Teacher Identity Construction in Teacher-Student Classroom Interactions

WU Xinrui[a]; GUO Fang[b],*

[a]Graduate Student, College of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.
[b]Professor, College of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

This study has been carried out using the qualitative method and conversation analysis approach to explore the discourse construction of the democratic and authoritarian status of English teachers in domestic high schools. Under the guidance of theoretical framework proposed by Chen Xingren (2013), two high school English classes from *Teaching Video Network* are analyzed in terms of question types, lexical characteristics, turn-takings and feedbacks. The results of this study show that in the classroom interactions, Teacher A builds up his democratic identity characteristics, while Teacher B turns up to behave authoritarian identity characteristics. This study analyzes two teachers' conversational strategies in order to yield implications for teacher development as well as help them further understand the way of using conversational strategies to mobilize students' initiative.

Key words: Classroom interaction; Conversation analysis; Conversation strategy; Teacher identity construction; English class of high school

INTRODUCTION

Different question types, lexical characteristics, turn-takings and feedbacks of teacher-student interactions give teacher different roles which result in different response behaviors of students. This study aims to describe and analyses the construction of teacher identities in teacher-student interactions by conversation analysis.

Within studies of conversation analysis, teacher-student interaction in the classroom is considered to be essential, in that it is the primary medium for teaching-learning process. Therefore, more and more scholars began to be interested in classroom conversation analysis. For example, Li Suzhi's (2007) study showed that the exchanges initiated by students promote students' participation in the classroom activities. Examining the operating mode of teachers' discourse power and the way to realize the hegemony of speech in classroom teaching, Huang Wei (2014) found that teachers' discourse power is mainly manifested in the four links of "topic control, turn structure, distribution of discourse power and transfer of discourse power", from which the classroom dialogue is guided and regulated. Over-control and improper handling of these four aspects may lead to the formation of teachers' discourse hegemony in the classroom. The study by Jenni Ingram & Victoria Elliott (2014) which also focused on conversation analysis of classroom interactions, showed that in classroom interactions where different turn taking structures apply, silences have a different influence on student and teacher behaviour.

However, few scholar connects classroom interactions with "identity", which can be understood as "a set of speech practices that people use to shape and show who they are in front of others or in communication with others." (Hadden & Lester, 1978) It is to say that teacher identity which is crucial in second language class

is constructed during the process of speech practice in interactions with students. Therefore this paper explores how and what kind of identity does the teacher construct and what implications there may be for instruction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is an interactive relationship between discourse practice and identity. That is to say, the identity a person uses to talk with will affect the speaker's way of communication. At the same time, the discourse practice a person chooses will also "stereotype" its corresponding identity. (Chen, 2013) The aim of this research is to find out the corresponding identity through the analysis of teachers' discourse practice.

Aiming at constructing pragmatic identity through discourse, Chen Xinren's discourse practice types related to identity construction is applied to this research. Chen Xinren (2013) modifies Tracy's (2002) research and summarizes the types of discourse practice related to identity building, as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1
Discursive Practice Concerning Identity Construction (Chen, 2013)

Discursive practices	Description
Code	Language, dialect or specific code
Style	Formal or casual style indicating identity relationship
Discourse Features	Discourse features like turn-taking indicating identity relationship
Discourse Content	Content like topic and viewpoint
Discourse Mode	Mode like direct or indirect indicating identity relationship
Speech Acts	Speech acts like criticizing, directing, informing and praising
Person-referencing	Words to address self and others
Grammatical Choice	Grammatical features like exclamation, tag question and personal pronoun
Lexical Choice	Words like modals and hedges indicating identity relationship
Phonetic Feature	Features like pitch, speed, accent
Paralinguistic Features	Discourse Strategies like gesture, distance and eye contact

It can be seen from the table that the construction of pragmatic identity is the choice of the communicators, which has certain subjectivity and may be affected by communication needs, communication purposes, context and other factors. In the process of using language, communicators can choose one or more types of discourse practice to help construct pragmatic identity. In other words, a pragmatic identity may be constructed by many types of discourse practice.

