

Chapter 7

Expanding Understandings of Race in Postsecondary Language Classrooms: A Call for Multiraciality in Teacher Identity Research

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ABSTRACT

While issues of race in relation to teacher identity have been addressed in language education research, they have often been confined to special issues. Factors contributing to the “absent-present” nature of race include an imbalanced focus on intersectionality which tends to prioritize the teacher’s linguistic identity over other social categories, such as race and the persistent dichotomy between the idealized native speaker and non-native speaker. To broaden the understandings of race in teacher identity research within postsecondary language classrooms, this chapter advocates for considering the notion of multiraciality. To support these arguments, results from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of four empirical studies are presented. The analysis demonstrates that race is often perceived as fixed and singular. The findings suggest that language educators and researchers should engage in critical thinking about how they describe and racially classify students and participants.

INTRODUCTION

Literature on teacher identity in language-related fields, including applied linguistics, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and Second Language Acquisition (SLA), has long shown that teachers construct multiple identities across space and time through discursive, narrative, and concrete socially situated practices (Braine, 1999; Cheung et al., 2015; Choe & Seo, 2021; Hallman, 2009;

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Kubota & Lin, 2009; Nagamoto, 2012; Trent, 2015; Varghese et al., 2005). While contextual influences impact teacher identity construction, self-knowledge is a crucial dimension for identity development because it prompts teachers to interrogate how their linguistic and social identities, including their racial identity, interact with and influence their pedagogical practices (Alsup, 2006; Motha et al., 2012; Santoro, 2009). From this perspective, racialization is inevitably salient in the teaching of language (Charles, 2019; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Motha, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017; Park et al., 2023; Shuck, 2006). However, although issues of race in connection to teacher identity have been addressed in language education research, they have often been relegated to special issues (Kubota & Lin, 2006; Varghese et al., 2016). At least two factors have obscured the complex notion of race in teacher identity research. The first is an overt focus on intersectionality—a framework for understanding how a person’s subjectivities and characteristics (e.g., class, gender, roles) intersect with unequal systems and structures shaping the person’s experience (Crenshaw, 1989; Loden & Rosener, 1990). In teacher identity work, there has been an imbalanced focus on intersectionality that tends to privilege the teacher’s linguistic identity over other social categories like race, class, and gender (Ellis, 2016; Varghese et al., 2016).

The second factor is the hierarchical dichotomy of the idealized native speaker teacher (NST) and non-native speaker teacher (NNST), which continues to serve as a guiding principle for conducting teacher identity research (Moussu & Llorca, 2008; Shuck, 2006; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). This dichotomy, when viewed through a critical racial perspective, operates within a mono-ideological framework (e.g., monoracial and monolingual). It typically assumes the NST as having one race (White) and being English monolingual, and the NNST as having one race (non-White) and being non-English monolingual, without questioning the logic behind that assumption (Charles, 2019; Motha, 2014; Ruecker & Ives, 2015). Even critical perspectives such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Raciolinguistics, used to inform our work on language teacher identity research, operate in a bicolored fashion—either/or—classifying people as either people of color or having White identities (Alim et al., 2016; Daniel et al., 2014; Rosa & Flores, 2015). As a result, critical perspectives have unintentionally perpetuated monoraciality, a belief that prohibits individuals from identifying with more than one racial group or background on the basis that racial differences are necessary for maintaining solidarity within a group and its identity (Jordan et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

The above discussion underscores the importance of continuing to interrogate, uncover, problematize, and eliminate the pervasiveness of mono-ideologies such as monolingualism, monoraciality, and racism in teacher identity work. To carry out this task, it is crucial that we critique our critical perspectives and incorporate underrepresented groups (Rudolph & Yazan, 2023). One population of language educators overlooked in language identity research is individuals who identify as multiracial or mixed race, defined as having two or more racial backgrounds (Patton et al., 2016). Therefore, in this chapter, I argue that, to enhance our understanding of the powerful role racialized mono-ideologies play in the postsecondary language classroom, the field should include the notion of multiraciality in teacher identity research.

The goal of this chapter is threefold: 1) to provide an overview of how the socio-historical mechanisms of hypodescent and anti-miscegenation laws helped normalize a monoracial ideology in the U.S. context; 2) to discuss how the legacy of these mechanisms extended monoracial ideologies in education, specifically in language teacher identity research and critical perspectives; 3) to propose the notion of multiraciality in teacher identity research as a way to challenge the colonial ‘common sense’ of maintaining a racial dichotomy mentality. To support these claims, I discuss the critical analysis of four empirical studies that explore teacher identity in language instruction. I drew on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the notion of multiraciality as the theoretical framework to guide the analysis. The research

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