Assertion of Professional Identity through Classroom Discourse

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Abstract
Professional identity has been a contentious issue widely researched in the domain of educational studies for decades. How teachers view themselves professionally is believed to have a direct impact on their discourse in classrooms as well as how they utilize their expertise while teaching. This paper examines the understanding and assertion of the professional identity of two academics through classroom discourse. It takes the form of case study in an English department of a Chinese higher education institution. Classroom observation is used and lesson recordings are transcribed. In addition, transcriptions of semi-structured interviews are subjected to content and thematic analysis. Findings have revealed that teachers use classroom discourse as a way of asserting their professional identity, as what they believe they are differs significantly from what they are expected to be. Furthermore, although participants’ claims show a tendency of creating a hybrid professional identity (The Third Space), classroom discourse seems to provide more evidence in support of Foucault’s ‘utopia’ explanation.

Keywords: classroom discourse; professional identity; the Third Space; English department; Chinese higher education
1. Introduction

Academics’ professional identity relates to how they view themselves and their roles. It is of vital importance because it influences their capabilities to survive and thrive in the profession as well as their pedagogy and interaction with students (Day and Gu, 2010; Danielwicz, 2001; Lieberman and Friedrich, 2010). It is conceptualized differently in the area of educational linguistics. In most studies, the concept of professional identity is defined in various ways or not defined at all (Beijaard et al., 2004; Trede et al., 2012). It is related to academics’ concepts or images of self in some studies (Knowles, 1992; Nias, 1989) and it is argued that these concepts or images of self significantly determine the way they teach, the way they develop as academics and the attitudes they hold towards educational changes. In other research studies, academics’ roles, relationships with other concepts and concepts such as self-evaluation or reflection which are important to the development of academics’ professional identity are emphasized (Goodson and Cole, 1994; Volkman and Anderson, 1998; Cooper and Olson, 1996; Kerby, 1991). It is further pointed out that academics’ professional identity refers not only to the impact of the conceptions and expectations of other people, including generally accepted views on what academics should know and do, but also to the issues academics themselves find important in their professional work and lives including the roles they adopt derived from their personal backgrounds and teaching experiences (Tickle, 2000).

Academics’ professional identity is also regarded as “an ongoing process of integration of the ‘personal’ and the ‘professional’ sides of becoming and being a teacher” (Beijaard et al., 2004:113). Its formation concerns not only the question ‘Who am I at this moment?’ but also the question ‘Who do I want to become?’ It is not a stable entity but rather a complex and dynamic equilibrium where professional self-image is balanced with various roles academics feel they have to play (Volkmann and Anderson, 1998). Also, professional identity is considered as multifaceted in the way that historical, sociological, psychological and cultural aspects may affect the academic’s sense of self as an academic (Cooper and Olson, 1996). Caninus et al. (2011) believe that professional identity is not a ‘composed variable with a uniform structure’ (Caninus et al., 2011:593). Rather it can be categorized into different profiles based on the scores of indicators of teachers’ sense of professional identity: unsatisfied and demotivated, motivated and affectively committed, and a competence doubting identity profile. The different profiles are shaped through continuous interaction between person and context but do not affect their perceived level of autonomy or professional development opportunities.

Empirical studies with regard to professional identity devote themselves to a wide range of teachers, including experienced teachers, student teachers, language teachers, and etc. (Dang, 2013; Gur, 2014; Abednia, 2012). Beijaard et al. (2000) investigated experienced secondary school teachers’ perceptions of professional identity. Teachers’ knowledge of their professional identity, put in simple words,
how they perceive themselves as teachers and what factors contribute to these perceptions. He discovered that teachers in the study were very capable of expressing how they currently view themselves professionally and most of them saw themselves as a combination of subject matter experts, didactical experts and pedagogical experts. It is contended that ‘teachers’ perceptions of their own professional identity affect their efficacy and professional development as well as their ability and willingness to cope with educational change and to implement innovations in their own teaching practice’ (Beijaard et al., 2000:750).

The current research aims to investigate the professional identity of two Chinese academics through a longitudinal case study. A leading English department in a prestigious Chinese university was selected, since it is hypothesized that the vast and constant changes of English language education in China over the past decades (see next section on Context) are likely to exert significant influence on their professional identity and possibly on how they perceive and utilize their expertise.