Therefore, in order to analyze teacher's pragmatic identity through conversational analysis, several discourse practice types are employed in this research: question types (Discourse Features), lexical characteristics (Lexical Choice), turn-takings (Discourse Features) and feedbacks (Speech Acts).

METHOD

This work aims at describing and analyzing the construction of teacher identities in teacher-student classroom interactions. For this purpose, this study has been carried out using the qualitative method and conversation analysis approach (Sacks, 1992). This approach aims to analyse the social organization of human interactions as they spontaneously occur in everyday life.

Research Design

Teacher identity research is a new trend in applied linguistics in recent ten years (Varghese et al. 2005). It is undergoing a transition from macro-narrative research to micro-conversational research. Macroscopic analysis mainly uses critical discourse analysis to discuss the role of social environment in shaping teacher's identity, while micro-analysis mainly uses conversational analysis to analyze the process of building teacher's identity. This study uses micro-conversational analysis to analyze several teacher-student interactions to adapt the trend and restrict the current study to a bound field for a deeper analysis of what kind of teacher identities have teachers constructed in the process of teacher-student interactions? By discussing these two issues, the study tries to prove that teacher identity is constructed through conversational activities and reveals the characteristics and process of teacher identity construction by constructing conversational strategies of different identities such as teacher autocracy and authority in the micro-context of classroom, so that we can improve teacher-student interaction through transferring inappropriate teacher identities by changing conversational strategies.

The adjustment of communicative function mainly includes the management of teacher's dialogue and the remedy of communicative problems in teacher-student interaction, so this study interprets data from four levels: question types, lexical characteristics, turn-takings and feedbacks, which belongs to the management of teacher's dialogue and the remedy of communicative problems respectively. The relationship between the four levels and teacher-student interaction is that teacher-student interaction is mainly carried out through questioning, which occupies a high proportion in teaching activities (Thompson, 1997), which is particularly evident in classroom teaching in China. Lexical characteristic is the vocabulary features used within the turn. Turn-taking refers to the order in which the two sides of the conversation take turns and the possible opportunities for "asking" and "answering". Feedback refers to the responses given by the teacher to what learners produce in the classroom. In its most narrow definition, this refers to

teacher response to error, which is the last step of teacher-student interaction. All of these four aspects are essential to teacher-student interaction, that is why we choose them as our research objectives within the interaction.

Sample Selection

This study has targeted the selection of classroom conversation data: only the most typical video that can show the construction of different teacher identities are used as data samples, which is determined by the purpose of this study. Accordingly, the samples selected in this study are chosen from the lecture videos of *Teaching Video Network*. There are two teaching videos are analyzed which are selected from English classes of first grade of senior high school. Because firstly, the first year of senior high school students not only have sufficient knowledge reserves but also the unique opinions on the problems. Moreover, teachers in this period are not busy in improving students' examination results and completing the curriculum in senior high school, but pay more attention to the cultivation of students' thinking ability. Thirdly, the classes are relatively independent units or communicative content in teaching, and they all revolve around a topic. Teacher A's class is around the topic of tomorrow's world, and Teacher B's topic is about news report. It is more convenient for the analysis of the communication and teachers' identity.

Data Collection

In order to enhance the reliability and validity of the research results, a qualitative and quantitative analysis method is used in this study. The coding process includes: firstly, analyzing, categorizing and counting the types of questions of the teachers, obtaining quantitative data, presenting them in charts, and conducting qualitative research on transcription through discourse analysis of lexical characteristics, turn-taking methods used in communications and the types of feedback to output the result of this research.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Question Types

