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**“When I am teaching German, I put on a persona”: Exploring lived experiences of
teaching a foreign language.**

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Abstract

The field of teacher identity is a complex area that has attracted the interest of numerous researchers over the last decades. Within this field the topic of the identity of language teachers has recently emerged. Many of the studies devoted to language teachers’ identity have focused on the teachers as object of study, (Morgan and Clarke 2011; Ying Cheung et al. 2015; Sachs 2005) little attention, however, has been paid in relation to how teachers themselves make sense of their experience of teaching a foreign language.

This present study addresses this underexplored aspect by using a phenomenological approach, focusing on the lived experience of two language teachers. The method used facilitates an insight into the lived world of language teachers. It aims to offer a relevant contribution to the teacher identity research, in particular in how language teachers experience their self; it also reveals a different insight in relation to the way multiple identities are experienced by language teachers.

Key words: Self, Language teachers identities, phenomenology, lived experience.

Introduction

“Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the first language into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional response are necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language.” (Brown 2007, p.1.)

We could paraphrase Brown’s quote for languages teaching arguing that teaching a foreign language is a complex undertaking where the *whole person’s* involvement is required: body, emotions and cognition. As a matter of fact, this *whole person* involvement makes languages stand out from other teaching subjects, such as Geography or Maths where physical, emotional or cultural aspects might play a minor role, if any at all. In a similar way as learning a language, teaching a language presents specific challenges to teachers, in particular the physical involvement as required in the pronunciation and fluency; the emotional involvement, such as teachers’ feelings in relation to the language or culture they teach; or responding to the students expectations regarding their language competence. In summary to be a language teacher is grounded in being able to “personify”, enact and embody a language that often is not the mother tongue.

In this chapter I will focus on describing how this language teachers’ enacting unfolds as an embodied mode of experience.

This chapter uses phenomenology as a starting point of the study on the lived experiences of language teachers and as analysis tool to investigate the structure of their experience.

Language teachers have been the object of numerous studies and research debates over the last decades and this has produced a significant amount of knowledge and ongoing debates. On the one hand, sociocultural and poststructuralist studies have established the complexity and multiplicity of language teachers' identities. On the other hand, the debate around the Native Speaker (NS) versus Non-Native Speaker (NNS) is still open and a dominant reference in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. Most studies however have focused on language teachers as objects of investigation and not on their experiences as subjects.

There is also an emerging trend around the phenomenon of languages learning from a humanistic perspective (Ros i Solé 2016) that considers the *whole person* approach as a way to convey the complexity and multi-layered experience of languages learning. Within this context, phenomenology, and in particular the exploration into the lived experience of language (*Spracherleben*), has been considered both as a relevant and as an under-researched approach (Busch 2015). This research gap is particularly noteworthy in relation to language teachers.

Within this context the questions I wanted to explore were: What is it like to teach a language that is not your mother tongue? How is the sense of self when teaching a foreign language? How is their embodied self? How the language-teacher-self does relate with their "normal" self?

This chapter aims to make a contribution into this under-researched field investigating the lived experiences of two languages teachers using phenomenology as starting point. The data are qualitative and rich gathered from in depth interviews. The analysis uses phenomenological tools and reflections to uncover the structure of human existence.

Positioning the study in the literature

From the point of view of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, sociolinguistics and the wide field of foreign language teaching, the topic of language teachers' identity has emerged over three decades and has been object of a significant number of studies.

Of particular relevance for language teachers is the discussion about the Native Speaker versus Non Native Speakers (NS- NNS). This debate was initiated by Medgyes (1994), (who coined the terms) and Braine (1999). These terms express the view that the native speaker is the norm toward which language learners should strive to emulate (Ricento 2005). Davies (2004) explains in relation to this view that there are two main approaches: the linguistic view, which sees the native speaker as the « repository and guardian of the true language », and the social view, which sees the native speaker as « the standard setter ». (Davies 2004, p. 448).

