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"When a foreign language learner becomes a foreign language teacher…" – A cross-cultural study into the affective domain of teaching

ABSTRACT. The aim of this paper is to characterize early experiences of future teachers of English in Polish and Turkish contexts; describe their emotions and attitudes as well as analyze their evaluations of the past situations. When a foreign language learner becomes a foreign language teacher…, firstly s/he has to transform from a FL student to a FL teacher, develop the ability to talk about one's early experiences and relate them to future growth. In this sense, narrative inquiry largely helps in contextualizing and transforming one's experience. The data collected for the study involve narratives produced by Turkish and Polish teacher trainees.

KEYWORDS: narrative inquiry, narratives, foreign language teacher development, novice teachers' emotions.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Learning to teach requires the change of perspective from that of a learner into that of a foreign language teacher. Bernat (2009) compares the process of becoming a language teacher to the process of turning from

a caterpillar to a butterfly. In practical terms, it means the need to reconceptualize, restructure and redefine one's self as a teacher. It also means the ability to identify one's self as a learner and one's self as a teacher and differentiate between the two.

Current research into foreign language education represents two tendencies. The former indicates a shift from transmission, product- oriented approach to constructivist, process- oriented theories (Crandall 2000: 34) which suggest the means for elicitation and reflection necessary to reconstruct, reconceptualize and reshape one's identity.

 The latter stresses the role of emotion in stimulating cognitive change (Borg 2006; Golombek, Johnson 2004; Folsom 2005). Foreign language teacher stops to be defined as unidimensional creature, but starts to be perceived as a human being that has feelings and emotions. According to Golombek and Johnson (2004: 322-4), emotions are a driving factor in teacher development, as they promote self-analysis and self-inquiry. Additionally, emotions may facilitate understanding of one's personal teaching theory and enrich teacher's personal interpretative framework. Emotions may also serve as a point of departure for the process of reflection.

Narrative inquiry, described both as a method and a phenomenon, combines all of these elements. As Savvidou (2011) observes, a narrative approach to teacher development proposes a model of learning that is appreciative, meaningful, reflective and collegial.

1.1. Narrative inquiry – a means for teacher professional development

The role of narratives in contextualizing teacher experience and shaping teacher identity was pointed out by many authors (Babiaková 2009; Crandall 2000; Gabryś-Barker 2012; Gade 2011; Javornik Krečič 2010; Mann 2005; Mitton-Skükner et al. 2010; Montalbano, Ige 2011; Sinclair Bell 2002; Xu, Connelly 2009; Tabor 2008; Werbińska 2007; 2009).

Literature in narrative research has its roots in literary traditions (Gade 2011). However, in the late 60s and 70s, narratives became the focus of evolving interdisciplinary field of narrative study, influenced by structuralist literary theory, sociolinguistics and cognitive psychology. Narratives soon become the central means by which people give their lives meaning across time (Pavlenko 2007: 164).

Sinclair Bell (2002) points out that narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures.

Others (e.g. Connelly, Clandinin 1990; 2000; Flyvbjerg 2005) compare humans to 'storytelling organisms who, individually and socially lead storied lives.' In other words, individuals pay attention to those elements of the experience that they select and they pattern those elements in ways that reflect the stories. Thus, narrative analysis focuses on the meanings individuals give their stories, that is, the interpretations attributed to an experience rather than the experience per se (Riessman 1993; Riessman 2005). Consequently, teacher narrative inquiry is an approach to professional development that makes use of the 'natural learning experiences' teachers encounter in their professional lives (Day 1999). Based on ideas of reflective learning (Schön 1983), storytelling engages teachers in critically reflecting on experience and becoming conscious of the tacit knowledge that is embedded in their stories.

Narrative inquiry fulfils several functions:

– it is a unique way for teachers to 'organize, articulate and communicate' knowledge of teaching and reflect on what they know and believe about teaching. (Johnson, Golombek, 2002: 7);

– it allows the individual to summarize their learning experience and feelings from a rather long time period and sometimes to compare them in several different contexts. (Herman 2009, cited by Gade 2011);

– it helps teachers to reflect on 'things they might not have noticed before' (Elbaz-Luwisch 1997: 75);

– it enables teachers to critique prevailing knowledge and ideologies of teaching and construct personal theories of teaching. (Ritchie, Wilson 2000);

– narratives indicate the complexity of teaching as a profession Crandall (2000: 40), because when language learners are asked to tell their stories, they inevitably address their contextual, situational and cultural factors as a part of the story of their learning (Oxford 1996: 582). Similarly, Pavlenko (2002: 214) talks about co-constructed nature of narratives, which require the approach that combine sociohistorical, sociocultural and rhetorical analyses;

– narrative inquiry serves as a means to bridge the gap between research and practice (Gade 2011).

