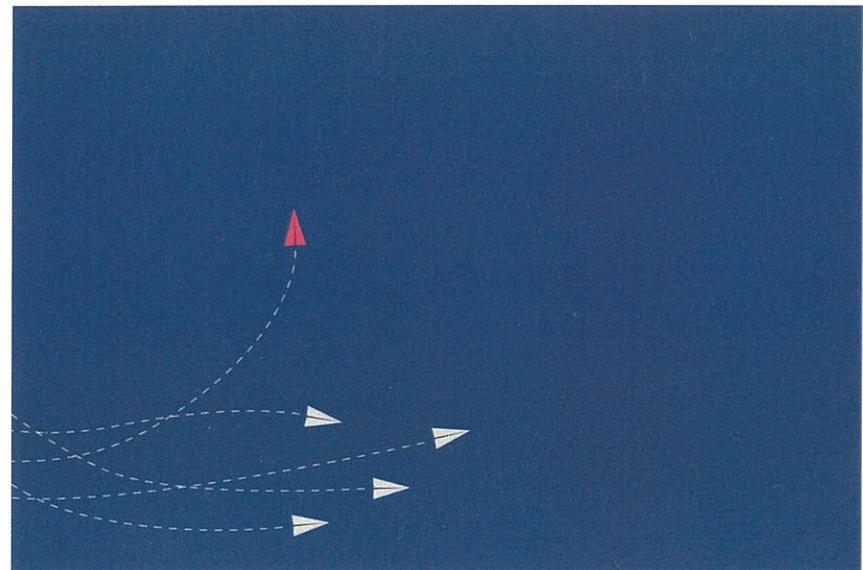


Theorizing and Analyzing Language Teacher Agency

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**new
perspectives
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7 World Language Teachers Performing and Positioning Agency in Classroom Target Language Use

Michele Back

Though second language acquisition theories encourage teachers to use the target language (TL) as much as possible in the world language (WL) classroom, many WL teachers have difficulty enacting this recommendation. While several studies have offered suggestions for maximizing TL use, here I examine the role of WL teacher agency. Using a comparative case study approach, I analyze discourse gathered from interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall sessions with three high school Spanish teachers. Findings highlight the context-sensitive, performative nature of agency with respect to teacher TL use, as well as the potential role of participant-researcher interactions in this performance. I discuss implications for WL teacher education and professional development.

Introduction

Standards and policies surrounding world languages (WL) education often include a statement on the importance of target language (TL) use. For example, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2010) recommended that ‘language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time’. Reasons given for this percentage include limited student exposure to the TL outside the classroom (Kang, 2008) and approaches to second language acquisition emphasizing the importance of input (Ellis & Wulf, 2015). Yet, because the TL is ‘both the *object* and *medium* of instruction’ (Bale, 2016: 393, his emphasis), many WL teachers find it difficult to teach *about* the language while speaking the language almost exclusively.

Given this disconnect between policy and practice, it is important to explore WL teachers' agency regarding their own TL use. In this chapter, I draw from Ahearn's (2001: 112) definition of agency as the 'socioculturally mediated capacity to act', as well as from positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) and Bauman's (1987) characterization of performance in order to highlight the context-sensitive nature of agency. I focus on three Spanish teachers working in distinct Connecticut high schools – rural English monolingual, urban Hispanic serving and suburban English monolingual – and discuss how these teachers both *performed* their beliefs about TL use during the interviews and *positioned* their and their students' agencies as Spanish teachers and learners. These findings highlight how agency is produced in interaction, as well as the role of teacher attitudes in shaping these performances and the often-overlooked role of the researcher in performances of agency.

Theoretical Framework

Ahearn's (2001) definition from the previous section illuminates how the capacity to act can be both shaped and constrained by interaction and context. The role of these constraints, as well as individuals' abilities to inhabit and reframe them, suggests the importance of examining discourse to determine agency. My theoretical framework therefore draws from notions of agency, performance (Bauman, 1987) and positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; see Figure 7.1). Similar to Ahearn, I view agency as context sensitive and emergent, yet still shaped by previous experiences. Thus, WL teacher *experiences* of engaging with the TL shape their interactions and their capacities to act, while their *beliefs* regarding TL use are also both context sensitive and rooted in these prior experiences.

In this chapter, I examine teacher beliefs and experiences as they emerge in interviews, observations and stimulated recall sessions. Researchers now view these interactions as situated social practices, rather than contexts wherein 'objective' data can be gathered (e.g. Talmy, 2011). Therefore, I view teacher expressions of agency as *performances* within these contexts. Following Bauman's (1987: 8) definition of performance as a 'specially marked way of speaking' that opens itself up for audience scrutiny, I reflect on how my role as researcher and my history with each participant may have impacted their performances of agency.

