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# Identity Negotiation and Demonstration of Agency in Two Non-Native English Speaking Teachers in the United States

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This study examines the identity negotiation of two in-service non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) and explores how they demonstrated agency to empower themselves as legitimate educators in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the United States. Concepts of agency framed this study and supported the researcher investigating the NNESTs' identity negotiation. The data included semi-structured interviews, non-participant class observations, and documents related to the participants' school websites and their course syllabi and handouts. The findings indicated that initially both NNESTs perceived their identities with deficit perspectives, and at the beginnings of their teaching careers, these perspectives influenced their professional legitimacy as educators in the TESOL field in the United States. Both NNESTs, however, exercised their agency to strengthen their professional legitimacy, and they also demonstrated greater agency to use their NNESTs identities as pedagogical resources. The study also suggests directions for teacher education and TESOL programs.

*Keywords:* agency, identity negotiation, identities, identities as pedagogical resources, non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), professional legitimacy

**Non-native** English speaking teachers (NNESTs) constitute the majority of English language teaching professionals worldwide (Canagarajah, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2005; McKay, 2002). Studies that examine issues relating to NNESTs, however, including their identities or the way they are perceived by their students, have only emerged in the last decade in the literature of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The reason that studies of NNESTs have emerged only recently is partly because more NNESTs are more open to acknowledging themselves as NNESTs (Braine, 2005) and partly as a result of increasing public platforms that provide opportunities for more researchers interested in issues regarding NNESTs to voice their ideas and share their studies. The establishment of the NNESTs' caucus in the TESOL organization in 1999 and the appearance of several NNESTs' blogs affiliated with this interest group are just a few examples of the NNESTs' growing awareness.

Over the past two decades, the English language teaching profession has engaged in a lively debate on the status of NNESTs in the TESOL field; in addition, studies pinpoint numerous ways in which the status of NNESTs has been marginalized (e.g., Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999). For example, NNESTs constantly encounter negative experiences, such as having their authority or knowledge of the English language questioned (e.g., Amin, 1997; Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999). One factor that causes the marginalization of NNESTs' status is the myth that native English speaking teachers (NESTs) are more qualified or ideal English language-teaching professionals. Based on the paradigm of NESTs versus NNESTs, researchers have dedicated themselves to dispelling the NESTs myth (e.g., Braine, 1999; Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 2005; Medgyes, 1983, 1992; Motha, 2006).

In addition, even though teacher identity has emerged as a subtopic within the field of language teacher education (Morgan, 2004; Varghese, 2007), the study of identity formation and negotiation specifically focusing on NNESTs is underrepresented in language teacher education literature (Motha, Jain,

& Tecle, 2012). Furthermore, very little research has been done to explore the complexities of how NNESTs negotiate their identities and the ways NNESTs empower themselves to become legitimate educators in the field of TESOL in English-speaking countries. This qualitative multiple-case study examines the identity negotiation of two NNESTs, and demonstrates how these two NNESTs exercised their agency to assert their professional legitimacy and transform their NNEST identities from a deficit to an asset.

The following questions guided this study:

1. How do NNESTs negotiate their identities in the United States?
2. How do NNESTs' identities shape their teaching practice and how does their teaching practice shape their identities?

This work aimed to illuminate the tensions of identity negotiation of NNESTs and to explore how two NNESTs empowered themselves in order to be legitimate educators in the TESOL field. The ultimate objectives were: first, to examine the complexities of identity negotiation and demonstrate the power of agency of NNESTs in the United States in order to inspire more NNESTs in the field of TESOL; and second, to provide some insights into teacher education programs in general, and TESOL programs specifically.

## Literature Review

In this literature review, I examined some existing research studies that contribute to the development of the specific questions that this study considers. The concept of agency (Peirce, 1995; Varghese, 2012) was the framework of this study and supported my investigation of the topic of NNESTs' identity negotiation.