According to Sinclair & Coutlthard, the three-step model of classroom discourse communication is different from that of daily communication. Teachers often use questioning to control turn-taking power in classroom. Recent studies have shown that asking different types of questions is the key to creating vivid and meaningful classroom interaction. When asked Yes/No repeat questions and traditional closed questions, which the teacher already has the answer in his mind, the discourse functions are mostly to introduce new lessons, test students' understanding and arouse interest, and serve classroom teaching and management. However, open questions are those in which there are no fixed answers in teachers' minds and. uptake question refers to teachers' continuous use of discourse strategies to encourage inspire and excavate students' answers. Therefore, the latter two strategies can better promote students' cognitive participation and belong to higher-order discourse strategies.
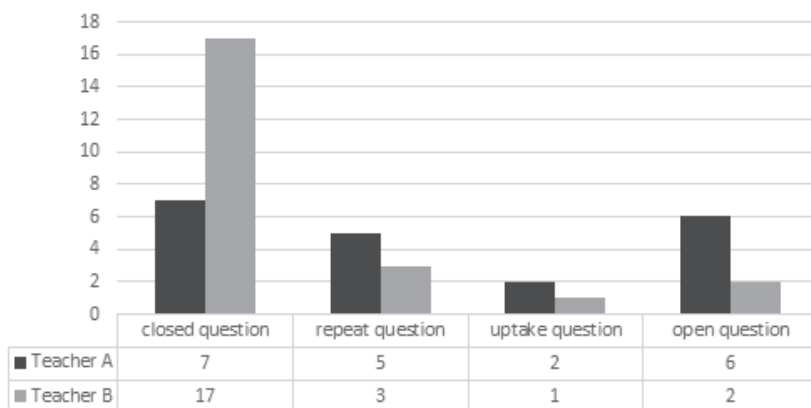

Figure 1
The analysis of sample teachers' questioning strategy

As is shown in figure1, among the twenty questions asked by Teacher A, there is little difference in the number of question types (closed question=7, repeat question=5, open question=6) except the number of uptake questions. This proves that Teacher A uses advanced discourse strategies to inspire and excavate students' answers, and realizes "assisted" students' classroom discourse participation. He doesn't concern about whether the class will lose control, all he wants is to mobilize students' thinking ability. However, in Teacher B's twenty three questions, closed and repeat questions occupy the most important proportion, which indicates that the communicative function of teachers' questions is to test students' comprehension and serve classroom teaching and management.

Lexical Characteristics

Lexical Characteristics refer to the address terms, which can intuitively reflect the identity relationship between the speaker and the listener. It is one of the means to construct teachers' interpersonal identity in class, which can not only open the turn of the conversation, but also meet the needs of classroom communication and restrict students' cognitive context. (Zhang, 2017)

Extract 1 Teacher A

01. T: VR does more good than harm, do you agree? Yes or No? You please.

02. S1: silence (3 seconds)

03. T: First, express your opinion.

04. S1: Ur... first, VR is new industry...

05. T: It's new industry, but it's not your opinion, here (point the PowerPoint) What side?

06. S1: I think VR does more good than harm.

07. T: Yes, very good

08. S1: Maybe you think it will be more disadvantage, but it will be improve in the future, in my

opinion, VR will get more achievement than ...

09. T: OK, sit down please, I get your point, you think there might be some disadvantages about VR, in the future, all these disadvantages will disappear and it will be... be the most aggressive industry in the world, OK, good point thank you. Next one. OK, you please.

10. S2: In my opinion, VR is good for us, because VR, we are able to look the science we will never achieve in real life, and student will be more interested in study, so VR is good for us, and though VR has disadvantages, but in total, it is beneficial to us.

11. T: You think with VR, students will be more and more interested in study, because it bring...it brings a lot of knowledge, am I right?

12. S2:Yes.

From the perspective of vocabulary selection, teacher A uses pronouns to show their equal discourse relationship with students. For example, when teachers use the personal pronoun "I" (I get your point) (09) the implication is: "you shouldn't worry about that you can't make yourself understood, I understand you", indicating that teachers encourage students to make their own judgments without being nervous. And teacher uses the personal pronoun "you" (do you agree?, express your opinion) (01, 03), which also indicates that they are unwilling to impose any personal statement or idea on students.

Although Teacher A has some words to interrupt students, but they do not cause negative mental pressure. Students always take the initiative and actively answer questions or make various responses in the classroom. For example, when student fails to give his opinion, Teacher A interrupts him twice (03, 05), but this is necessary for only in this way can students know the importance of expressing their opinions before state their points. And we find that students' enthusiasm is not abated, but continues

to actively express his view (06, 08) with Teacher A's encouragement (07).