In the study, the researcher wishes to explore how teachers, placed in certain unfavourably academic environment, tend to view themselves and to what extent their own perception of their professional identity can have an impact on their teaching and research activities. Moreover, this study also probes into in what way the formation of their professional identity reflects an ongoing process of integrating the “personal” and the “professional” (Beijaard et al., 2004) and the roles they adopt based on their personal and professional backgrounds and experiences.

2. Context

English is taught as a foreign language in China at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It is a compulsory course for all university students. However for non-English majors, the emphasis of English courses is placed on the attainment of language skills and the ability to communicate freely in English, whereas the focus of the curriculum for English majors has been experiencing constant changes due to the needs of social and economic development in China, shifting from a humanistic approach in the 1920s – 1930s to pure language skills training in the 1950s – 1990s, then to a so-called interdisciplinary model during first few years of the 21st century. The most recent trend among the leading English departments in Chinese universities features a return to the humanities-oriented approach, since it is considered that humanities subjects are most helpful in developing English majors’ competitiveness in preparation for their future career in the global job market. Apart from training students to become fluent English users, teachers are required to teach literature, history, philosophy, cultural studies and etc. in content-based courses via English as a medium. This process intends to develop competitive graduates with humanistic awareness and critical thinking acumen – so-called ‘whole people’, who can play an important role in the social, economic and diplomatic development of China, especially with culture as a soft power gaining more prominence recently (Hu and Sun, 2006; He et al., 2008; Huang, 2010; Jin, 2010; Wen et al., 2010; Zhang and Dai, 2010; Zhou, 2016b).
Previous studies have contributed to the in-depth understanding of the classroom teaching in English departments of Chinese universities via teachers’ classroom discourse, particularly codeswitching (Zhou and Richards, 2013; Zhou, 2016a). Classroom discourse is used as a medium to help further analyze teachers’ identities as well as the constraints of policy environment they face. Teachers’ classroom talk, especially their choice of language use, not only derives from the consideration of their pedagogical strategies but also their cultural identities. Furthermore, the content of teachers’ codeswitching reflects the limitations caused by the outdated national curriculum. However, how teachers maneuver and create space for themselves to allow the peaceful cohabitation of their expertise and professional identity is not yet explored. Hence the present study sets out to inquire this issue based upon previous contributions.

3. Research Methodology

This research takes the form of a case study so as to explore the research questions in-depth. The participants are two male teachers from a Chinese university (Teachers A and B). They typify competent and qualified cases in terms of researching English language teaching at tertiary level in China. They are experienced teachers who work for a university with a strong reputation for foreign language teaching, which to some extent confirms that they should have formed a certain sense of professional identity.

The research questions are:

1. How do they understand their professional identity and why?
2. In what way have the changes brought to the English departments in China (e.g. curriculum, national policies and etc.) had an impact on their professional identity?
3. To what extent is their professional identity reflected in their classroom teaching practice?

Two data collection methods were used: classroom observation and interview. Two skill-based English courses were observed: Advanced English and Extensive Reading. A total of 22 lessons (90 minutes each) and six interviews (four hours in total) were recorded. Lesson recordings were transcribed and interviewing data were subject to content and thematic analysis. In terms of interviews, two semi-structured interviews were conducted at the beginning of the study with the two participants respectively who were asked general questions on their views of English language education in China and at their university. The rest of the four in-depth interviews were conducted at the middle and the end of the study where participants were invited to speak freely of their perspectives on professional identity and the difficulties they had in relation to teaching and research. Part of the questions for the last four interviews were also prompted by certain contents of lesson transcriptions. A list of example interviewing questions is provided in Appendix A.

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1 Teacher A taught Advanced English to 3rd-year-students. Teacher B taught Extensive Reading to 2nd-year-students.
4. Results and Discussion

Results from classroom observation show that in the two skill-based courses where English language skills should be the main lesson content, a surprisingly significant amount of teachers’ talk in classroom is devoted to lecturing literature and philosophy content, particularly comparison between Chinese literature and philosophy with that of western countries. Time coding has revealed that on average 35.5% of Teacher A’s classroom talk and 56.7% of Teacher B’s classroom talk over the term is spent on literature and philosophy respectively. In addition, there is also a considerable amount of Chinese spoken in both classrooms where English should be used as the medium of instruction, according to the requirements set out in the national curriculum. On average 25.3% of Teacher A’s classroom talk is in Chinese whereas 46.8% of Teacher B’s classroom talk is in Chinese throughout the term. It is worth pointing out that since the two courses observed are lectures with little interactions with students, the amount of teachers’ classroom talk per session equals with the total amount of each session time.