Although the dichotomy NS-NNS has been heavily criticized as a myth (Paikeday 1985) and as an Anglo-centric construct (Moussu and Llorca 2008), it continues to be part of the norms, perceptions and expectations around language teachers and is still widely used (Arva and Medgyes 2000; Pachler *et al.* 2007; McNamara 1991; Shin 2008). It also plays a significant role regarding perceptions of professional competence of language teachers, as Murdoch puts it: “language proficiency will always represent the bedrock of their professional confidence” (Murdoch 1994, p. 254). The students’ preferences for native language speakers has been demonstrated in some studies (Lasagabaster and Sierra 2005) as well as the self-doubt of non native language teachers (Arva and Medgyes 2000; Hayes 2009). However, the claim that NS teachers are better teachers than NNSs, and that NNSs are deficient in terms of linguistic and cultural authority has been questioned in different studies (Matsumoto 2018; Atamturk *et al.* 2018). In his comprehensive review of the NS-NNS debate, Alan Davies concludes that the term NS “remains ambiguous” as it is both “myth and reality”. (Davies 2004, p. 431)

The debate around NS-NNS is closely related with the broader research area of language teacher identity. As this paper focuses on lived experiences of language teachers, and on their self or selves as part of their life world, it can be situated within this current broad field of research.

What follows is a short overview of current debates around the identity of teachers, in particular of language teachers.

There has been an increasing interest in researching the topic of teacher identity over the last two decades, as well as a growing emphasis on the role of emotions, passion, commitment and courage in teaching (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Beauchamp and Thomas 2009). Many researchers have attempted to define teacher identity, and although there is not a widely accepted definition, there are some common characteristics that many scholars seem to consider fundamental to teacher identity from a post structuralist point of view (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009). These are: multiplicity of identities, the discontinuity of identities and the social nature of identity. One main focus of research within this field has been the identity of newly qualified language teachers (Ruohotie-Lyhty 2013; Trent and DeCoursey 2011; Kanno and Stuart 2011; Hallman 2015). Another main line of research has been the colonial legacy of Non-native speaker (NNS) teachers (Case 2004; Cho 2014; Trent and DeCoursey 2011; Reis 2015; Canagarajah 2012). From the point of view of the theoretical approaches around language teacher identity, although there is not a single coherent theoretical approach, the poststructuralist perspective in different variants seems to be the predominant one (Varghese *et al.* 2009; Morgan 2004, Norton and Toohey 2011).

If we consider the main characteristics described above for teacher identity in general, similar central features have been used to describe language teachers' identity: "(I)identity is not a fixed, stable, unitary, and internally coherent phenomenon but is multiple, shifting, and in conflict" (Varghese *et al.* 2009 p.22).

From the review on language teacher identity research it emerges that the majority of the studies remain at the theorizing level, either social identity theory or theory of situated learning (Varghese *et al.* 2009). Even the studies which have approached language teachers' identity

from a narrative inquiry have a strong theorizing focus on sociocultural theory (Tsui 2007; Ruohotie-Lyhty 2013) to study the development of professional teacher identity over a period of time.

This emphasis on theoretical approaches to languages teachers shows the need to explore other perspectives such the lived experience of language teachers, which this chapter aims to address.

Method

The main interest of this study was to investigate the subjective experience of teaching a foreign language. It draws from the identified under-researched phenomenon of how teaching a language impacts on the teacher's sense of self, from the point of view of the lived experience. For this reason phenomenology as a research method was chosen.

The phenomenological method draws from the work of philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty who investigated the things themselves in their appearing (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The main principle of Phenomenology is to examine every topic getting back to the conditions found in of our experience as expressed in Husserl's phenomenological dictum : "to the things themselves" (Husserl 1950, p.6). By this he meant that phenomenology should base its study on "the way things are experienced rather than various extraneous concerns which might simply obscure and distort what is to be understood" (Gallagher and Zahavi 2012, p.6).

