of their designated self.

Nonetheless, the idea of L2 teachers increasing (or balancing) their capital through alternative investments such as rigid structuring—using textbooks with answer keys, for instance—is an interesting one. Being “very organised”, for example, is a repeated motif in Claire’s teaching and her investment in structuring is most clearly seen in Extract 11.

[11]

I’m not a native speaker ... I changed my view of teaching ... it’s like a story in the classroom. I have to like, plan it ... And then after that, give them some activities. See if they can follow the activity; make sure the instructions are clear. And, then, later if I can do the next step, I go to the next step; if not, I have to go back to the first step ... So preparation, I think, is the best preparation. (Claire)

Structuring (or preparation) seems to provide Claire with the means/code (ability to control the narrative in the classroom) so that she can comfortably participate in this marketplace (in front of undergraduates). We would argue that whilst Claire superficially appears to have increased pedagogical agency to do what she wants, there is a clear contrast between her sense of agency and the realisation of it. In essence, her actions seemingly reflect agency “as co-constructed between an individual and the environment and as subjectively reflexive and experienced” (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2020, pp. 94–95). Specifically, we suggest that Claire is very aware of how her students (marketplace) will come to accept or reject her position in relation to her collective symbolic capital. Namely, although she is a qualified teacher, she is also younger than her colleagues are and is Filipino (an L2 English, non-Thai teacher); we believe that these are two key factors that contribute to (or negate) the legitimisation of any positions she takes up through her investments. For instance, we doubt she could take up the same positions as Mike or Sumana in the classroom because her students would not accept it.

5. Discussion

With respect to accepting or resisting roles (Research Question 1), our participants recognise that they are expected to switch between language and content teaching, yet they do not seem to ascribe to a notion of (re)forming multiple identities as they do so. This finding can be related to what Liu and Xu (2011) term *designated identity* and *actual identity*, which are similar to Ruohotie-Lyhty’s (2013) *ideal* and *forced* identities. Essentially, our teachers seem to reconcile the conflict between their designated identities (institutional constructs) and their actual identities (personal constructs) by assuming preferred roles that are primarily facilitative in nature. Consequently, when asked to undertake somewhat incongruous roles with little to no structure imposed upon them, it is not so much about the focus of the lessons

or orienting to the institution's goals (designated identities); it is, as Mike puts it, "one's attitude toward the field, toward your own confidence". Accordingly, these teachers consistently spoke of a holistic notion of learning as opposed to a narrow view of content and/or language aims.

With respect to the relationship between identity and agency (Research Question 2), our analysis showed how these teachers positioned themselves, their identities, and others in relation to their emerging storylines and the acts within them. Our findings showed how the teachers had varying levels of agency that somewhat shaped their approach to teaching and their identity agency. Specifically, the most senior Thai teachers either did things their way or refused to teach certain classes. Other teachers, in contrast, were not able to say no, yet they were still afforded a high level of pedagogical agency that allowed them to position themselves in unique ways—although, for some, this level of agency sometimes made them uncomfortable. The two less experienced teachers (David and Claire), for instance, both spoke of wanting more guidance yet were also able to go their unique ways. Decha also positioned himself as an individual, drawing on his experiences as a banker and as the Dean of the faculty to scaffold himself into new situations. Mike, meanwhile, followed a philosophy of "letting go" that drew heavily on his Buddhist lessons and life experiences.

Yet despite these idiosyncrasies, all teachers positioned themselves in relation to teaching-as-caring and oriented toward ethical self-formulations. As Tao and Gao (2017) argue, mobilising personal and social resources in light of agentic affordances can help professional teacher development in shifting educational contexts, which we believe is the case with our participants. Furthermore, our participants' positionings show how teaching is very much human-centred and emotional, where "much of the competence and expertise possessed comprises characteristics associated with the workers' conceptions and manifestations of themselves, including also their values and ethical commitments" (Eteläpelto, 2013, p. 62).

In our context, we believe that our participants' emotion labour is reflective of a complex interplay of pedagogical agency and relational agency. Specifically, because of a lack of top-down constraints, our teachers are afforded an increased level of pedagogical agency (cf. Kayi-Aydar, 2015), which in turn, allows them to position themselves as unique individuals that either do not see the need for relational agency and/or do not require it (see Pappa et al., 2017b). Hence, our findings highlight how and why "it is important for language teachers to reflect critically on how their emotions "inform" them of how they orient to feeling rules ... and how they incite emotion labour, as well as to consider how they might exercise agency in choosing to "think and act differently"' (Miller & Gkonou, 2018, p. 57).

With respect to the types of investment the teachers valued (Research Question 3), by incorporating Bartlett's (2008, 2014) extension of Positioning Theory, our analysis showed how the positions our participants took up were legitimised or not (in the case of David) by their status (capital) and competence (means/code) in relation to their audience (marketplace). In our context, we see the marketplace as composed of various audiences (students, other teachers, institutional gaze, and even the self), and it is to these audiences that our

participants continually position themselves in an effort to legitimise their practices and identity agency. Drawing on a metaphor of a cylinder and its component parts within a door lock, we see this as very much a case of “wheels within wheels” (see Bartlett, 2008, p. 169), as multiple triangles of various constitutions align and realign to the affordances and constraints of the environment. To take up a legitimised position is to align one’s “key” (one’s own array of capitals and competencies) with those of an available range of pins within a cylinder (valued array of capitals and competencies in a particular context). Opening the lock, and thus the door, is akin to legitimising one’s position and stepping through to assume a particular position and identity.