Extract 1 Teacher B

13. T: Which report may match the number1 headline?

14. S: The first, A.

15. T: the first one, line A, right? Why, why do you think so?

16. S: Because the bad language.

17. T: Bad language, yeah. Yes, OK, thank you. Now please, how about the second one?

18. S2: C

19. T: Why do you think that?

20. S2: 就内个...第一段

21. T: OK，the first paragraph...

22. S2: Maybe, it will ...again.

23. T: what?

24. S2: It will see her daughter again.

25. T: OK, we can find mom, mom right?

26. S: Silence.

Extract 2 Teacher B

27. T: When did it happen?

28. S: At eleven 45

29. T: You know eleven? Eleven? (laugh)

30. S: Sorry teacher, July, en... July six, 2005.

31. T: Yes, OK, good, sit down please. I mean not 11:45, but 12:45.

Extract 3 Teacher B

32. T: what does the report talks about? How about the last paragraph?

33. S: content

34. T: Content, what does it mean? Content means...comment, right?

35. T: OK, sit down please. You mean the comment about the accident.

However, address forms used by teacher B in inviting students to answer questions show that the relationship between teachers and students seems uncertain. In Extract 1, "We", "Us", "Let's" and other address reflect the psychological distance is relatively close. While terms like "Teacher", "You" in Extract 2 are more formal; indicating that the psychological distance between teachers and students is relatively far.

One of the implicit effects of teacher talk is to make students feel restrained, and the teacher B's words in the case do achieve this effect. By using short sentences ("C" (18), "The first A" (14), "At eleven 45" (28), "content" (33)), uncertain words ("maybe"(22), "sorry teacher"(30)), some pauses (22, 30) and silences (26, student say nothing but nodding his head) in responds, students show their worry obviously.

Turn-Taking

Turn-taking refers to the order in which the two sides of the conversation take turns and the possible opportunities for "asking" and "answering". It is an important aspect for teacher identity construction.

Extract 2 Teacher A

36. T: can you please share with me your wildest imagines about the tomorrow's world?
    - 8 seconds silence
37. T: Can you please share with me your wildest imagines about the tomorrow's world? Maybe   you can discuss with each other.
    -Discuss
38. T: So what will tomorrow's world would be like? Who can answer this question?
39. S: In tomorrow, in the future, I believe that there must be ...er...many robots. That they could do every job that people can do, so they could take place people. So I think people will don't move. OK that's all.
40. T: OK, you think in the future, robot will take arouse our job that have done by human beings, right? Nice point, anyone else?
41. S2: There is a big civilization
42. T: OK, a big civilization will replace human civilization in the future you think? Yes or no?
43. S2: No, no, no
44. T: So what's the point?
45. S2: It's a new different...
46. T: Its a new different civilization, so you think there will be some discrimination between human civilization and other civilization? Right?
47. S2: Yes.
48. T: So interesting point, thank you. Any one else?
49. S3: People will die and the earth will disappear.
50. T: And the earth will disappear. So, so where will the human beings go?
51. S3: Die
52. T: Die, do you think human beings will move to other planets?
53. S3: Yes, maybe
54. T: So to which planet？
55. S3：... Mu.
56. T: Mars, Mars, OK, and maybe or some others?
57. S3: ... Beiji.
58. T: OK, Its much time to share, I got much fantasy about tomorrow's world.

From the perspective of turn-taking, Teacher A shares the right of turn-taking mainly through students' initiative to speak independently. It is up to the students to decide whether to respond and how to respond to the teacher's questions: waiting for the students' self-choice, even if the students can't answer, the teacher does not designate the students to answer, but advises the students to discuss (37); invites the students recommended by the discussion group to answer (36, 44). In a word, teachers should give turns to students as much as possible. Even if the student's answer is incorrect, the teacher does not choose another student until he solicits other possible answers (50, 52), and expands them into new knowledge points after they answer the question by themselves.