The focus of phenomenology is the way things appear to us through experience, and the aim of phenomenological research is to provide a rich textured description of lived experience (Finlay 2008). Phenomenology uses the term *lifeworld* and it involves a way to describe the world as experienced, as lived, rather than a world separated from the people experiencing it (Horton-Salway 2007).

Phenomenology as a qualitative human science research method seems to offer a uniquely ideal approach to study the taken-for-granted experience of teaching a language. Phenomenology starts with wonder, with having a fresh look at everyday objects and activities as if it was the first time we saw them. It is a reflection that problematizes “everydayness” and taken-for-granted ways of thinking (Ravn, 2016). Thus it will enable a new, fresh look into the lived experience of language teachers.

Participants

The purpose of this study was to generate rich descriptions of language teaching experiences. To gather the data, I carried out in-depth interviews with two participants. They were both very experienced British language teachers: one bilingual (English-French) with German as an additional language, and the other was a NNS teacher of French. The study was conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of Ethics. In terms of how these were applied within the proposed research this refers to: respect to the individuals, being aware of my own competence, being responsible to avoid any harm to participants and to myself and being fair and honest.

The participants were asked for their written consent and they were informed about their right to withdraw at any time. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the names used in this paper - John Carpenter and Claire Woods - are not the real names and some personal details have been omitted.

The participants were chosen following a maximum variation sampling (Langdrige 2007). This means that the researcher tries to find participants who have a common experience, but with a wide variation of demographic characteristics. The table below provides the key differences in several relevant personal characteristics of Claire and John.

Claire	John
Female	Male
Under 45	Over 50
Secondary Education, face-to-face	Higher Education, distance education
Bilingual French/English: Teaching French and German	Not bilingual Teaching French

The participants were interviewed separately for thirty to forty minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The interview questions were designed following the phenomenological approach and following the recommendations of M.Englander for a phenomenological interview (Englander 2012). I asked the participants for a description of teaching a language, for example a concrete experience or situation they could recall. The subsequent questions followed the responses of the interviewee with focus on the phenomenon being researched. While I was open to their responses and their experiences, I also kept in mind the focus on my research which was their lived experiences as language teachers. Therefore, my questions tried to elicit as many concrete descriptions of their experiences as possible.

To reflect on my role as a researcher using this method. I considered the following about the phenomenological method. I was aware of the importance of self-awareness in doing this type of investigation and I put into practice as much as I could the *epoché*, this means, bracketing my own understanding, my own background and my own involvement.

I developed an attitude of refraining, at least initially, from importing external frameworks and setting aside judgements about the phenomenon. (Finlay 2009). Obviously bracketing can be achieved only to a certain extent, and in my case, as I am a language teacher it is impossible to

put aside my experiences and knowledge. However, I think that the phenomenological method enabled me to be open and see the phenomenon – in my case, the experiences of language teachers - in a new way. When I processed and analysed the interviews, the findings were for me unexpectedly new and some of them intriguing, suggesting my position in this study as insider-outsider (Milligan 2016).

Analysis

In the analysis I followed the phenomenology approach as portrayed by (Giorgi 1985). Giorgi uses a Husserlian-inspired approach and provides detailed guidelines for researching psychological topics that can also be applied to educational phenomena. It involves (Giorgi and Giorgi 2008; Willig 2008):

1. The collection of concrete descriptions of the phenomenon from participants;
2. The researcher's adoption of the phenomenological attitude;
3. An impressionistic reading of each description to gain a sense of familiarity with the whole;
4. The in-depth re-reading of the description to identify 'meaning units', which capture specific aspects of the whole.
5. Identifying and making explicit the significance for each meaning unit, and
6. The production and articulation of a general description of the structure(s) of the experience.

Although the analysis starts with descriptive phenomenology, the final stages of the analysis also include elements of interpretative and existentialist phenomenology. That involves the context, intention and meaning of the text, as well as looking for a general understanding of what it means to be human, using for example reflections from the work of Sartre or Merleau-Ponty. Following Finlay (2009) I consider the division between descriptive and interpretative analysis as part of a continuum.