Our findings also underlined the uniqueness of our context as, with the exception of David, none of our participants invested in capitals that are frequently cited in the literature. Instead, our most senior Thai teacher (Somchai) refused to take up positions where he had no interest. Conversely, our second most senior Thai teacher (Sumana) also disliked teaching basic skills and EMI courses, but she proactively used her increased capital to argue for more challenging curriculums; as she states, “when I became one of the committee members revising the curriculum, I was happy that I could get rid of some courses”. Our other three participants drew on alternative capitals: for Claire, this was increased structure in her lesson plans; for Decha, it was linking his teaching to personal interests and past experiences; and for Mike, it was a combination of relinquishing control of his situation and liberating the minds of his students. Hence, this aspect of our study revealed how simultaneous yet non-mutually exclusive strategies, which can be internally or externally driven, can collectively help language teachers legitimise their preferred positions through investments that are reflective of their level of agency and are conducive with how their audience/marketplace sees them.

Such findings also illustrate how an agency-oriented approach to teaching can be used to navigate unequal power relations in intercultural workplaces (see Lai et al., 2016), as well as highlight how agency can “be seen as a key mediating category through which the inter-connections between cultural and economic forces, identity formations, and social structures can be examined” (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p. 53). This was particularly evident in the case of David, who is trying to increase his level of agency in terms of career advancement through “becoming” an academic by investing in further education. Yet, his positioning highlights how some investments (capitals) do not cross over cultural divides (marketplaces) and become valuable (providing means/code) unless they are accompanied by the already established forms of valued capitals in that locale (in this instance, seniority, age, and/or being Thai).

6. Conclusion

With a small sample size from just one location, we acknowledge that generalisations cannot be drawn from our study. Nonetheless, we have made a number of contributions to the field of teacher development and practices in terms of exploring relationships between

identity, agency, and environment, as well as to expanding the theoretical and analytical ways with which this can be done.

First, we have shown that in moving between EFL, CLIL and EMI roles, teachers do not necessarily need to assume different identities, and that emotion labour can serve a key purpose in identity development/maintenance. This has important implications for practice in teacher education. Specifically, by highlighting findings such as ours, educators preparing teachers to work in fluid contexts, or language teaching in general, can focus on the detriments of ethnocentric pedagogies—particularly those where teachers are assumed to have the same goals (see Ruohotie-Lyhty et al., 2021)—and emphasise the benefits of drawing on personal constructs and emotion labour. We feel that this is particularly important, as it can be a powerful means to combat teacher burnout (Loh & Liew, 2016; Zhang & Zhu, 2008) whilst also helping to scaffold entry-level teachers. Both these issues are important in international English language teaching as many teachers cross cultural divides and enter the field with minimal training and experience (Rose & Galloway, 2019).

Second, by combining Positioning Theory and Bourdieu's economic analogy of capitals/means/marketplace, we have shown another way identity research can draw on theoretical constructs. Moreover, we have done so in light of an ecological perspective on identity agency. Specifically, we have shown how identity can be positioned in narratives (through acts and storylines), whilst also considering the role of the audience (marketplace) in legitimising the performance of that identity (the position taken up) in terms of affordances/constraints (means/codes gained through investment in capitals). Accordingly, we have also answered Tao and Gao's (2017) call for research "to accord primacy to teachers as agentic professionals who develop professionally towards self-realisation while coping with external demands" (p. 346), and also contributed to Song's (2016) "call for greater attention to context-culture-specific emotional discourses in language teacher education" (p. 632).

Third, we have shown clear links between "valued" investments and agency. For instance, those with valued cultural capital in this context (seniority, age, and "valued" nationality) are afforded agency to just say no (Sumana and Somchai), and thus simply avoid crossing over into marketplaces where they may not have the means/code to participate. Those who cannot say no, draw upon alternative forms of capital that align with the identity agency they are afforded in this marketplace, such as structures (Claire), personal experience and status (Decha), or philosophical doctrines (Mike). This has important implications for teacher education programs and teachers' professional development, as it highlights the idiosyncratic nature of experienced, in-service teachers, where identity (*who*) and agency (a key aspect of the *how*) are mediated by past and present competencies (means/codes), statuses (capitals), and surrounding environments (particularly marketplaces/audiences).

In terms of limitations, we recognise our university is quite progressive and that other universities may have more structural constraints. Moreover, in Thailand, teachers and the elderly are highly respected. When coupled with a lack of top-down constraints, this could lead to the lack of "struggle" in identity formation amongst senior Thai teachers. However,

we feel that this is also a strength of our study as it approaches issues from the viewpoint of locally sourced, career teachers. Second, although our participants were quite candid, we recognise that even with the promise of anonymity, they may have been wary of being recognised and thus may not have given socially undesirable answers. Third, whilst interviews were deemed the best way to gain insights into professional identities, future research could include observations to see how positions are enacted in the workplace. Future studies would also benefit from the inclusion of participants who left teaching to pursue other careers. This could give insights into why teacher turnover is so high in contexts like ours (Johns, 2018).

Overall, we hope to have shown that the relationship between teacher identity and agency should continue to receive increased attention from an ecological perspective. One way that this can be achieved is through the lens of legitimisation (capitals–means/codes–marketplace) and Positioning Theory, where researchers and educators can explore not just sites of identity struggle, but also sites of congruence. In this way, we may be better able to tackle the high rate of turnover and burnout in the international language teaching landscape.

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