## Identity and NNESTs' Identity Negotiation

Identity, from a broad and more general perspective, refers to the notion that people constantly organize and reorganize a sense of who they are and their relationships with others (Norton, 2000). Researchers have unitarily viewed identities as ever-changing, dynamic, and in a continual state of flux (e.g., Peirce, 1995; Weedon, 1999; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) pinpointed the importance of understanding the identities of teachers, because identities serve as a guide that help teachers both navigate their teaching and mediate their teaching practice. Sachs (2005) echoed Hammerness et al.'s concept by advocating that teacher professional identity provides a framework in which teachers can construct their own ideas of how to be engaged in the various communities they inhabit, and noted that teachers' identities are not fixed but instead negotiated through experience. The above research studies imply that it is important to examine NNESTs' identities, as these may shape their teaching practice. It is also worth examining NNESTs' identity negotiation in order to understand how NNESTs function and become engaged in their various communities, such as their teaching contexts or the society in general. In addition, the status of being NNESTs enhances tensions of their identity negotiation, partly due to the dichotomy of NESTs versus NNESTs. This dichotomy then further questions NNESTs' professional legitimacy.

### Tensions of NNESTs' Identity Negotiation: NESTs versus NNESTs Dichotomy

Previous research that examines NNESTs' identities is mostly based on the paradigm of NESTs versus NNESTs (e.g., Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999; Medgyes, 1983, 1992). These studies make important contributions in challenging the myth of the native speaker (Phillipson, 1992)—that is, NESTs are more desirable and closer to the ideal in English language professionals. Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) conducted a pioneer study challenging this native speaker myth. Regarding the native English speaker construct, Brutt-Griffler and Samimy argued that the native–non-native dichotomy is not a linguistic construct but a socially constructed identity "based on cultural assumptions of who conforms to the preconceived notion of a native speaker" (p. 416). In addition, some social variables, such as national origin and accent, are socially held characteristics representing those of native English speakers (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). Because these socially held characteristics can be fixed, however, this idea is in

contradiction with the concept that identities of teachers are negotiated through experience, a point mentioned earlier. The resulting conflict can then establish tensions in NNESTs' identity negotiation.

### Tensions of NNESTs' Identity Negotiation: Professional Legitimacy of NNESTs

The idea of professional legitimacy can also cause tensions in NNESTs as they negotiate their identities. Pavlenko (2003) and Golombek and Jordan (2005) highlighted the concept of NNESTs' professional legitimacy and put it as the central focus of their studies. Both of these studies illustrated the tensions and contradictions in NNESTs while they negotiated their identities as legitimate English teaching professionals. For instance, in Pavlenko's (2003) study, some NNESTs indicated that they did not know any alternatives to the native/non-native speaker dichotomy and thus did not know they had any other identity options available to them. On the other hand, some NNESTs in this study reported that certain class readings and discussions offered them newly imagined communities of multilingual individuals and legitimate second language users instead of failed users of the English language. In other words, by embracing Cook's (1992, 1999) notion of multicompetence, some NNESTs in this study strived to position themselves as legitimate English language teachers.

Golombek and Jordan (2005) conducted a case study of two Taiwanese students in a TESOL program to examine how these NNESTs asserted their identities as legitimate teachers of English, with a particular focus on pronunciation teaching. They concluded that NNESTs' sense of professional legitimacy as English teachers can be contradictory. For instance, even though one participant had extensive English education (both in Taiwan and in a U.S. TESOL program), her sense of herself as a legitimate speaker of English was conflicted (Golombek & Jordan, 2005). The participant stated that, on one hand, she felt her English language ability was limited because she could not have "mistake-free" conversations with native English speakers, but was able to establish her legitimacy in speaking English based solely on how intelligible she was to native speakers (Golombek & Jordan, 2005); on the other hand, her learning experience in the United States and her exposure to American culture and native English speakers enabled her to justify being a legitimate English teacher in Taiwan. Although this participant's sense of professional legitimacy was conflicted, she was able to exercise agency to assert herself as a legitimate speaker and teacher of English through linguistic resources provided by the course readings in her TESOL program.