Extract 4 Teacher B

59. T: Where do we often read the news report? Where do we often to read them? Yes?
60. S1: In the newspaper and the internet.
61. T: Yes, very good, sit down please. Maybe in the newspapers, what else?
62. S1: ......
63. T: On the internet, right? And what else?
64. S2:......
65. T: Maybe in the... sit down please, yes?
66. S3: Maybe in the internet.
67. T: on the internet, in the newspaper, what else?
68. S3: ...
69. T: Maybe in the magazine, right? OK, sit down please. In the newspapers, in the magazines or on the internet. There are so many news reports around us, so How can we get the information we need or are interested in as quickly as possible? ... yes?
70. S4: We can read the title and the first paragraph.
71. T: The title and the first paragraph, OK, good. Sit down please, just now, we show you some... at the beginning of the class; I show you some pictures, right? So from these pictures, we can guess what the news report about, right?
72. S: Yes
73. T: So pictures can help us to get information from the news report. Now, let's check it out.
74. T: The report A talks about?
75. S5: The death of king.
76. T: The British king...
77. S5: Ur...Queen... ur... E...
78. T: Elizabeth. Right? OK, good, sit down please.

As for Teacher B, from the perspective of turn-taking, because students do not answer questions actively or correctly, teachers mainly form the control of turn-taking by "re-selecting the respondent" and "interrupting the speech". All questions are asked by Teacher B, and students neither ask questions nor take the initiative to answer them. It is precisely because the students do not take the initiative to answer or answer incorrectly, Teacher B keep changing student to answer the question when they fail to answer it (63, 65). She uses a single classroom questioning strategy. It seems that they are repeatedly inviting students to answer the same question that they can't answer. And Teacher B interrupts the speech for avoiding mistakes. One example is that when the student doesn't know the answer, the teacher tells the answer directly and says "sit down please" (69), the other is when the student gives broken answers; Teacher B gives the answer without waiting for the student to think and asks the student to sit down (78).

Feedback

Teacher feedback can be classified from different angles. The simplest classification is to divide feedback

into positive feedback and negative feedback (Nunan 1991). Positive feedback refers to teachers' positive response to students' performance through discourse; negative feedback refers to teachers' denial of learners' language output through discourse and their response and evaluation to students' errors, namely corrective feedback (Lin & Zhou, 2011). This paper will analyze teacher feed back in terms of these two aspects.

Table 1
The Comparison and Analyze of Different Feedback Types of Teacher A and Teacher B

Types of feedback	Teacher A	Teacher B
Positive feedback	Nice point	OK, good*10
	Yes*7	OK, thank you*7
	That's a problem of using VR.	OK, that's very good*2
	Yeah, it cost so much, yeah.	Yes
	Yes, very good	Yeah, that's right*4
	Good point thank you	
	That right, thanks.	
	Yeah, she is very good.	
	OK *2	
Negative feedback	That's all?	Comment right? not content.
	So where will the human beings go?	Eleven? I mean not 11:45, but 12:45
	Do you think human beings will move to other planets?	You mean this sentence tell us why did London win?
	First, express your opinion.	You can think about it after class.
		Anyone else has different opinion?

In Table 1, speech act of Teacher A's students is encouraged by means of weakening and positive evaluation. On the one hand, aiming at encouraging students to think and express more about their thoughts, Teacher A does not choose to deny students directly when they make mistakes, instead, he weakens the negative feedback by further questions ("That's all?", "So where will the human beings go?", "Do you think human beings will move to other planets?") and guiding words ("First, express your opinion."). On the other hand, Teacher A responds to students' right answers pertinently with the repetition ("Yeah, it cost so much, yeah.", "Yeah, she is very good.") or specific evaluation ("That's a problem of using VR.") of students' answers. This kind of positive feedbacks also encourage students to express more with the confirm of teacher.

However, Teacher B gives positive feedback using simple and common words ("OK, good", "OK, thank you", "OK, that's very good", "Yes", "Yeah, that's right"), which can respond to every student. This kind of positive feedback can't mobilize students' initiative effectively. Students' enthusiasm for answering questions was also undermined by teachers' negative feedback, such as direct negation ("Comment right? not content.", "Eleven? I mean not 11:45, but 12:45", "You can think about it after

class."), rhetorical questions ("You mean this sentence tell us why did London win?") and re-select the respondent ("Anyone else has different opinion?").