I analyze these performances through participants' use of discursive features such as agentive language (e.g. 'I do not use the 'TL' versus the more passive 'I was never told to use the TL'). I also highlight how participants position each other (interactive), themselves (reflexive) or absent others (reactive; Back, 2015) in interaction. Kayi-Aydar (2015: 96) described the role of positioning on agency thusly: 'while certain

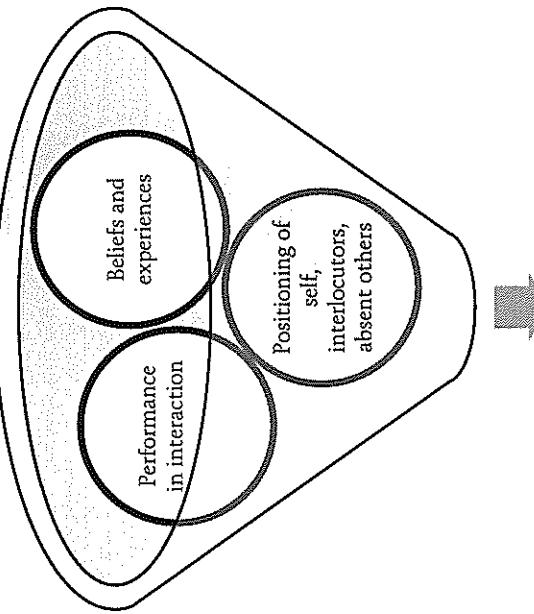


Figure 7.1 Theoretical framework

positions may enable one to become agentic, agents can also actively resist certain positionings. Agency and positioning are therefore closely linked, one influencing the other'. Thus, positioning agency often results in conflicting performances, as interlocutors reflect on their own capacities and question how others have positioned them. Both positioning-for-acting and resistance to positioning were key components of my data, as participants asserted their capacity to act and resisted both my and student positionings regarding this capacity.

Figure 7.1 illustrates my theoretical framework: as a mix of teacher beliefs and experiences; their positioning of self, interlocutors and absent others; and the performances of these beliefs, experiences and positioning; all of which, when funneled together, shed light on how agency is expressed in discourse.

Participants and methods

The three participants (Adelaide, Jenny and Paul) are high school teachers who have worked at their respective schools for their entire careers. All identified as non-native speakers of Spanish, with no home exposure to the language. Their experience in Spanish-speaking countries varied from several months studying abroad in Spanish-speaking countries (Adelaide and Jenny) to several week-long trips in these areas (Paul; see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	High school demographics	Years teaching Spanish
Adelaide	Female	White	Rural, English monolingual	21
Paul	Male	White	Suburban, English monolingual	11
Jenny	Female	White	Urban, Hispanic serving	5

I conducted two two-hour interviews with each participant: one before and one after classroom observations. I observed each participant's Spanish 3 classes three times, totaling six observations (6–9 hours) per participant. I video recorded classes during the third observation, and the second interview with teachers included a stimulated recall session (Gass & Mackey, 2000) using these recordings. I observed Spanish 3 courses for two reasons; first, every participant taught the course, making it a logical point of comparison. Second, Spanish 3 at the high school level offers a challenging curriculum, including content such as aspect and subjunctive mood. Because of this, it is also a course that frequently frustrates students, and one in which TL use can break down.

For data analysis, I combined quantitative counts of teacher language use with a qualitative content analysis from interviews, observations and stimulated recall sessions. I measured Spanish and English use in utterances, defined as speech occurring under one intonation contour, delimited by a pause and comprising a single semantic unit (Mackey *et al.*, 2003). Utterances that occurred in both languages counted as one utterance in each language; however, utterances that contained words in another language used as either examples or fillers were counted only as utterances in one language. Sample utterances for each classification are shown in Table 7.2.

I analyzed discourse from interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall using thematic coding (Gibbs, 2007). After recording and transcribing data, I used open coding, followed by select coding and

analytic memo writing. Through this coding, I identified the discursive activity; then, I outlined the characteristics that defined it as both positioning and performance of agency. My objective for incorporating data from classroom observations was to triangulate my inferences of the interview and stimulated recall data and situate the interview data within my participants' overall interactional histories.

I chose a comparative case study approach to explore the similarities and differences of these interactions (Yin, 1994). While a comparative case study highlights common themes among cases, I first present these data in narrative form profiling each teacher to best highlight their performances of agency and positionings, after a brief section that presents the quantitative findings on TL use. I follow these sections with a discussion of common and divergent themes. Before this, I discuss overall findings for teacher TL use.

Findings

Overall teacher TL use

Teacher TL use varied for two participants and was consistent for one participant. As seen in Figure 7.2, the percentage of Adelaide and Jenny's use of Spanish varied from 53% to 84% of classroom discourse, while Paul's use was consistently 100%. This corresponded with participants' estimates of TL use in the first interview; while Paul was sure he used 100% TL consistently, Adelaide and Jenny acknowledged that their TL use was far from optimal.