### Agency

The investigation of NNESTs' identity negotiation guided me to explore NNESTs' agency, thus following the work of many researchers who have pinpointed the close relationships between identity and agency (e.g., Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Motha et al., 2012; Weedon, 1999). Identity is socially constructed because people strategically assemble and deploy different versions of *selves* from available resources within their communities (Motha et al., 2012; Steele, 2010; Weedon, 1999). A teacher employs different *selves* based on available resources within one particular community; in addition, by choosing strategies to adapt to these environments, he or she demonstrates agency. Peirce (1995) discussed the importance of agency: a subject has human agency, and he or she can be both positioned by relations of power and resistant to that positioning, and may even "set up a counterdiscourse which positions [him/her] in a powerful rather than marginalized subject position" (p. 16). Varghese et al. (2005) described agency as playing an important role in identity formation because it emphasizes that individuals are "intentional beings" and that agency rejects "a structurally deterministic view of the fashioning of individuals" (p. 23). In addition, drawing on Varghese et al.'s (2005) concept that agency is action-oriented, I can conceptualize NNESTs' agency as the action to (re)position NNESTs to a more powerful social relation in their learning or teaching contexts.

## Design and Methods

I conducted a multi-case study. As Yin (2006) pointed out, the strength of the case-study method is its ability to examine a "case" within its "real-life" context (p. 111). This case study follows the tradition of qualitative research, in which the focus is on process, meaning, and understanding, and the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). In addition, the case-study method yields detailed and nuanced data and thus is particularly appropriate for capturing the fluid and ever-changing nature of identity negotiation. Even though each participant's experience and descriptions are unique, what can be learned from a single case may inform a larger problem (Wolcott, 2005); furthermore, the reason for choosing a multi-case design but having only two participants was purposeful because the focus of this qualitative inquiry is to build in-depth discussions of the tensions and negotiation regarding NNESTs' identities, as well as to explore deeply the intimate connection between the identities of my participants and their teaching practice. In addition, having two participants helped me conduct cross-case analysis and examine recurring themes from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### Participants and Setting

Jiyoon (a pseudonym) is my first participant; she is from Korea. She attended a two-year Master of Arts TESOL program at Evergreen University (a pseudonym) in the United States. After graduating in TESOL in 2004, Jiyoon continued to pursue a doctorate in education at another U.S. institution. Jiyoon started to learn English in her junior high school in Korea. Before Jiyoon attended her TESOL program, she had taught English in a high school in Korea for ten years after graduating from college. Jiyoon reported that the main reason she studied TESOL was learning new skills to motivate students' learning at the high-school level.

The second participant is Simon, also a pseudonym, and he is from Ukraine. Simon pursued his master's in a two-year TESOL program at Lake University (a pseudonym) in the United States and graduated in 2006. He tutored Ukrainian children in English for a year before attending his TESOL program. An interesting thing to note about Simon is that he started to learn English in college, and—even though he started to learn English late—reported that he was able to catch up with his college peers who started learning English at earlier ages. In addition, Simon stated that because his level of English ability allowed him to catch up with his college peers, he was encouraged to study English for his master's; then, from his passion for teaching, Simon chose to pursue a master's in TESOL.

Jiyoon had taught some courses in TESOL at Evergreen University while she was a TESOL student. After Jiyoon obtained her master's in TESOL and while she was pursuing her doctorate, she became an adjunct faculty member in the TESOL program at Evergreen. Jiyoon reported that her students were mostly full-time graduate students, with some part-time community college instructors who were pursuing an advanced degree in TESOL for job advancement. Simon conducted his internship and served as an English teacher in the English Language Program (ELP) affiliated with Lake University while he was in his TESOL program. After graduating in TESOL, Simon became a full-time English teacher in the ELP program, where he taught for seven years; his students ranged from high-school graduates to college graduates.