For phenomenologists there is the debate around the focus of their research (Finlay 2009): Is it the focus on the essential and general structures or of a phenomenon (eidetic)? Or is it to explain

individual experience (idiographic)? Although the approach of this paper is strongly ideographic exploring how teaching a language is experienced by individuals, I also adopted a middle view as suggested by Halling (2008), firstly looking at particular experience; secondly considering the themes common to the phenomenon and thirdly looking at philosophical and universal aspects of being human. Following Halling's approach I aimed to move back and forth between experience and abstraction as presented in the following sections.

Findings

A male non-native French Higher Education lecturer

John is a very experienced teacher of French. He has an excellent level of French but he is aware that he is not a native speaker.

A fictitious identity?

In the interview John described a situation during an intensive French course where students were complaining about not having a native speaker teacher, he said: "and I am not a native French speaker, so I consider myself included in that critics, so that is quite destabilizing as a teacher".

After feeling questioned by what he thought was a "false perception on their part". He decided to adopt a French identity throughout the course, he changed his British name for a French one.

The students were convinced that he was a native French teacher:

"so what I did was to adopt a French identity, (...) I changed my name on my name badge that we all wore and I translated my name literally from John Carpenter to Jean Charpentier which is a direct translation, and I told my colleagues at the beginning of the two week period to only refer to this name and not to my normal name, and it had a dramatic consequence".

The *dramatic consequence* he is referring to, was significant for him as well as for his students.

For him because what started as a game became part of his reality and of the way he perceived himself:

(...)”little by little I felt it changing my own identity as in much as I had then to try and sustain the pretence of being French and not being British and it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it does to you internally, but I was aware that I somehow portrayed a different personality”.

With his new identity as Jean Charpentier, John remembers: “I think the first time I did it, I was a little bit self conscious about it and was aware and wondered whether it was convincing and how quickly that would be found out, so there was a sense of cheating or being a fraud or not being genuine”.

At the beginning John/Jean had the feeling that he was representing a fictitious identity, even feeling that he was cheating or being a fraud. However, this was related to the possibility that students could “find out the truth”, more than anything else.

John/Jean on the other side, was aware of the reasons why he did that: “it was for the teaching, and it had a real purpose to it”. It was to have more credibility for his student, to meet their expectations and their believes: the idea that a good language teacher has to be a native speaker. John/Jean gave the students what they wanted: a native speaker teacher. But what does it mean? To have a French name? To have an excellent command of the language? None of the students doubted that John/Jean was a native speaker. In fact as the students found out at the end of the course that John/Jean was British they could not believe it and had difficulties to process this revelation. John/Jean recalls: “when the students found out that I was not a native speaker they were quite shocked and they had to make, just for the last two hours of the last day, they had to adjust their perceptions to me back to ‘oh he is actually British’ and some of them had great difficulty doing that and some of the were not persuaded by it initially, and so I reasoned from that, I must have got into it and projected some sort of Frenchness”.

It is interesting that when students found out, they had ‘to adjust their perceptions’, said John/Jean. I wonder in which way? Did they see him as a different person? Did he sound different? Less French? Did they see him as a worse teacher? Did they have to question all

what they had learned from him? In terms of the students' perceptions, I can only speculate about their perceptions in a somewhat absurd situation in which they had to question what they had experienced over two weeks, namely that his French teacher, turned out not to be French.

Projecting some sort of Frenchness

In relation of John's/Jean's sense of self while he was acting as Jean, while being conscious of his fictitious identity, he also recognized that part of him was genuinely feeling French and "thinking" French. He spoke about projecting "some sort of Frenchness", he described: "being involved in teaching French now and again for ten years and spending a lot of time in France and using French virtually every day has had an influence on me anyway, and there are times for example, when I can't find words in English or I find I am dreaming in French" or even when he talked in French without noticing, he described one of those situations "I was confused and thought, oh where am I? And what language should I speak? So you do internalise things to such a degree, so sometimes it can just throw your compass a little bit."