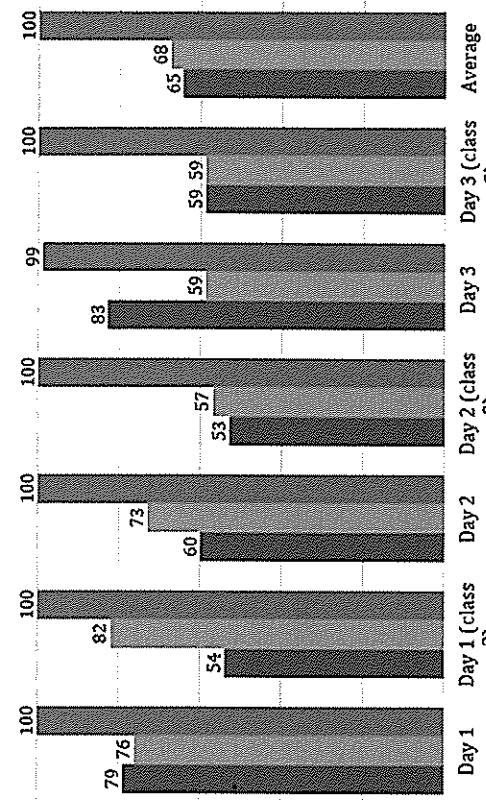


Figure 7.2 Participant TL use by percentage of utterances in Spanish

Language	Example	Counted as
Spanish	'Hoy tenemos otra vez la clase para trabajar'	One utterance in Spanish
English	'Before we go over it everyone has to have a different paper'	One utterance in English
Both languages	'El otro lado es la tarea, not this question, this question'	One utterance in Spanish and one utterance in English
Both languages	'Here you use tener'	One utterance in English ('tener' as example word)
Both languages	'Alright, vamos a empezar'	One utterance in Spanish ('alright' as filler)

The functions of each language were similar for Adelaide and Jenny, who used Spanish and English for the following tasks: procedural talk, introducing content, classroom management and building rapport. Adelaide used more English for classroom management, while Jenny used more Spanish for rapport. Both teachers used more Spanish to introduce content and more English for explicit grammar instructions, but overall both languages were used to complete similar functions. Of the two teachers who used English, Jenny had a stronger tendency to use both languages in the same utterance, while Adelaide's utterances were normally either in English or Spanish. This may be because Jenny had native and heritage speakers in her class who used both languages in their utterances, as I discuss further on.

While the teachers were aware of their level of TL use in the classroom, they framed their language use in different ways. In the following three sections, I discuss how these teachers positioned their agency with respect to TL use.

Adelaide: 'In a perfect world [...] we would be doing everything in Spanish'

Adelaide was the most veteran Spanish teacher of the participants, having taught for 21 years. She received her teaching certification through the state's alternative program for post-collegiate graduates. An avid traveler and language learner, Adelaide lived and worked in Spain, Ecuador and Brazil, learning Portuguese and French in addition to Spanish. She described her language learning experiences as positive and remembered her own Spanish teachers as 'energetic and enthusiastic' (Interview 1, 12/12/16).

Adelaide's high school is in a rural area next to the state's flagship university, drawing students from four neighboring towns. The school offers several advanced placement courses, as well as courses that can be taken for college credit. Adelaide is frequently called upon to serve as a cooperating teacher for the university's student teachers, and I first met her in this capacity. Our relationship was cordial, and our interactions were generally on an equal footing as two 'experts' with both theoretical and practical experience in WL teaching.

Within Adelaide's high school, students are placed into one of two tracks (A or B) for all academic subjects, including WLs. These tracks are structured as more (A) or less (B) academically rigorous; students are placed into A or B tracks based on recommendations from the middle school. Students in B track courses frequently have documented learning disabilities or mental health issues, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or anxiety. During the semester that I worked with Adelaide, I observed two of her Spanish 3B track classes. In her interviews, Adelaide frequently

positioned her students as reluctant or anxious language learners. She sometimes linked this reluctance to anxiety or learning disabilities, while other times she related it to students' negative experiences with Spanish in middle school. Within either context, Adelaide emphasized her perceived need to handle her students' language learning 'with kid gloves, because you want them to stay and have a good experience' (Interview 1, 12/12/16). These factors also led to some student resistance regarding Adelaide's own TL use, as she described:

They think they're not good at Spanish [...] their anxiety goes way up when I speak in Spanish [...] often I hear them comment 'English please' or 'I have no idea what you're saying' or 'I don't speak Spanish' (Interview 2, 3/28/17)

Adelaide saw her role as finding a comfortable balance for her students, which meant that she used less of the TL than she would have liked: 'Optimally I would love to speak 90 percent Spanish in the classroom—and I don't' (Interview 1, 12/12/16). During our conversations, Adelaide frequently used words like 'optimal' or 'ideal' with respect to maximum TL use, contrasting this with the reality of her classroom and students. Moreover, her use of the active voice ('I don't [speak Spanish!'] indicated an acknowledgement of agency regarding her TL use.

Her directness on this issue also positioned me as a co-expert who could understand 'ideal' TL use versus the realities of the classroom.

These realities included constraints on time and curriculum, which Adelaide referenced in both interviews. She stated that she had limited time to teach the full curriculum, especially if she was to fulfill the department's goal of alignment with Spanish 3B courses taught by other teachers: 'It's the balance of "Okay, I have 58 minutes. There are certain things I want to accomplish". You know, where do you give and take?' (Interview 1, 12/12/16). Moreover, unscheduled visits from the administration, in which students were asked about the day's learning objectives, sometimes resulted in more English usage. Adelaide explained:

The learning target has to be very clear, because when we [the teachers] get observed literally they [the administrators] come in and they put their face in the kid's face and say, 'What are you doing?' I watch my kids sort of freak, but I don't want them to freak. I want them to be confident and be able to articulate what they're doing. I could say it [the learning target] in Spanish. I mean I used to last year, I always did it in Spanish, well, then I stopped because then you know some kids [...] might have an idea but not be able to articulate it or they get scared and they say I don't know. I therefore have failed because they don't know what the learning target is, so I feel that pressure a lot. (Interview 1, 12/12/16)

While Adelaide again used agentive language to illustrate this situation ('I stopped; 'I therefore have failed'), I chose this quote to illustrate Adelaide's perception of conflicting goals of maximum TL use, student articulation of learning objectives and alignment with other courses. Her use of aggressive, fearful vocabulary ('put their face in the kids' face,' 'freak out,' 'they get scared') are performances (Bauman, 1987) that both diminish her agency and index the power of administrative demands, which frequently take precedence over her teaching goals.