I selected these two participants based on the following criteria: a) Jiyoon's and Simon's native language is not English, and prior to Jiyoon's and Simon's graduate study, they had acquired English in a context of English as a foreign language; b) Jiyoon and Simon had obtained a master's in TESOL from a U.S. institution; and c) Jiyoon and Simon each had teaching experience in the United States. In addition, I employed purposeful sampling in order to recruit information-rich cases (Merriam, 2009).

### Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants; each interview ran approximately 40-60 minutes. The participants had an initial interview, and a follow-up interview was conducted after the initial interview and classroom observations in order to clarify any unclear statements or points; I also employed

some interview strategies to help my participants reflect on their learning and teaching experience. For example, I started the interviews by presenting a timeline highlighting different stages of their lives and listing several major events, such as the time they started their TESOL programs or the time they first taught in the United States. Interviews were recorded (with participant consent) and fully transcribed.

I also conducted non-participant observations (Merriam, 2009) in the participants' classes. The first observations were conducted in the individual participants' first class of the winter quarter because it allowed me to understand how the NNESTs introduced and addressed themselves when they met their students on the first day of class. The second observations were conducted in the middle of the quarter. These observations allowed me to get a sense of the ways the participants taught and also allowed for triangulation of data obtained from the interviews. Each observation, which lasted for roughly 120 minutes, was audio recorded with participant permission and supplemented by my field notes; in these notes, no identifying student information was recorded.

I also performed document analysis. To have a better understanding of the participants' learning experience in their TESOL programs, I examined the program structure, including course components and requirements given on these programs' websites. To understand the teaching contexts used by my participants, I reviewed the handouts and syllabi that they created. This review of the documents allowed triangulation with the data that I gathered from the interviews and the class observations.

## Data Analysis

In this multi-case study, data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 2009). Teacher interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts underwent open coding (Merriam, 2009) to identify possible themes that arose within the conversation, alongside data gathered from observations, student questionnaires, and documents. An additional set of focused codes, designed to be reflective of the overall research questions and the conceptual framework of this study, was also developed. Within-case and cross-case analytic processes were utilized (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and I allowed opportunities for each participant to engage in member checks by providing them with the transcripts of their interviews and copies of initial data analysis. I avoided providing clearly defined or fixed definitions of agency during interviews with my participants, and instead sought to examine how agency for these NNESTs was described, constructed, and used.

The participants gave a great deal of information in their interviews through stories about the experiences, memories, or tensions they recalled when they were in the TESOL programs and in their current teaching contexts; these stories prompted me to draw on their narratives to support the argument in the Findings and Discussion section. Several studies demonstrated the importance of using narratives in teacher education research (Alsup, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Motha et al., 2012). Motha et al. point out the usefulness of analyzing narratives "in order to reclaim and make sense of complex and confusing interactions in our lives as second language educators, we narrativized our experiences, then shared and together analyzed them. The process helped us to demystify our experiences and supported our agency around our practice" (p. 6). Even though the participants are TESOL graduates and they retrospectively reflected on their experiences in the TESOL programs, analysis of their narratives was helpful for me to understand their experiences. In addition, numerous scholars have been turning to general life histories, professional life histories, and the use of narrative in order to explore the cultural experiences of those involved in various educational settings (Alsup, 2006; Amey, 1999; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Motha et al., 2012).

Before giving the findings, several parameters of this study are worth mentioning. First, sometimes the participants would reflect on their past experience in their TESOL studies. Even though I had not followed the participants as they went through their TESOLprograms, the timeline strategy and some related documents presented during the interviews, such as class handouts, class syllabi, and their transcripts in TESOL, served as reference points for the participants to reflect on their experience. In addition, I found

Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of language strengthened the justification for my use of participants' narratives to analyze their past experience in their teacher education programs; for example, language is never neutral, and is mediated by both speaker and listener (Bakhtin, 1981; Britzman, 1991). For me as a researcher, my participants' narratives of their experience are never going to be "value-free" or interpreted or analyzed outside of my own perspectives. I did a member check by sending transcripts of our interviews to the participants to resolve some unclear points; in addition, utilizing data triangulation also supported my aim to have the findings be as thorough as possible.