It is understood that Teacher A’s research area is in American Literature and Teacher B has established a research interest in Western Philosophy. Nevertheless it is against the syllabus for them to spend lengthy time discussing contents relating to their own research interests with the students in skill-based courses. By doing this, less time is spent on teaching English language skills, which could be assumed to have a direct impact on students’ second language learning processes. Moreover, participants tend to frequently switch to Chinese when teaching literature and philosophy and this has deprived the students of the amount of L2 exposure they are expected to have, which could potentially lead to negative consequences in terms of L2 learning outcomes.

Analysis of interviewing data further reveals that the reason that the participants tend to teach literature and philosophy (especially Chinese literature and philosophy) more than language skills is that they view themselves as subject experts. However they have no choice but to be viewed as English language teachers by both the national curriculum and academics from other disciplines, even though they refuse to see themselves in this way. In addition, they emphasize that teaching literature and philosophy from both Chinese and western perspectives is a deliberate pedagogy so as to help students establish a comparative framework, raise their cross-cultural awareness and improve their intercultural communication abilities, which they believe is a corrective reflection of their professional identity. Examples extracted from lesson transcriptions could be seen as follows:

Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

It reminds me of the ‘Aunt Xianglin’ written by Lu Xun. He said her pupils barely move. Here it says her eyes are like two

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2 The sentence in italics is from the textbook.
small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough…The descriptions of the details are excellent. (Extracts from Teacher A’s Advanced English course)

We will come to an article later on named ‘The Aims of Education’ written by British educationalist Whitehead. He was also an experimental philosopher. He said: teach it thoroughly, but not as much as possible. You may aim for speed and efficiency when you are studying, but when you come to my class, I hope you could slow down, as only when you are staying in a relatively slow status, deep discussion can be carried out…Buddhists say: Buddhism lies in the trivial matters of everyday life. In monotony of everyday life, your heart could be purified gradually. This is the way that Chinese people, Orientals prefer to promote in terms of obtaining wisdom. (Extracts from Teacher B’s Extensive Reading course)

It should be noted that the extracts illustrated above are taken from the two skill-based courses observed where teachers are expected to pay more attention to the vocabulary and grammar of the language. Instead, they spend a substantial amount of the lesson time discussing literature and philosophy with students and drawing students’ attention to the different perspectives between the west and China. When asked the reason of doing so, Teacher A expresses:

Our students are proficient in English language skills already. I do not think it is necessary anymore to draw more attention to vocabulary and grammar. It will only bore them. What they really need is literary and cultural knowledge, preferably from a comparative point of view, so as to help them develop the intercultural communication competence. This competence will greatly benefit them in their job-seeking process and future career.

Teacher B agrees and adds that:

English majors should never just learn English. It is always wrongly understood by scholars from other disciplines that we can only teach language skills. In fact, as teachers, I believe our role is to build a bridge between the west and China for them. It is through the other dimension that can we better understand ourselves and the world.

Additionally in the interviews when asked what type of teacher they perceive themselves as, Teacher A says that since he has been researching American Literature for years, he sees himself as more of a literature teacher, although he
understands that he also teaches English skill courses. He wishes to be seen as a subject expert in American Literature but also admits that it is inevitable that he is often seen as merely an English teacher. On the other hand, Teacher B does not believe he is purely a philosophy teacher. Compared with the teachers in the philosophy department, he considers himself as ‘something in-between’:

I can’t be too philosophical in class. It is not entirely like teaching philosophy in English, because I have to be aware of the level of my audience. They are, after all, not philosophy majors. I also need to consider students’ L2 level when selecting texts for reading. At the same time I will keep in mind and ensure that the texts I select can provide them with some philosophical thoughts and inspire them to think critically.