Adelaide's Spanish 3B classes occurred early Friday mornings (the day I observed), and I frequently noticed her struggle to encourage student interaction in Spanish. She used many strategies to make her TL input comprehensible, including gestures, repetition and drawing on the board. She also used English for vocabulary translation, complex grammar explanations and procedural talk. Adelaide described her use of English for procedural talk as a method of calling her students' attention back to the task at hand. Her recall of a recorded classroom activity, in which some students were not staying on task, illustrates this strategy and her agency in deliberately using English for this purpose:

I can see it [in] her face. She's tuned out, she's like, 'Oh my God, she's speaking in Spanish' [...] and all of a sudden I say, 'be prepared' [in English] [...] They hear me change and go, 'be prepared', they're like, 'Oh!' (Interview 2, 3/28/17)

As seen in the quote, Adelaide's discussion of her language choice portrayed her English usage as a performance that referenced her reactive positioning of the students as less responsive to Spanish and indexed their collective histories as a classroom, in which a switch to English merited additional attention. In this and other stimulated recall examples, Adelaide was nearly always able to clearly articulate her reasons for using Spanish or English. When she could not think of a reason (usually for using English), she would reflect on whether she could have performed the same task in Spanish.

For example, during a recall of one task, I noted that Adelaide used English to discuss how the wording of certain questions might lead students to the wrong answer. She referenced an administrative goal of having students reflect on answers and feel confident to both give a response and not be devastated if that response was incorrect. Although at first Adelaide felt that encouragement and reflection were more effectively done in English, as she watched the recording she began to discuss how she might do this in Spanish:

If they knew that vocabulary [...] we could make it funny, like everybody [says] *'engañó'* [trick] [...] or '*una trampa*' [a trap] [...] that would

actually be a really fun way to infuse little snippets of language. (Interview 2, 3/28/17)

My observations of Adelaide's teaching practices highlighted that, although Adelaide positioned herself as an experienced teacher and user of Spanish, the contextual factors within which she taught constrained her capacity to act upon 'ideal' 90% TL use. Her reflective positioning as a teacher who provided a safe, comfortable learning environment for her students, many of whom had anxieties around school and language learning, often resulted in an easing off of TL input. Meanwhile, the challenging and sometimes conflicting demands of the administration compelled her to opt for expediency in English over input in Spanish. However, when Adelaide was given an opportunity to view her teaching and reflect upon her language use, she quickly came up with alternative strategies to expand her TL use, such as providing problem-solving language in Spanish. In Adelaide's words, '[The video] is really good to watch. People should all have to do this. Because [...] when you're in the moment it's not necessarily obvious' (Interview 2, 3/28/17).

Jenny: **No one was holding me accountable'**

Jenny was the novice teacher of the three participants, having five years of experience at an urban high school linked to a local community college. Jenny had taken master's-level courses at the flagship university, where I first came in contact with her as her professor. Like Adelaide, Jenny had Spanish teachers that she characterized as enthusiastic and energetic. After working with Teach for America, Jenny received her certification through the state's alternative route and began teaching at her current school.

Jenny's high school is characterized by a large percentage of Spanish native and heritage speakers from Puerto Rico, Peru, Guatemala and other regions of Latin America. Nevertheless, Jenny positioned Spanish in her school as a 'polarizing subject—I find students either love it or hate it' during our first interview. When I asked her to elaborate, she stated:

Many of [my students] are native speakers and this is the only language we offer at my school. So they feel pigeonholed and forced to take something that [...] in their mind that they already know [...] I feel that that alienates some students. (Interview 2, 5/19/17)

Jenny's reactive positioning of her students as feeling 'pigeonholed', 'forced' and 'alienated' from Spanish courses in school correlated with what she viewed as their reluctance to speak Spanish in class. Although, like Adelaide, Jenny mentioned anxiety as a factor, especially for her non-native students, for her native speaker students the reluctance

stemmed from an inability to see Spanish as a useful course. Social and familial pressures also may have played a part, as Jenny discussed:

I think maybe certain parents might have said to their kids like that they don't want them speaking Spanish outside the home [...] I don't have proof of this but I've gotten that feeling before because you know some parents who immigrate here [...] their main goal for themselves is to learn English, and they want their children to be able to learn English [...] So I'm wondering if that influence comes across in the Spanish classroom like they don't want to be seen as the fluent kid who can speak it really well. (Interview 1, 12/15/16)

Although Jenny was careful to state that she had ‘no proof of her analysis’, indexing her hesitation through several hedges (‘maybe’, ‘I think’, ‘I’m wondering’), she offered a detailed hypothesis of how an ‘English-only’ policy in school – even in the case of Spanish language classes – might be reinforced at home by Spanish-speaking parents. Another potential obstacle for student TL use was the bilingual nature of her students’ everyday interactions; for example, Jenny discussed how her Puerto Rican students are accustomed to using both English and Spanish in the same utterance; therefore, [saying], “You have to be in this one language” is kind of a foreign concept to them’ (Interview 1, 12/15/16).