The second element to note is my own educational and teaching experience. As a researcher who had graduated from a TESOL program on the eastern coast of the United States and taught the English language in both EFL and ESL contexts, one of the challenges I encountered was that my interpretations of the data were shaped by my own educational and professional experience. As already noted, however, strategies such as member checks and triangulation in terms of data analysis helped to minimize some possible bias or assumptions.

## Findings and Discussion

This research study examines how two NNESTs negotiated their identities as second language speakers and teachers of English in the United States. It also explores how their identities as NNESTs shaped their teaching practice and how their teaching practice shaped their identities as NNESTs. The analysis suggested that the two participants, Jiyoon and Simon, constructed their identities as NNESTs based on the ideas that English is not their first language and that they speak English with accents or they lack English speaking fluency—and therefore, they perceived their identities as NNESTs with deficit perspectives. As Jiyoon and Simon started to teach in the United States, the deficit perspective of their identities as NNESTs also affected their teaching. In addition, the analysis showed that while the participants negotiated their conflicting identities as non-native English speakers and teachers of English, they also questioned if they could be legitimate TESOL professionals in the United States. Both Jiyoon and Simon, however, exercised their agency to reposition their identities as NNESTs from a deficit perspective to a positive perspective, and thus they were able to establish their professional legitimacy. Furthermore, Jiyoon and Simon demonstrated greater agency by using their identities as resources that they could draw on in teaching.

### The Identity Negotiation of NNESTs: Am I a Legitimate Teacher?

Regarding the research question examining how NNESTs negotiated their identities in the United States, I first needed to discuss my participants' perceptions of their own identities. Both Jiyoon and Simon constructed their identities as NNESTs through a lens of linguistics with regard to their first languages, their "accented English," and their English-speaking fluency. For example, Jiyoon particularly associated her "non-nativeness," a term she mentioned several times during the interviews, with her Korean accent when she spoke English. Simon stated that he regarded himself as a NNEST because sometimes he still experienced a struggle to achieve fluency in speaking English; as he noted, however, "my students treated me like an American because they could not catch my accent." Both Jiyoon and Simon's statements echo Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999)'s study showing that part of the tensions of NNESTs' identity negotiation is related to the concept of accent, which may establish fixed labels such as NESTs versus NNESTs. This concept of accent influenced Jiyoon's sense of professional legitimacy.

The following examples demonstrate the tensions in Jiyoon and Simon as they negotiated their identities as NNESTs and questioned their legitimacy as teachers in the United States. Jiyoon traces her growing confidence:

Previously, I thought I had to change my accent; I had to learn intonation like the way Americans speak; I had to be perfect in that matter; otherwise, I cannot teach English. Even though I was a

teacher, I was not fully satisfied with my teaching with that kind of non-nativeness. So at that time, non-nativeness was a deficit. But after my TESOL program, I kind of learn, well, accent can be beautiful. There is no way I can be a native English speaker. I just present who I am as a learner and a teacher. . . . You know I have lots of fossilized English errors in my speech. How am I going to deal with that? Well, I tried. But I have to acknowledge that I cannot be perfect in that matter. That kind of negotiating position I kind of think well . . . that is okay. That's okay too. So it kind of helps me to regain my confidence.

This statement suggests that Jiyoon negotiated her identities as a non-native English speaker and teacher. At an earlier stage, Jiyoon had perceived her identities with a deficit perspective; her "non-nativeness" also affected her professional legitimacy as a TESOL professional in the United States.

Similarly, Simon noted moments when he negotiated his identities as a non-native speaker and teacher of English in the United States:

[Previously] when I taught a class and I needed to explain something, I constantly found myself later thinking, "Oh, I could have said this. I could have said that. It would be easier to explain and easy to understand." Or sometimes I was overwhelmed and I felt my English was not good enough to explain some point; I would focus so much on the English part of it that [it] would take away the energy focusing on the subject and the actual content of the class. And later, maybe sometimes later, I realized even when I speak my own Ukrainian language, especially when I argue with someone, I think, "Oh, I could have said this, I could have said that, it would better explain my point." [So I realized] oh, it is not a language issue, it's just . . . a human issue. So it's not my English fluency, just my reasoning, my overall analytical skills . . . and when I realized that, all of a sudden it was easier to explain [the lessons] because I did not worry that much about English.