It seems that there is a dilemma with regard to the professional identity for the two participants. As for Teacher A, although he is likely to see himself as a literature teacher, he cannot deny the fact that he still teaches English language skills in some courses. As for Teacher B, on the one hand, the outside world tends to view him as an English language teacher, which he refuses to accept: ‘I am definitely not an English language teacher. I am a teacher who uses English to spread humanities knowledge but I refuse to be viewed as an English teacher’. On the other hand, he is not completely a philosophy teacher either. It can be argued that these teachers are struggling to avoid being perceived as English language teachers only because English language teaching is not a discipline but more of a ‘service’ provided for other professions. They prefer to be acknowledged as part of the humanities academy, where they are recognized as experts in certain subjects.

Results of the current study reflects the point Beijaard et al. (2000) make about teachers’ perceptions of their professional identity affecting their willingness to cope with educational change and to implement innovations in their teaching practice. The national curriculum for English majors in China and policies regarding English language education have been undergoing various changes over the past decades. The fluid and instable nature of the changes have caused confusions among academics in English departments. They are expected to deliver the requirements set in the curriculum whereas they hope to maintain and implement their own understanding of this discipline.

In the present research the two participants tend to view themselves as literature or philosophy subject experts more than English language teachers. Such perception of theirs is formed on the basis of what they believe is essential for the students. However the guidelines set in the national curriculum are still to a large extent skills-oriented, which impels them to respond to the curriculum in their own particular way through reducing the English language teaching while increasing the teaching of subject knowledge in their classes. Additionally, their perceptions of professional identity as academics in the humanities area provoke them to actively incorporate new knowledge and engage in innovative pedagogy (i.e. teaching literature and
philosophy comparatively), simply because the current curriculum is forcing them to become the type of academics they do not want to be.

5. Third Space and Utopia

The above discussions on teachers’ classroom practice reveal that the claims teachers make in the interviews indicate that they are endeavouring to create a multicultural atmosphere in the classroom and achieve multiculturalism which according to them is necessary for the students. Their goal is an environment in which students are encouraged to achieve intercultural communicative competence, helping to enrich their personal development as well as their future professional development. Teachers maintain that it is to this end that they incorporate knowledge of literature and philosophy from both western and Chinese perspectives and generate cross-cultural comparisons where possible. Since they consider the national curriculum and courses available in the department to be insufficient in terms of humanities content, they have to incorporate this type of knowledge in skill-based courses. They achieve this by seeking space within the national curriculum and creating freedom within departmental policy. On the basis of their claims in the interviews, it can be argued that between the western perspective they represent in class as American Literature or Western Philosophy teachers and the Chinese perspective they embrace due to their own cultural identity, they are attempting to create a hybrid space. This emerges from both western and Chinese elements but is not fixed firmly in either side. This can be conceptualized within the framework of a Third Space.

It will be beneficial at this stage to summarize the discussion of the existence of other spaces, in particular the Third Space as it relates to cultural differences.

Foucault (1986) argues that the space in which we live in and in which our lives, our time and our history happen is in itself a heterogeneous space: ‘we do not live in a kind of void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another’ (Foucault, 1986:23). He believes that there are sites with the curious property of being related to with all the other sites but in such a way as to ‘suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect’ (Foucault, 1986:24). There are two main types of space which are connected to others but simultaneously contradict the others: utopias and heterotopias. Utopias are spaces with no real places. They represent society in a perfected form and are fundamentally unreal spaces. However heterotopias are real places which do exist: ‘They are formed in the very founding of the society which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places...and are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about’ (Foucault, 1986:24).

Foucault (1986) believes that there exists a form of experience which can be regarded as a mirror, between utopias and heterotopias. The mirror is itself is essentially a utopia because the image one sees in the mirror does not exist. However it is also a
heterotopia since the mirror is a real object which shapes the way one relates to one’s image. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in the sense that when people stand in front of the mirror and look at themselves, the mirror makes the place they stand absolutely real; however it also makes it absolutely unreal, because the place they occupy has to pass through this virtual point in order to be perceived. The mirror is a metaphor used to explain the duality of heterotopias. He also lists several principles of heterotopias and possible types of heterotopias or spaces which exhibit dual meanings (Foucault 1986).