When discussing her own TL use, Jenny used some agentive discourse to state that she did not use as much Spanish as she would like (e.g. ‘I don’t [use 90% TL] [...] this is an area that I do want to work on’, Interview 1, 12/15/16). However, Jenny also positioned herself as both an inexperienced teacher and a non-native speaker unable to access certain TL words or phrases. Her teaching inexperience was framed in the context of her histories with Teach for America and alternative certification, as well as a lack of administrative supervision of her Spanish courses. She drew upon her identity as a non-native speaker to explain why she was unable to say certain things in Spanish; moreover, she felt that her students positioned her as a non-native speaker and therefore would not speak Spanish to her: ‘They see the blonde hair. They just want to speak English to me’ (Interview 2, 5/19/17). Throughout our two interviews, Jenny performed these positionings to explain why she did not use the TL as frequently as she would like. The following quote illustrates her perceived lack of experience as a teacher:

Going back to the question about my preparation as a teacher, I was never told this upfront, like what has to be in Spanish and what has to be in English, and no one was holding me accountable in my early years [...] Maybe I’ve fallen into like a bad habit now. If I had gone through like a traditional route [of certification] it might have forced me to increase my amount of time that I use Spanish. (Interview 1, 12/15/16)

As seen above, Jenny attributed her lower TL use with the passive construction ‘I was never told’ to use the TL. Her discourse on this topic reinforced this passivity; she had ‘fallen into a bad habit’, and a more traditional route of certification might have ‘forced’ her to use the TL. With these constructions, Jenny shifted her capacity to act onto unknown agents from her alternative certification program and an unrealized, more traditional certification program. Perhaps her relative novice status as a teacher played a role in this shift in agency; in other words, Jenny was much closer, chronologically speaking, to her teacher training than the other participants.

Yet, Jenny’s difficulties in performing agency came through in other topics during our discussions. She performed her perceived lack of experience on various topics through numerous hedges, such as ‘I think’ and ‘maybe’, and even showed slight discomfort or resistance to my questions (e.g. ‘this feels like a test’) or a desire to answer ‘correctly’ (e.g. ‘give me a hint’). This surprised me, as Jenny’s responses were as good as, if not better than, the more experienced participants. Moreover, due to Jenny’s experience with native Spanish speakers, she was keenly aware of the sociolinguistic factors surrounding the acquisition of Spanish and perceptions of the Spanish language, an issue that did not surface in my interviews with the other teachers. It is possible that my previous role as her professor led her to position me less as a co-expert and more as an interlocutor with superior knowledge and experience. This positioning would explain in part her hesitant performances of expertise regarding both teaching and the TL.

Given Jenny’s responses regarding the position of Spanish among her students and the school community, I was also surprised by some of her teaching practices. I observed two of Jenny’s Spanish 3 classes – one that had a high percentage of Spanish native speakers, and one that had a lower, but still present, number of these students. Both classes took place three times a week for an hour and a half. The classroom itself was a language lab with computers at each desk, thereby prohibiting a great deal of movement or interaction among the students. However, Jenny made several efforts to get students up and moving through activities that included circulating around the class or using whiteboards to write a response.

Despite these activities, I observed that most of the class time was dedicated to explicit grammar explanations in Spanish and English. While Jenny did use authentic materials to illustrate these grammatical concepts, there was very little focus on meaning-making, conversation or a deeper exploration of authentic materials for culture and comprehension. Jenny did acknowledge her reliance on these types of lessons in our first interview, stating, ‘I was taught in a very old school, traditional, grammar-based fashion, so I think I revert to that a lot when I’m not sure how to go about teaching a concept’ (Interview 1, 12/15/16). Yet, these

practices seemed to contradict her observations in our interviews that her native speaker students tended to ‘tune out’ during explicit grammar lessons.

Like Adelaide, Jenny appreciated the ability to observe her practice through the stimulated recall and noticed several instances where she could have used the TL instead of English. Jenny also stated that during the study she had incorporated more authentic resources, such as YouTube videos, ‘so that my voice is not the only accent that they’re hearing and the only source of comprehensible input’ (Interview 2, 5/19/17). However, Jenny did not reflect upon any specific ways that she could incorporate more TL into her own speech. Rather, she reactively positioned her non-native students as ‘needing’ input in English for explicit grammatical explanations (‘explaining it to him over and over in Spanish might not have been as effective as just giving him [the explanation in English]’, Interview 2, 5/19/17). During both interviews, Jenny also lamented her native speakers’ reluctance to use Spanish in the classroom. Perhaps due to this perceived reluctance and necessity, Jenny frequently positioned the entire class as being unfamiliar with certain concepts, such as vocabulary words. Given the demographics of the class, I found it interesting that Jenny assumed unfamiliarity with vocabulary and used English to provide translations, rather than using authentic resources as opportunities to probe student knowledge. Lastly, during the stimulated recall, Jenny again positioned herself as an inexperienced Spanish speaker, emphasizing the difficulty of explaining Spanish words such as ‘*ojalá*’ [I hope] and ‘*tengo ganas de*’ [I feel like] in a comprehensible manner using the TL (‘You can’t really act that one out [...] besides just telling them what it means in English’, Interview 2, 5/19/17).