Simon encountered challenges in teaching resulting from his dual identities as a non-native speaker and teacher of English. His concern about English-speaking fluency also made an impact on his sense of professional legitimacy as a TESOL professional in the United States. Meanwhile, this concern shaped his teaching and instruction.

Through identity negotiation, both Jiyoon and Simon exercised agency to reposition their "non-nativeness" from a perspective of a deficit to a more positive perspective, and this change of perspective helped them assert themselves as TESOL professionals in the United States. In addition, having interaction with other NNESTs as TESOL professionals (re)affirmed both Jiyoon and Simon's sense of professional legitimacy as teachers in the United States. Both Jiyoon and Simon mentioned that the experience of interacting with other NNESTs as faculty members in their TESOL programs was inspiring, and that those NNESTs served as role models for them. Jiyoon, for instance, indicated that she and her mentor, who is also a NNEST from China, have formed a lifelong mentor-mentee relationship; she stated in her interview that "He himself is a non-native English speaker teaching us in the program and this was very inspiring to me . . . 'Oh [he said], even though you are not a native English speaker, you can teach us in the US. This is great.' " Jiyoon also mentioned that although her mentor has a heavy Chinese accent, he is very articulate. She discussed how she negotiated her identity as a NNEST and her sense of professional legitimacy due to her accented English; she described as well how her mentor tried to bring students' different cultures and languages to the class discussion. From my classroom observations, Jiyoon also demonstrated this teaching approach, a point that will be elaborated later. Likewise, Simon also mentioned that there was a NNEST from Japan in his TESOL program who was a faculty member, and she, according to Simon, was probably the first person who encouraged him to believe that NNESTs can be TESOL professionals in the United States.

### Demonstrating Agency through Identity Negotiation as NNESTs

As mentioned previously, agency enables people to position themselves in a powerful rather than marginalized subject position (Peirce, 1995). The following examples demonstrate how Jiyoon and Simon exercised their agency as they negotiated their identities as non-native speakers and teachers of English.

As Jiyoon stated:

One situation I do not want to be in is to repeat being in a colonized position, just mimicking their [native English speakers'] structure and their thinking process. That is not something I want. I want to maintain my Korean way of delivering messages. That is important too. I mean you are not expecting somebody from another country to have the same language, the same meaning like native English speakers have. That is not possible. There should be learning communities from both sides, particularly in higher education. They are all saying we have to empower culturally and linguistically diverse students, but at the end of days, people say you have to improve your English. In what way? That is in my way, my meaning, as a non-native English speaker.

This statement brings up a powerful aspect of Jiyoon's agency. After recognizing that she could not be a native speaker of English due to her "non-nativeness," a notion she constructed by her accent, intonation, or fossilized English errors, Jiyoon chose not to be situated in a colonized position of following native English speakers' structure and thinking process. Jiyoon also frequently used "her own way" as she taught. She constantly mentioned her native country, Korea, and herself as a Korean and an immigrant as examples in class, a point that will be developed further in the next section. Also, during the interviews, Jiyoon indicated that she always felt rewarded if students showed recognition of her as a NNEST in the field of education; she found that students appreciated her own life and learning experiences. Such recognition and appreciation enabled Jiyoon to "become aware of other ways to re-script herself" (Morgan, 2004, p. 173) and therefore empower herself.

Simon also demonstrated agency in his teaching context:

It is not about being native or non-native. It is about your competency . . . If I don't have confidence in myself, and if I don't appear as a confident teacher who knows what he does, and then maybe, the students will have the idea, "ok, he is a non-native speaker." That was my concern so at the beginning I did not try to reveal that I was a non-native speaker. But if you are confident and you know what you do, you know the materials, you know the class, you hold yourself to standard, you hold your students to standard, that might work . . .