Foucault’s accounts of the notion of heterotopia and utopia provoke interpretations and applications across a range of disciplines such as geography, ethnography and socio-cultural studies etc. (Hirst and Vadeboncoeur, 2009; Kostogriz, 2009; Vadeboncoeur et al., 2006; Dudgeon and Fielder, 2006). In discussing the hybrid identities of Australians with relation to semiotic, dialogic and material spaces, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2006) consider that the land of Australia was initially envisaged as a utopia and later became a heterotopia after the European immigrants arrived to settle. The geographical features of the landscape and the differences between the ways of thinking and speaking of the various groups within the population formed the complexity of this country. The differences thus created possibilities for ways to be other than either ‘European’ or ‘indigenous’ (Malouf, 1998).

In Australia, where immigrant Europeans have established political and cultural dominance at the expense of other cultural groups which were originally viewed as primitive and inferior, the conflicts between neo-colonial control and decolonization have persisted (Dudgeon et al., 2010; Dudgeon and Fielder, 2006). The concept of a ‘Third Space’ is thus proposed to challenge both the cultural authority that imperialists desire and the inherent cultural purity claimed by minority groups (Bhabha, 1994), because according to Bhabha’s point of view, there is no homogeneous cultural place. He argues that ‘cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other’ (Bhabha, 1994: 52) and therefore attempts to break the simplistic logic on the basis of which the dominant force tries to justify its ancestry while the minority group employs liberationist rhetoric to reconstruct itself as pure and innocent. He disagrees with any form of utopian oppositionality and argues that there is no absolute ground for any appeal to cultural superiority (Bhabha, 1994). For him ‘the Third Space’ is not just an in-between place existing within two distinct cultures but in fact reflects a radically hybrid place (Bhabha, 1994): “The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity…is ‘the Third Space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (Bhabha, 1990:211). The concept of the Third Space is essentially the notion of heterotopias that Foucault proposes: heterotopias, or the Third Spaces, are places which demonstrate not simply duality, but more profoundly, hybridity. Notions of spatiality, Third Space and hybridity are considered and applied in various ways within the field of education and include studies which apply Third Space to teacher education (Cuenca et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2014), methods of bridging school and home literacies (Leander and Sheehy, 2004), construction of identities in higher education (Whitchurch,
2012), different cultural discourses and time scales (Lemke, 2000) and transcultural and translingual communications for students (Prieto-Arranz et al., 2013). In the current research, they provide a means of understanding the ways in which the participants involved both realize their academic identity and characterize their educational aim in terms of producing graduates who are ‘complete persons’, comfortable in the cultural space between ‘Chinese’ and ‘western’.

Moje et al. (2004) outline three broad categories of perspectives on Third Space. The first category is the geographic and discursive perspectives which focus on the role of physical and socialized spaces in which people interact. Soja (1996) investigates the way physical space operates in the socialization of human interactions as well as the way social spaces shape the physical and suggests looking beyond the binary categories of physical and social spaces. The second perspective on Third Space refers to Bhabha’s (1994) critique of modern notion of culture and his view of Third Space being produced in and through language as people come together, as discussed in the previous paragraph. Lastly in the educational domain, three ways in which Third Spaces are currently conceptualized are identified: as bridge building from knowledge marginalized in schools to conventional academic knowledge; as a navigational space which encourages students to explore various funds of knowledge and bring their home learning experience to academic settings; and as a space of cultural, social and epistemological change where integration of home and school knowledge produces new forms of learning.

There is a sense in which the participants in the current study could be seen as creating a space for what might be described as marginalized knowledge (in the sense that traditional liberal arts education has, in their view, been excluded from the current university curriculum), but they are not seeking to create a navigational space between knowledges; their aim is to open up space within which they can establish a distinctive academic identity. The remainder of this discussion will therefore draw on work within the second category identified by Moje et al. (2004), based on a research study in the Australian academic context.