There is no clear cut for John/Jean about his feeling British or French, or his language (French or English), sometimes he does not know, until he heard someone speaking in a language and then he adjusts to the context.

In terms of how this experience was for him, he clearly enjoyed it. For John having a fictitious identity was a "liberating experience", even if he felt he was cheating or being a fraud: "I got used to it and it was fun, I enjoyed it, it was adopting a slightly different personality and (...) the overriding feeling was (...) it was amusing more than anything".

Having the possibility, the choice to project different personalities, not to be constraint to a single one was experience as a liberating feeling.

Being more than what the other sees

The category “Selfhood” in phenomenology is used to account for a structural feature of conscious experience, and it has to do with the person’s sense of agency, their feeling of their own presence and voice in a situation (Ashworth 2003). The self is actually completely intertwined with our links with others and provided by interaction with others. In their reflections on social forms of self-consciousness, Gallagher and Zahavi (2016) acknowledge that the “I” can become aware of itself through the eyes of other people: I might frame my awareness of myself from the perspective of others, trying to see myself as they see me. Within this attitude, the judgements that I make about myself are constrained by social expectations and cultural values. (Gallagher and Zahavi 2016). In the case of John’s experience, it is the interaction with the others (his students) what makes him aware of himself – as ‘deficient’, non-native French teacher, this means that his sense of self is radically challenged and questioned. This type of interaction can be considered as an “other-mediated form(s) of self-experience” (Zahavi, 2012). A clear example of this form of self-experience can be found in the reflections of Sartre in the third part of “Being and Nothingness” in what he describes “Le pour-autrui”: Being for the others.

According to Sartre, self-consciousness (he exemplifies this in relation to shame) presupposes the intervention of the other, that is, the self of which I am ashamed. My public persona did not exist prior to my encounter with the other, it was brought about by this encounter. To feel shame is to accept the other's evaluation; it is to identify with the object that the other looks at and judges. In being ashamed I accept and acknowledge the judgement of the other. Sartre states: “(...) I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am.” (Sartre 2003: p. 312). Commenting on this passage Dan Zahavi explains Sartre’s position with the sentence: “I *am* the way the other sees me, and I am nothing but that”. (Zahavi 2014, p.213)

A closer analysis of John's / Jean's situation reveals that Sartre's approach does not quite work for him. Rather his action adopting a different identity puts him in a position to say: "I am (both) the way the other sees me, and *more than that*". This means, instead of being just constrained by others, the experience is liberating and empowering: it opens an array of possibilities, such as:

"I am what you think I am" (I am like a NS of French, you cannot tell the difference),

"I am not what you think I am", (I am actually British, not a NS of French)

"I am what I think I am not" (I do feel French, I project "Frenchness")

"I am not what I think I am" (I am not a deficient teacher, I am not only British)

John's display of a fictitious identity reveals the multi-layered aspects of the self where the terms "fictitious" or "real" do not mean anything. Also the terms NS, NNS, in John's experience lose the solidity they appear to have in current debates and teachers' and students' expectations. They reveal themselves as volatile, unsubstantiated constructs that appear or disappear depending on the context and situation.

A female bilingual (French/English) secondary teacher with German as an additional language

The lived experiences of Claire teaching a language are characterized by fluidity and interdependence of the three languages/cultures: English, French and German and the impossibility to provide a static, or stable account of any of them, her feeling more enacting or inhabiting a language depends on the circumstances, the students and the context.

In the middle- in between

Claire clearly feels her role of a language teacher as a mediating person: “I think when I teach German I am a bit of an intermediary between the English student and the German language and culture”, “I am facilitating them to get nearer to a different culture, to a different language” “I feel like an intermediary I want to persuade the children I am teaching that this is fantastic, that this is really good”. When I asked Claire about where she positions herself when explaining something about the French or German culture (inside / outside) her response was “Ah...in the middle I think (...) in the middle, neither in one or the other” (neither British nor German)

The role of an intermediary is difficult to grasp and to explain: “neither here, nor there”.