In sum, Jenny exhibited performances that indexed her reflexive positioning as an inexperienced Spanish teacher and speaker, which may have been due to our previous relationship of student and professor, as well as her novice status. By positioning herself as inexperienced, while reactively positioning the administration and her histories with teacher education as absent or ineffective, Jenny’s performance of her teaching beliefs and practices shifted TL use agency to other players, which surfaced in some of her teaching practices. While Adelaide referenced her administration’s overbearing presence as having a negative effect on her TL use, Jenny instead saw a correlation between a lack of administrative accountability and low TL use. Although Jenny could see an overall benefit to reflecting upon her TL use, she was unable to come up with specific strategies that would help her use more TL in her classes.

Paul ‘We have a huge advantage here’

Paul had 11 years of teaching experience in a suburban school district. After considering the possibility of being an elementary school teacher,

as it would give him the opportunity to be involved with ‘a little bit of everything’, Paul realized that teaching Spanish would also allow him the opportunity to engage with multiple subject areas. He therefore enrolled in the traditional certification program at the state’s flagship university. As the head of his department and an active member of several of the state’s WL teaching organizations, he was also frequently called upon to act as a cooperating teacher. Similar to Adelaide, this was the capacity in which we met, and we again related to each other as co-experts.

Unlike Adelaide and Jenny, Paul never had a long-term study abroad experience. However, rather than viewing this lack of experience as a detriment, Paul positioned this as an advantage for communicating with his students: ‘My kids all look at me and they go, “But you’re a Spanish teacher”, and I go, “And I learned [Spanish] the same way that you guys are learning”’ (Interview 1, 12/12/16). Paul attends short-term study abroad programs frequently with his students and takes trips on his own to Spanish-speaking countries. Similarly, although Paul stated that he was not ‘an expert in any way, shape, or form’ in the heavy cultural content that he teaches, he positioned his experiences as a teacher as having filled in many of the knowledge gaps in both TL use and cultural content that remained after his certification program (Interview 1, 12/12/16).

Paul teaches in a relatively wealthy suburb; the district is known for its rigorous academic content and prestigious WL program. Like Adelaide’s school, Paul’s high school places students into two academic tracks, which are distinguished by Roman and Arabic numerals (e.g., Spanish 3 and Spanish III). The Arabic numeral-designated courses are considered more academically rigorous, while the Roman numeral-designated courses, like the B track at Adelaide’s school, typically contain a larger number of students with learning disabilities and mental health or behavioral issues. During the semester of the study, Paul taught two sections of Spanish II.

Paul positioned himself as a firm believer in maximum TL use, recalling that he was exposed to a maximum amount of Spanish in his own language classes. Moreover, he stated that during his certification program it had been ‘drilled into [his] head’ that students need to hear the TL as much as possible in class: ‘You have to give kids input, input, input to expect to be able to get anything back from them’ (Interview 1, 12/12/16). Paul positioned himself as a strong and capable TL user, contrasting this with the abilities of many of his students: ‘My ability to use the target language in class isn’t the issue. It’s their ability to produce for me’ (Interview 2, 5/15/17). This contrasted sharply with Adelaide and Jenny’s approaches to TL use. During my observations of Paul’s class, I frequently witnessed conversations in which Paul would speak in Spanish while his students would respond in English. Students were not penalized for speaking in English, but were encouraged to complete their thoughts, while Paul offered feedback in Spanish. During our second interview,

Paul emphasized that his goal for his students was their understanding, rather than TL production.

The kids understand me. Whether or not they can produce, they understand me. [...] I go, ‘Okay, you know what, if you need to go out into the world and have an interaction with someone [...] the fact that you can understand is probably a good thing because at the end of the day you can probably gesture and put enough cognates together that you might be able to get something across to them’. (Interview 2, S/15/17)

Paul's discourse on his TL use indexed his TL expectations for both himself and his students. Rather than meeting students 'at their level' by using English, Paul spoke in the TL with the objective that his students would both understand him and be able to use additional strategies to 'get something across'.

These strategies were particularly relevant for his Spanish III students, whom he described as 'not the most academically focused kids'. Paul felt that these students' overall academic performance and motivation impacted their ability to succeed in Spanish: 'When you already have a kid who academically doesn't necessarily have that same skill set in their native language [...] it gets really dicey' (Interview 1, 12/12/16). Thus, Paul stated that it was sometimes problematic for him to conduct some aspects of classroom discourse in the TL: 'Not impossible but very difficult [...] especially if you have a class of students who may not be the most academically motivated' (Interview 1, 12/12/16). He discussed how he used strategies, such as modifying his language and course content, to remain in the TL: 'Even though it might be really good to dive into something, if their language isn't to the point where we can do most of it in the target language, I probably don't do it' (Interview 2, S/15/17).

Paul's discussion of TL use in the classroom, drawing upon phrases such as 'difficult, but not impossible' and describing specific strategies, such as making content less complex while continuing to keep discussions in the TL, again indexed a strong performance of agency regarding both Paul's TL use and expectations for his students. This agency was also reflected in my observations, in which Paul used Spanish constantly, from casual conversations with his students to formal lectures on content. The courses were content-heavy – the unit I observed focused on an encounter between indigenous populations and the Spanish in Mexico and South America – and there were no explicit grammar or vocabulary lessons, as these items were embedded in the readings and class activities. Paul's classes were also extremely student focused, with Paul giving instructions at the beginning of the class and allowing students to complete the day's work independently. Therefore, although Paul spoke less frequently than either Adelaide or Jenny, his discourse was entirely in the TL.