Simon's statement again suggests the negotiation of his identities as a non-native speaker and teacher of English. In addition, it also suggests that Simon contested the assumption of native-speaker superiority and his demonstration of agency to reestablish his legitimacy as a teacher of English. Simon's statement echoes Rampton's (1990) idea that the notion of experts is constructed by "what you know" rather than "who you are."

### Identities of NNESTs as Resources

Not only did Jiyoon and Simon demonstrate their agency to position themselves as legitimate teachers in the TESOL field, they also exercised greater agency to use their identities as pedagogical resources (Morgan, 2004; Motha, et al., 2012; Simon, 1995).

To help confirm this, I conducted classroom observations in Jiyoon's class, which included five international students from China, Japan, Korea, and Thailand and three Caucasian students from the United States. I noticed that Jiyoon mentioned Korean culture or language whenever she felt she needed to support her ideas. Even in the first class, Jiyoon started by introducing herself and telling a story about her name and then relating her name to Korean culture. It is interesting that, after Jiyoon's self-introduction, as the students took turns introducing themselves—without Jiyoon explicitly asking the

students to tell their own names and cultures—all students shared the stories about their names and cultures. In addition, every time I observed the class, Jiyoon encouraged the students to bring up their own cultures and languages as examples to the class.

Simon also mentioned that now in the first class of each term he always starts the class by telling a story about his name and then sharing his experience about how he started to learn English when he was eighteen years old in Ukraine. In addition, the following statement from Simon suggests how the fact that he regards himself as an English language learner becomes a pedagogical strategy for him:

> My own philosophy is, you know, "If I can do it, you [the students] can do it." . . . and because I have to learn this [English] I could kind of go back and imagine if it could work for me if I was learning English. And maybe how would that change? Had I known about this? Had I tried this? Yes, absolutely. Comparing with other teachers, their philosophy their approach and my philosophy my approach, I see whatever I do as a teacher is really connected a lot to the fact that I am an English language learner as well.

Note how Simon's self-introduction in class had transformed over time. At the beginning of his teaching position in the United States, Simon did not reveal his identity as a NNEST to his students. "I would tell my students I am a non-native speaker of English only if I am sure they like me," he reported. Now Simon's triple identities as a non-native speaker, a teacher of English, and an English language learner himself become a pedagogical resource for him and also shape his instructional strategies.

## Conclusion

The first part of this study examined two NNESTs' perspectives on their identities and explored their identity negotiation. Both NNESTs constructed their identities as non-native speakers of English based on the notion that they do not speak English as their first languages and also based on their English-speaking performances: Jiyoon was concerned about her Korean accent in particular and Simon was worried about his fluency. Initially, both NNESTs perceived their identities as associated with deficit perspectives (i.e., speaking English with an accent and wrong intonation or lacking English fluency), and these perspectives further influenced their ideas of being legitimate TESOL teachers in the United States.

The second part of this study shed light on how these NNESTs exercised their agency to empower themselves. Jiyoon recognized that her accent can be beautiful; furthermore, she wanted to express herself in her own way without necessarily following, or mimicking, native English speakers' ways of speaking or even their thinking processes. Simon realized that when he speaks any language, his fluency may indicate his thinking or analytical skills, not the competence of that language per se. In addition, both NNESTs exercised greater agency to turn their identities as NNESTs from a deficit perspective into a positive perspective; they used their NNESTs identities as resources that they can draw upon in their teaching contexts.

The findings of this study confirm that teacher identity is negotiated through experience and that their identities can mediate their teaching practice (Hammerness et al., 2005; Sachs, 2005). The analysis of this study also suggests that identity negotiation of teachers does not happen only once but multiple times; it is an ongoing process. Jiyoon and Simon stated they had greater struggles asserting themselves as legitimate teachers in the TESOL field when they started to teach in the United States; this finding offers directions for teacher education programs generally and for TESOL programs specifically. First of all, in terms of identity negotiation, many researchers in teacher education (e.g., Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1991; Olsen, 2008; Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008) have agreed that learning to teach is more than acquisition of subject-matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and teaching skills; learning to teach is a process that involves more about identity negotiation, which can generate tensions and contradictions as student teachers undergo the process of becoming teachers.