The relevance of work in this area to the current study is exemplified by Dudgeon and Fielder’s (2006) exploration of the concept of decolonization through illustrating how Indigenous Australians create a Third Space within tertiary institutions as part of a broader project of cultural renaissance. Two examples of creating space are examined: the general way in which Indigenist academics open up space in the western domain of Australian academia and a particular Indigenous studies program focusing on teaching and learning in a university in Western Australia. Cultural survival, reclamation and identity are priorities for Indigenous Australians as part of a perceived cultural renaissance. Within the program, an Indigenous culture course, which was at one time specifically aimed at Indigenous Australian students, is now taught to a disparate group including Indigenous students, white Australian students and overseas students. It is taught by a culturally diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. The notion of the Third Space is used in the context of the classroom, in the sense of opening up a hybrid space in-between the colonizer and the colonized. Intercultural learning, communication and negotiation form part of the
course. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own social and cultural identities. A learning framework is designed to cross cultural borders, validating and contextualizing cultural and regional diversity. Indigenous students sometimes embrace a dual identity as students and cultural teachers to non-Indigenous students. It has been concluded that ‘the third spaces are created as ways of thinking and doing, as social and psychological, connected to individual agency and political action as part of making space within everyday institutional life’ (Dudgeon and Fielder, 2006:396). In this case, it is the process of striving for decolonization and moving beyond power relations which makes the pursuit of the Third Space worthwhile.

The issues identified in Dudgeon and Fielder (2006) illustrated above can be related to the current study in terms of the sorts of claims the participants make in their interviews about their own dual position as both someone who both understands his or her cultural identity and owns the cultural consciousness and awareness in the intercultural background. The use of ‘owns’ in reference to cultural consciousness here is significant, suggesting a form of internalization that amounts to inhabiting the relevant identity. There is evidence here that the participants see themselves as creating a Third Space in class which allows them to embrace a hybrid identity. The concept of this hybrid identity can be further elaborated in the following two respects.

Firstly, these participants aim to develop their students into ‘whole people’ with cultural knowledge from both western and Chinese perspectives, cultural sensitivity and awareness, and particularly intercultural communication competence. Therefore they actively incorporate knowledge of literature and philosophy from both the Chinese and western perspectives. When asked the reason for doing so, they state that by exposing students to both Chinese and western perspectives they are trying to position both themselves and their teaching in a cross-cultural space established between these two cultural realities. Based on their statements, then, it can be argued that between the western and Chinese perspectives, the teachers are creating a Third Space which is a hybridity of the west and China. This hybridity rejects the duality of both sides but encourages their synthesis.

Secondly, the participants’ refusal of being viewed as English language teachers and preference of being recognized as subject experts also suggest they are actively establishing a Third Space between English language teachers and subject experts. They are aware that as much as they would like to, it is not possible for academics from other disciplines to see them as pure subject experts. Moreover, fundamentally they are not English language teachers per se, as they show no interests in teaching language skills to students. Therefore they endeavor to maintain a hybridity of their professional identity which is neither English language teacher or subject expert in the complete sense but an entity that encompasses both.

Nonetheless a further closer look at the teachers’ classroom talk suggests that what teachers claim they are doing might not match what they actually do in class. Teachers claim in the interviews that they incorporate knowledge of Chinese literature and philosophy and put it into a comparative dimension with knowledge of its western counterparts in order to achieve a cross-cultural atmosphere in class.
Students are thus able to develop intercultural communication competence. If this is the case, however, teachers’ talk should be concentrating on synthesizing western and Chinese literature and philosophy, rather than reinforcing the differences between them. It would seem that in practice the teachers’ talk is not in fact rejecting the duality but rather depicting a dichotomous portrayal of a cultural divide. Examples of teachers’ talk can be used to elaborate this point from two perspectives.

Firstly, from the linguistic point of view, on most occasions, the participants use English to discuss western literature and philosophy whereas they employ Chinese to provide the same type of knowledge from the Chinese perspective. In terms of the intimate connection between language and culture, this may be understandable, but it nevertheless serves to underline divisions rather than pointing to the possibility of synthesis. The following example is typical of the sort of switching found throughout the data set:

*Little Fly, Thy summer’s play*. Little fly always makes a buzz in the summer’s night, right? My thoughtless hands very casually intentionally brush you away. Don’t make noise around me. However the author made a meditation about this very minute behaviour. He said: *Am not I, A fly like thee? Or art not thou, A man like me?* 这句话让你们想起了谁？对，庄子。庄生晓梦迷蝴蝶, 望帝春心托杜鹃。庄子说：我在梦中看到自己变成了一只蝴蝶。我醒来后就暗自揣测，到底我是我，蝴蝶是蝴蝶，还是我就是那蝴蝶，那蝴蝶就是我？这个问题大家对于现代科学意识非常强的人来说，觉得庄子是在胡说八道。他在讲什么？但是如果你不要抱着成见，去体悟这句话，你就知道这句话有它的深度。我在何种意义上是我？” (Whom does this sentence remind you of? Yes, Chuang-tzu. He dreamed of himself becoming a butterfly and when he woke up, he started to ponder: are the butterfly and I two separate things or are we the same thing? It sounds nonsense to people with a very strong sense of modern science. What is he talking about? But if you think about it without any prejudice, you would understand that he had a point. To what extent am I myself?)

Secondly, the participants often draw attention to the differences between the west and China without making an effort to generate a synthesis from them. This contrast

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*Sentences in italics in this paragraph are from the textbook.*

*Words in brackets are English translations of the Chinese sentences.*
is to be found even in those examples where the sort of switching identified above does not occur, as in the following:

Aristotle says that law can only prevent people from being bad but cannot make them into better people. So Plato says that only philosophy can make people noble. The competition between poetry and philosophy started in ancient Greece…Marx thinks that religion is a type of anesthetic. Chinese people do not have the concept of religion. Our Buddhists believe in transmigration which encourages you to be a better person because you will be punished in your next life if you are bad in this life.

In the example above, the participant compares different opinions existing between the west and China regarding how to make people good. Having displayed the functions of law, philosophy and religion, he does not seek to establish commonalities but instead emphasizes the cultural differences. In fact, the data set provides many examples where participants use the subject matter as an opportunity to develop a dichotomous depiction of a cultural divide even where there is no obvious warrant for this.

The examples illustrated and explained above provide evidence for the claim that from the perspectives of linguistics and content, teachers’ talk in class actually does not reflect the creation of a Third Space between western and Chinese culture. In fact, the use of different languages to segregate the different contents as well as highlighting the culturally different points between the west and China without integrating or synthesizing reinforces cultural differences to a large extent. In that sense, it can be argued that the creation of a Third Space, although implied in their interview claims, is not reflected in the classroom discourse. Due to the existence of this mismatch, the Third Space (heterotopia) in its first sense which has been proposed based on the participants’ claims concerning their wish to create a cross-cultural atmosphere in class and achieve multiculturalism in fact should not be considered as a heterotopia per se. It is, in essence, a utopia because the participants’ claims only exist in an ideal world and are not achieved in their classroom talk. However the Third Space in its second sense which relates to a hybrid professional identity which embraces and surpasses both the identities of English language teachers and subject experts still remains valid but requires more research evidence for further confirmation.

6. Conclusion
In summary, this research investigates the professional identity of two Chinese academics through classroom discourse in the form of a case study. It was hypothesized that facing the disciplinary crisis and ongoing changes for English departments in Chinese universities, academics’ professional identity might have been affected to a certain extent, which could potentially lead to how they react to educational policies and changes as well as how they employ their expertise at work.
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and that such changes of professional identity might be reflected via classroom discourse.

Findings from classroom observation and interviewing data have shown that participants are building a hybrid identity between the west and China, as well as between English language teachers and subject experts, through the medium of classroom discourse. Participants’ claims at interviews are subsequently conceptualized using the Third Space framework and analyzed in comparison with their classroom talk. Although participants’ attempt of creating a hybridity for their professional identity between English language teachers and subject experts is confirmed, their claim about bridging the west and China can hardly be viewed as creating a Third Space. A closer look at the classroom talk indicates that on most occasions it actually reinforces the cultural differences instead of embodying synthesis which embraces the hybridity of two cultures.

One limitation of this study is that students’ feedback on teachers’ classroom talk, particularly on their use of the Chinese language and the extensive discussion on Chinese literature and culture in English skills course, is not obtained. Future study can remedy this limitation by employing questionnaires or interviews with students on their attitudes towards teachers’ classroom discourse and their evaluation on teachers’ pedagogy. This study can also be replicated with more cases in different contexts where English language teaching in tertiary education has been developing in practice for decades whereas national policy and curriculum have not been able to be positioned to pursue the same goal.

References


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