During our second interview, I asked Paul how he could maintain such a high level of TL use, given that the other participants had more difficulty. Paul framed his response in the context of departmental and administrative expectations, his experience in the district and an overall willingness along with his colleagues to 'push the envelope' with respect to curriculum. Though he stated that his supervisor 'sort of demanded' that he speak in the TL, this expectation was complemented by the support of his department, his own teaching and learning histories and a sense of agency that allowed him to take risks with the curriculum. Paul frequently used 'I' and 'we' statements to discuss his decisions about TL use, his department and the curriculum. Paul's reflection on his decision to stop using tests exemplifies this discourse:

I tell my parents at open house, 'How many of you walk into your job on a daily basis, sit down, take out a pencil, paper and take a test? No, you're asked to perform, you're asked to do something with your language or with your job skills'. I said, 'That's what I'm asking of your kids'. [...] I have these great tests. They're really good [...] I haven't touched them in years. They're good stuff but that's not what we are'. (Interview 1, 12/12/16)

In this excerpt, Paul gave justifications for a content-based curriculum, positioned himself as capable of articulating this with parents and other stakeholders and linked these justifications with the objectives of his district and department ('that's not what we are'). Thus, Paul positioned himself and his capacity to act in the classroom as in accordance with the overall goals of the district. Although, like Adelaide and Jenny, he reactively positioned his students as reluctant Spanish speakers, he did not demonstrate that this affected his agency to either use the TL or be creative with his curriculum. Whereas Adelaide viewed her administration as threatening and Jenny as absent, Paul viewed administrative policies as validations of his own beliefs, as well as those of his colleagues. Paul positioned his colleagues and district positively, using words like 'advantage', 'collegiality' and 'collaboration' to describe his department. He also positioned this collegiality as unique to his school, as seen in the following excerpt:

We have a huge advantage here. We have a work room that that every-one sort of lives in, [so if] I didn't know something I could turn around and go, 'Hey what about this?' 'Hey, do you have anything for that?' That doesn't happen in most places. So to be able to have that, I mean it's a huge advantage for us. (Interview 1, 12/12/16)

Paul's positioning of department collaboration as unique and advantageous served to empower his own agency. The positioning indexed his

value of the environment and allowed him to act in ways that supported the goals of this community, including maximum TL use.

Discussion and Implications

Although each participant inhabited a particular teaching context, a comparison of their perspectives offers insight into the factors impacting teacher agency in TL use. First, all three teachers reactively positioned their students as reluctant Spanish speakers. Whether this was due to student learning disabilities, language learning anxiety or the complex identities of Spanish heritage speakers, each teacher viewed this reluctance as impacting their students' performance. However, the teachers performed their own TL use in different ways to address this reluctance. While Jenny and Adelaide used English 20%–50% of the time to accommodate their students, Paul drew a line of separation between his abilities and his expectations for his students, speaking the TL 100% of the time. Parallel to the participants' positionings of their students were their reflexive (self) positionings of agency (Davies & Harré, 1990). Whereas Adelaide and Jenny positioned themselves as somewhat forced to use English – Adelaide due to administrative demands and a desire to reduce student anxiety, and Jenny because of her own inexperience – Paul positioned himself as a frequent TL user, consistent with his positioning of departmental and administrative expectations. The participants' reflexive positioning also indexed their sense of agency during the stimulated recall sessions. Adelaide seemed to benefit most from these sessions, reflecting upon her practice and proposing alternative ways of conducting classroom discourse to use more TL. Paul was also reflective, but his maximum use of the TL made it unlikely that he would propose alternative strategies. Jenny's self-positioning as inexperienced seemed to correlate with a lack of reflection and ability to propose alternative strategies, even though she recognized her high level of English use and saw this as unlikely to be helpful for her students. As discussed previously, my relationships with each of these participants as either a co-expert or a professor with more perceived knowledge may have influenced these performances.

When considering these findings, four implications for WL education are apparent. First, teacher positioning plays important roles in performing agency, but these positionings are also mediated by context and experience. Therefore, similar positionings may result in different actions. This finding corresponds closely to Kayi-Aydar's (2015) linking of positioning and agency, as outlined previously (see also Chapter 2).

Although all three teachers reactively positioned their students as reluc-

tant learners, they acted upon this positioning in different ways. Whereas Adelaide and Jenny took this reluctance as a reason to incorporate more English into their instruction, Paul separated his own TL use from that of his students. Reflexive positioning, as well as interactive positioning between interviewer and participant, also played a role in teacher agency and seemed to correlate with years of experience. Both Adelaide and Paul used agentive discourse that indexed their decisions to use the TL as conscious; their positioning of me as an equal may have played a role in their usage of more agentive language. On the other hand, Jenny positioned herself as lacking experience and therefore less capable of using the TL, possibly due to her positioning of me as a superior or 'expert', given that I was her former professor. A takeaway from this finding is to carefully consider how the researcher may be positioned by participants when asking them about experiences the researcher may share, such as teaching practices.

