Multilingualism on her mind: Stories of identity and beliefs from a teacher of multiple languages

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This study explores the identities and beliefs of a multilingual teacher who has experience from learning and teaching several languages. Based mainly on theories of multilingualism and teacher identity, the following research questions guided the development of the study:

To what extent and how does a teacher’s experience of learning multiple languages shape her identities as a teacher of multiple languages?

To what extent has the teacher constructed distinct teacher identities for the various languages she teaches?

Studies of autobiographic narratives can be fruitful to get insights into teachers’ thoughts and experiences, and to how they shape their identities. In the present study, data was collected in the following way. An experienced teacher with fluency in five languages and with experience from teaching four of them was invited to take part in the project. During the first six months of 2015, the teacher regularly wrote texts about her language learning experiences and teaching practices and sent them to the researcher. Altogether, the teacher wrote 60,000 words.

Data analysis is still in progress and first results will be presented at the conference. Following Pavlenko (2007), the analysis will pay attention to the interdependence of content, form, and context. First, to identify emerging themes and patterns in the data, I will use deductive content analysis with predefined categories mainly from multilingualism theory and theories on teacher identity. Second, an analysis of how the teacher positions herself as a language learner and teacher through the use of metaphors, tense shifts, adverbials, and emotives will contribute to a deepened understanding of her identity constructions. Finally, I will pay attention to both global and local contextual factors which may have influenced the teacher’s narratives.

Keywords: identity, beliefs, multilingualism.