The focus of teacher education and TESOL programs, therefore, can place more emphasis on providing opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect on their identities, which means examining how teacher candidates relate themselves to others and to this world—in other words, teacher candidates can have opportunities to reflect on how they draw on different versions of *selves* in order to be engaged in their communities. In addition, teacher education and TESOL programs can implement more intentional structuring of opportunities for teacher candidates to observe, experiment with, and evaluate those possible selves (Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008). More important, these opportunities may stimulate discussions of some possible conflicting identities and identity negotiation among teacher candidates. Thus, teacher educators can take a more critical role in helping teacher candidates to navigate some possible contradictions and tensions while they negotiate their identities during the process of learning to teach. A point worth highlighting relating to identity negotiation is that the tensions of identity negotiation are not always bad; they can "provide the sites or impetus for important identity development" (Alsup, 2006, p. 183). If tensions are too great for the student teachers, however, and there is little support for their identity negotiation, the tensions or negotiation would not transform into identity growth (Alsup, 2006) and can be continuous.

This study also demonstrated how both Jiyoon's and Simon's dual identities as non-native speakers and teachers of English established some contradictions and tensions, particularly at the beginnings of their teaching careers. Jiyoon and Simon were able to exercise agency not only to enhance their professional legitimacy as TESOL professionals in the United States, but also to turn their NNEST identities into their pedagogical resources. This analysis suggests a direction for teacher education programs—and TESOL programs in particular—with a focus on NNESTs. As Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) argued, TESOL programs can do a better job supporting NNESTs to develop their agency and professional legitimacy. In both teacher education and TESOL programs, helping students recognize their identities and then navigate some possible contradictions and tensions in NNESTs, as noted above, is a good start. Furthermore, teacher educators can offer NNESTs opportunities to establish a range of factors that can contribute to their professional legitimacy.

One way to enhance NNESTs' professional legitimacy in teacher education or TESOL programs is to emphasize and support NNESTs' identities as multilingual speakers or (emergent) bilinguals/multilinguals in order to highlight what NNESTs have already known or what they are working toward (see Golombek & Jordan, 2005; Pavlenko, 2003). Another way to enhance NNESTs' professional legitimacy, as this study presented, is to emphasize that NNESTs' identities can be assets. Numerous studies have shown that the concept of teachers' identities having pedagogical implications remains unrealized in most language-teacher education programs (e.g., Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Morgan, 2004; Varghese, 2007). One possible reason for this situation is that most language-teacher education programs tend to be organized to teach novice teachers in the form of distinct modules such as methodology, second language acquisition, and language structure, and thus the concepts of "identity" and "pedagogy" are still two separate ideas (Morgan, 2004). Considering how Jiyoon and Simon incorporated their identities as NNESTs into their teaching, teacher education or TESOL programs can support NNESTs more effectively by moving from viewing identity and pedagogy as juxtaposed and yet separable variables to implementing a more interweaving notion of "teacher identity as pedagogy" (Morgan, 2004; Simon, 1995). Most important, advocating the concept of NNESTs' identities as resources in teacher education and TESOL programs can also encourage NNESTs to deeply examine their learning or teaching strategies that might have already been used, so they can function or be engaged in those contexts. Thus, this step may facilitate NNESTs to establish or recognize factors that enhance their professional legitimacy. Take Simon, for example. After recognizing his English learning experience can be inspiring to his students, Simon used this as a talking point or an ice breaker in his class. This teaching strategy ultimately enhanced his professional legitimacy as a TESOL educator in the United States. In future research, more focus is needed on the effect of

discourses on NNESTs' professional legitimacy, including identities as assets, for NNESTs in the field of TESOL.

## Acknowledgements

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