Second, and unsurprisingly given the large body of literature on language learning anxiety (e.g. Chen & Chang, 2004; Horwitz, 2000), all participants positioned their students as reluctant learners of Spanish. Both Paul and Adelaide's students, who were in the 'less-demanding' academic track, were aware of their lower academic status. Although Jenny's students were not tracked, they were no doubt conscious of the stigma surrounding heritage Spanish speakers, who are frequently viewed from a deficit perspective in the United States (Leeman, 2015). One wonders whether this repeated positioning of students as anxious or 'imperfect' learners contributes to a vicious cycle, in which students take on and augment these positionings to the point where successful language learning becomes all but impossible. WL teachers could help break this cycle by incorporating culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and differentiated instruction. Both strategies acknowledge diverse student identities and build on student strengths and funds of knowledge, leading to a more meaningful engagement with content.

Stemming from this recommendation is a third implication: the importance of curricular design to encourage maximum TL use. A curriculum focusing more on culturally relevant content for Spanish heritage speakers could help increase motivation among Jenny's students. Even students who do not speak Spanish in the home could benefit from a curriculum focused on meaningful communication and intercultural citizenship, as recommended by Byram (2006) and Kramsch (2011). Such innovations emphasize what students can do in the language and how Spanish relates to their daily lives. These changes also encourage more TL use, as teachers spend less time on explicit grammar instruction. Teachers should not be afraid of 'losing' their students with a meaning-based curriculum; Paul's TL use demonstrated how teachers can provide extensive, comprehensible input without confusing students or contributing to social distance.

Of course, teachers need time for this type of curriculum revision, which leads to my final implication: the role of the stimulated recall exercise. Of the three participants, Adelaide was the most receptive to

the sessions and their potential for bringing forth new strategies. Jenny was also positive about the experience, albeit in a more general manner. This was most likely due to her reflexive positioning as an inexperienced teacher with limited capacity to change her teaching practices, augmented in part by my own presence. Subsequent experience, combined with strong mentorship by an experienced WL teacher, could enable Jenny to reposition herself as capable of acting in ways that provide meaningful TL experiences for her students. Overall, stimulated recall can provide opportunity for reflection on WL teacher practice, which in turn could increase the capacity to act in ways that empower teachers to use the TL more frequently.

Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

In this comparative case study of three secondary Spanish teachers, I illuminate the workings of experience, context and interaction, offering new perspectives on how WL teachers perceive their own agency and that of their learners. Combining relevant theories of positioning and performance with an exploration of attitudes and practices, this research offers insights into how teachers perform their agency, as well as how they can reflect on these performances to modify classroom practices around TL use. This research also adds to the body of literature on interviews as a situated practice, reflecting upon the interviewer's role in participant performances of agency.

Though policies favor maximum TL use in the WL classroom, in practice this recommendation is often challenging for teachers. Differing perceptions of agency by WL teachers play a key role in realizing this recommendation. As seen here, teachers' positioning of students as reluctant or anxious language learners can create a situation in which teachers use the first language to create a more 'comfortable' learning environment. However, some WL teachers can both reactively position their students as reluctant and demonstrate agency in their own TL use. Careful reflection on teacher practices through exercises such as stimulated recall might allow WL teachers to explore alternative strategies that empower them to use the TL more often. Moreover, WL teacher histories and experiences with the TL and their own training are highlighted in their reflexive positioning as knowledgeable or inexperienced, which also plays a role in their classroom TL use. Finally, researchers may be positioned by participants as more or less knowledgeable, which in turn may lead participants to express more or less agency, regardless of how their agency is carried out in the classroom. For this reason, triangulation through other sources of data is important to gain a clearer picture of how agency is produced.

As a comparative case study of three WL teachers in one region of the United States, this research cannot be generalized to all WL teachers.

However, it is hoped that these findings will pave the way for additional studies on teacher agency in TL use and other practices in WL education. Though I did use classroom observations to triangulate the inferences gained from the interviews, additional triangulation through interviews with students and/or administrators could shed additional light on these findings. Additionally, more research on student agency in language learning, particularly among students positioned by their teachers as reluctant learners, would add important voices to this conversation.

Note

- (1) I use 'world language' rather than the traditional term 'foreign language' both to recognize the multilingual, multicultural reality of today's schools and to index an approach to learning new languages as an important component of global citizenship, rather than something 'other' and 'foreign'.

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8 Bi/Multilingual Teachers' Professional Holistic Lives: Agency to Enact Inquiry-based and Equity-oriented Identities across School Contexts

Patricia Venegas-Weber

This chapter draws from a larger life history study that focused on the linguistic and cultural trajectories of bi/multilingual elementary school teachers working in different English–Spanish dual language immersion (DLI) schools in a Midwestern city. In this chapter, I focus on the voices and agency of two bi/multilingual teachers: Jennifer, a self-identified Chicana teacher born and raised in East Los Angeles, and María, who was born and raised in a small town in Spain and identifies herself as a Spanish and Valencian speaker. This chapter pays special attention to their reflections and to the nuances of participating and being the bi/multilingual English or Spanish ‘only’ teacher in critical dialogue with a strict language separation model. I argue that the teachers’ agency, their newly situated understandings and their pedagogical practices allow them to articulate what I have come to call a ‘bi/multilingual pedagogical noticing’, which has shaped their self-reported classroom practices. That is, through inquiry and equitable practices, these two teachers have ‘noticed’ pedagogical resources in themselves, which they purposefully and meticulously leverage within the social context of their classrooms and their schools. This practice (re)shapes teachers and emergent bilinguals’ contexts tied to pedagogical possibilities that further reflect the students’ and teachers’ linguistic, social and cultural resources, practices, identities and life trajectories.