The position of an intermediary resonates with the reflections of Simone Weil in relation with the Greek term *Metaxu*, (*in-between-ness*) something that both separate and connect us. She exemplifies this with the image of two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall: “The wall is the thing which separates them but it also their means of communication”. (Weil 2004, p.145)

Clare as an intermediary feels both separation and connection of her students with the language and culture she is teaching. She has a double function being the same as them / being different from them.

When I asked about to position herself in relation to being British or French, she is unable to give a clear answer “Obviously being bilingual French is part of me, but I don’t feel...I still feel very English...” I still feel like a person from outside looking into” (outside the culture) I don’t feel either one or the other, I don’t feel French or German, but when I teach I do”.

I put on a persona

One recurring theme in Claire’s interview is the experience of being someone different, creating a persona, pretending, in a word, enacting a different person when she teaches.

Talking about her experiences teaching German she said:

“You have to be like a different person, don’t you?” And she further describes her experience of teaching a language as having a different identity; she says: “when I am teaching, when I am speaking German I feel I’m having a persona, I don’t think I pretend to be a German in particular, but I feel like a German expert, as a teacher of German as opposed to myself” (...)

“Part of your own character is there, it has to be, doesn’t it, but you also project something. I think all teachers do that, don’t they? I think that if you are teaching a language, I think you project something that you think will typify a German person, or if I am doing a French lesson, I would use the expression ‘oh la la’, not because I think that French people would say that, but because it is attached to the persona ‘being a French person’ or being a French teacher.”

When asked about what she means when she says ‘persona’, Claire answers : “What I mean...when they see me, they don’t see me like Claire Woods (*Her name*) but they see me like a German teacher, they say Frau Woods, or in French they say: Madame Woods” when asked about how this experience feels, she answers: “I feel quite empowered, because I know I am the expert...(…) I think having a persona is quite liberating, isn’t it? It enables you to be more creative”.

Being a language teacher for Claire has a fundamental ambiguity of being / and not being herself at the same time: to be herself, she has to be someone different. This being someone different emerges in the interplay of herself, the pupils and the social/cultural context. To illustrate and analyse this I will use the phenomenological concept of *intersubjectivity*, which, since Husserl, has been object of systematic and extensive discussions among phenomenologists. Intersubjectivity is a relation between subjects and includes an investigation of the first-person perspective. Intersubjectivity requires a simultaneous analysis of the relationship between subjectivity and world. That means that “the three dimensions *self, other*

and *world* belong together, they reciprocally illuminate one another, and can only be fully understood in their interconnection.” (Zahavi 2019, p.88) Claire’s responses and actions in relation of her lived experiences as a language teacher are indeed not only connected to the situation and the others – her pupils- but they only emerge in interconnection. At one point in the interview Claire said that she felt British, but when I asked her: “Hundred per cent?” she answered “Well, except if somebody says something about France or Germany, or French or German, and then I would become an intermediary again”.

Her embodied self / selves also emerge in the interaction: her voice, her gestures depend on the language she is teaching, as well as on the type of learners: “I speak a lot lower when I speak German, lower, not the volume but the pitch, I have a deeper voice in German and I have a higher voice in French” She also talks about a body feeling more “airy” when she speaks French.

Feeling protective

Claire says in her interview that she feels protective in relation to the culture and to the language she is teaching, if someone says something against the French or German culture or language, she will defend them: “I do defend them as well, for example if they say ‘why do they use such a long word, it is ridiculous’ and I would say, ‘well, you know that is really clever’. I do that...I can feel quite defensive, I suppose”.

Talking about a German film (*Das Leben der anderen*), Claire feels angry when her students cannot appreciate or understand how good the film is: “(...) it’s a brilliant film. They were saying, they didn’t get it and I felt very cross with them, I said, *you silly boy*, again is purely German. I couldn’t be anything else, and again I feel very much...very protectective”. In her role as intermediary she oscillates from one side to the other, connecting her pupils with the other side / the other culture and language.