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Xiang Maoying (2004), there are three types of teacher identities, namely, (1) authoritarian, (2) laissez-faire and (3) democratic. Authoritarian teacher means that teachers mainly rely on traditional and compulsory forces to influence students. Teachers emphasize guidance, control and supervision of students, decide everything in the classroom by themselves, and even adopt compulsory means to interfere with students' behavior; The laissez-faire teacher refers to a teacher who pays little attention to the needs of students, lectures on his own in the classroom, does not understand and listen to students' opinions on teaching, and is far away from students emotionally and psychologically; Democratic teacher refers to a teacher who respects students and treats them equally. In the classroom, teachers do not cover everything, but according to the teaching requirements, create opportunities for students to participate in classroom activities.

Table 2
A Contrast of Teacher A and Teacher B Conversation Strategies and Identity Characteristics

	Teacher A	Teacher B
Question types	Average number of each question types (closed question=7, repeat question=5, open question=6)	Closed and repeat questions occupy the most important proportion for classroom management
Lexical characteristics	Using pronouns to show their equal discourse relationship with students	Using "We", "Us", "Let's" or formal address to reduce or increase distance from students
Turn-taking	Sharing the right of turn-taking mainly through students' initiative to speak independently.	Mainly form the control of turn-taking by "re-selecting the respondent" and "interrupting the speech"
Feedback	Weaken negative feedback Specific positive feedback	Positive feedback with simple words Negative feedback of direct negation, rhetorical questions and re-select respondent
Effectiveness	Questions can be solved through Teacher's guide. Students always take the initiative to answer questions. Classroom atmosphere is harmonious and harmonious.	Students never take the initiative to answer Students' anxiety and loss of confidence
Identity characteristics	Restriction + Support Democratic Teacher	Strict Control Authoritarian Teacher

According to the different application ways of the two teachers' conversational strategies (see Table 1), Teacher A seems to show the identity characteristics of democratic teachers, he controls just a part of the interaction and mobilize students' initiative by giving students every

types of questions, using pronouns to show equal discourse relationship with students, sharing the right of turn-taking and giving proper feedback. He respects students, treats them equally and creates opportunities for students to participate in classroom activities; it's just the characteristics of a democratic teacher.

While Teacher B shows more the identity characteristics of authoritarian teachers, she uses a lot of closed and repeat questions for classroom management, uses informal or formal address to make the relationship uncertain, controls of turn-taking and gives simple feedback. That's the characteristic of authoritarian teacher, she emphasize guidance, control and supervision of students, decide everything (question types, lexical choose, turn-takings, feedbacks) in the interaction by herself without caring about the students' feeling, and fails to mobilize their initiative.

Identity always exists relatively to others. Teachers' identity through classroom dialogues with students is the result of teachers' and students' co-construction. Without the role of students, teachers can not build their identity unilaterally. For example, the construction of teacher B's authoritarian identity is related to students' inactivity to answer questions in class (non-answer or wrong answer may lead to teachers' continuous choice of interlocutors). The construction of teacher A's democratic identity is also related to students' positive classroom response. Students' answers, whether correct or incorrect, can provide teachers with clues that they can't answer (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, pp.21-22), so that they may adopt other strategies such as guidance, suggestion and new knowledge. If we want to build a truly equal classroom discourse relationship, we needs to provide more opportunities for students to express themselves.

The results of this study on teacher identity only applies to the two lecture videos in the study. These two classes alone cannot be used to conclude that the two teachers are "authoritarian" or "democratic". But this research tells what kind of language strategy can cause "authoritarian" or "democratic" identities, which has fulfilled the purpose of this paper.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this analysis has shown the conversational strategies used to establish democratic and authoritarian teacher identities. In order to be a democratic teacher who can mobilize students' initiative to thinking and expressing, we need to ask more uptake and open questions, use pronouns to show our equal discourse relationship with students, share the right of turn-taking through students' initiative to speak independently, give specific positive feedback and weaken negative feedback through guiding the students to find the answer independently.

Conversational strategies are a powerful tool which can hugely influence the construction of teacher identity and the effectiveness of interaction of the class. As a consequence, they are worthy of further study. This study contributes to a more concrete description of how different conversational strategies are used to construct different teacher identities. It is hoped that this research will be enlightening to the teacher identity construction and the teacher-student interactions in English classroom, and can effectively improve the enthusiasm of students to be active in teacher-student interactions.

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