Discussion

Ashworth (2003) stresses the ideographic, that means individual, focus of phenomenological research and that the possibility of a “coherent ideographic description” of each interviewee is the immediate finding of the research (Ashworth *et al.* 2003, p. 273).

However, as mentioned before, I followed Halling’s approach when looking at common themes and more general and universal topics in Claire’s and John’s experiences as language teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of languages teachers, and in particular their sense of self. The analysis of the data gathered through the in-depth interview have revealed some aspects of the life world of language teachers which I will present in the following.

One essential part of their experience of being a language teacher was associated with being someone else: “putting a persona, having a fictitious identity, pretending”. This apparent contradiction was however not a sort of alienation, rather they had the sense that “being someone else” was their way of being authentic, of being themselves. What sounds like a clear contradiction was lived in their experiences as “liberating”, “empowering” and “creative”.

They accounted for multiple selves depending on the context: a British-self, in “normal life” not in an educational setting, a French-self when teaching French, an intermediary when teaching British pupils, the protective-German-self when British people criticized the German culture, the patriotic self when teaching the French culture etc. However those multiple selves did not appear as solid coexisting identities, but as a fluid movement, as a continuous changing depending on the context. Although there was a clear interplay between of self- others and world, there was still a strong sense of agency, of choice, of creativity in their being-in-their-world as language teachers.

The role of intermediary also emerged as a fundamental feature of their lived experience as language teachers. This role expresses, on the one hand, an ambiguity of locus, of their position: “in between”, “not here, not there”; on the other hand it reveals both connection and distance. Their efforts to connect students with another language and culture also reveal that what is given is distance, ignorance and disconnection.

In relation to the debate of the NS-NNS their experiences seem to confirm Davies (2004) statement that the notion of NS is both myth and reality. In the case of John, it was reality as part of the students’ beliefs that they projected into him, it was myth as John/Jean showed that the distinction had no real substance whatsoever. From a more philosophical reflection John’s self-awareness can be considered other-mediated experience of the self, as described by Sartre, however his experience revealed a stronger sense of agency, choice and creativity.

When we look into the findings in relation to current research about teacher identity and in particular to language teacher identity, the results offer some more nuanced insights into the view of language teachers’ identity as multiple and shifting, as stated by Varghese *et al.* (2009). More than multiple well-defined conflictual identities, the experience of the language teachers in this study seems to reveal a self that is in itself fluid, moving, changing, creative, contradictory and ambiguous. This fluid self seems to be also more in line with an emerging new paradigm of language learning where the learner is seen as a continuous, multiple and fractured self (Ros i Sole 2016).

Other new insights that have been unveiled in this study is how contradictions seem to be harmonized in their experience: being someone else, being in between, being and not being NS and how the self-awareness of those contradictions are experienced *erlebt* as energising: “fun”, “amusing”, as “liberating”, “empowering” and “creative”.

Conclusion

The phenomenological approach allowed me to look into the lifeworld of language teachers from the perspective of the teachers as subjects, not only as object of study. Although this study focused on two individual experiences, some themes have been identified and explored that seem to be part of the phenomenon investigated, the lived experiences of language teachers.

Being a language teacher revealed itself in its contradictory nature, where those contradictions are experienced as harmonized and energising. In particular the need to project a *persona* or a *fictitious identity* was at the centre of the lifeworld of being a language teacher.

It has also manifested in its role as intermediary, mediating between connexion and distance, interpreting between languages, cultures and individuals.

These insights are valuable contributions for the investigation of the life world of language teachers, yet they are just some glimpses of one possible way of looking at it.

As Husserl points out, all phenomena and objects invite us to explore further:

“There is still more to see here, turn me so you can see all my sides, let your gaze run through me, draw closer to me, open me up, divide me up; keep on looking me over again and again, turning me to see all sides. You will get to know me like this, all that I am, all my surface qualities, all my inner sensible qualities.” (Husserl 2001, p.41)

Following this spirit, this study may invite and inspire other researchers to further looking into the lifeworld of language teachers.

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