The role of teacher narrative inquiry in professional development is not without criticism. Pavlenko (2002: 214) believes that narratives cannot be simply treated as factual data subject to content analysis. Recent research convincingly demonstrates that narratives are not purely individual productions- they are powerfully shaped by social, cultural, and historical con-

ventions as well as by the relationship between the storyteller and the inter-
locutor (whether an interviewer, a researcher, a friend, or an imaginary
reader).

2. THE STUDY

The study was supposed to provide an answer to the following ques-
tions:

1. What problems did Polish and Turkish teacher trainees experience
while learning a foreign language?

2. How do the students in both groups narrate their experiences as
learners and teachers? What emotions do they describe?

3. What sense did they make of this experience as FL learners and future
FL teachers?

As a tool for collecting data, a personal narrative was used, in which the
subjects were requested to describe their own learning experiences and re-
flect on how the past experiences could be helpful in their current situation.

The choice of this type of introspective research narrative was deliberate
as according to Jensen (2006: 40, cited after Gade 2011) narrative in their
potential to derive meaning from the complicated reality (Jensen 2006: 40,
cited after Gade 2011). Oxford (1996: 581) adds that the value of self- reports
or recollective studies lies in their attempt to capture 'situated cognition'
(learning occuring in a particular context). Narrative usually consists of
2 parts:

– Telling of the past – e.g. describing the problems experienced in lan-
  guage learning,
– Anticipating future – e.g. describing their predicted responses to these
  situations as future teachers. In this sense, narrative inquiry combines
  structured reflection and evaluation of the situation.

The written assignment task was introduced at a similar time in both
contexts, i.e. Polish and Turkish. The details are presented below:

– Polish context: February 2011, number of participants: 96,
– Turkish context: March 2011, number of participants: 156.

The subjects could write at their narratives at home, which ensured the
time needed for reflection.

As far as teacher training standards in Poland and Turkey are con-
cerned, there are certain similarities between these two contexts, namely:

• Trainees, both in Poland and Turkey are likely to become future
  teachers of English as a foreign language.

- Foreign language teacher training programmes cover similar theoretical issues in language pedagogy, methodology of ELT, theory of L2 learning.
- Throughout the education the students obtain specialization in two subjects. In this particular study for Polish students these are English and German, whereas for Turkish students: English and Turkish.
- Both groups of students take part in practical training (180 h – observation and teaching under the supervision of others).
- The students in both countries develop ICT competence.
- They are at a similar level of language proficiency. Their command of a foreign language is estimated as B2, B2+ (scale: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

Yet, the most important difference between these two countries lies in the fact that Turkish students have to take an examination, proving their qualifications for teaching English as a foreign language and enabling them to perform the profession.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Thematic analysis of teacher narratives: subthemes – problems reported

One of the approaches to narratives is content analysis, based on identifying and analyzing major thematic treads. Thematic analysis of the students' reports in both groups shows that Polish and Turkish subjects experience problems with similar language areas, namely: grammar vocabulary and speaking. The difference, however, lies in the frequency of occurrence. Thus, for Polish students grammar seems the most difficult and speaking is placed in the third position in the ranking of difficulty. In contrast, for Turkish students, speaking is perceived to be the most problematic, whereas grammar- the least difficult (grammar occupies the third position in the ranking). Both groups of the students place vocabulary in the second position in the ranking of difficulty. The following samples of students' responses best illustrate the issue.

> 19: Simple Past Tense. I remember that it was very difficult for me to understand the use of auxiliary 'did' in this tense. I could not absorb the simple rule that when I create negative sentence or question, the main verb of the sentence 'goes back' to its base form. Sentences like *'I didn't went to cinema' or *'Did you went to the cinema yesterday?' seemed to be perfectly correct to me. I still keep in mind that I failed my first test on Past Simple because of that. My teacher was surprised because I was rather a good student.

33: I had problems remembering meaning of some new words which resembled the ones I already knew or Polish words – I made mistakes while translating them and couldn't remember the right meaning).

17: It is difficult to hold a spontaneous chat with another person. It is difficult to choose the right verb form and tense.

However, a closer look at the data indicates further differences. Turkish groups reported problems that mostly focused on language skills and sub-systems, such as: listening, writing, reading and pronunciation. They also perceived teaching materials as problematic, because they often considered them to be ineffective and boring. In contrast, Polish students mentioned difficulties which are indirectly related to the process of language learning, namely: problems with motivation (particularly motivation to learn) and low- self- efficacy. The student's response provides more details about this issue.

27: The lessons could hardly be classified as hard or stressful. I always came to them relaxed and cheerful and I also enjoyed them a lot. I do not find myself a slow learner, neither did I at that time. Yet, I was not making much progress. My problem was a certain absence of mind during the lessons. It was very hard for me to focus on the material (unless it was really entertaining) and remember it later. All the exercises I did as if mechanically and they were done correct. But later I nearly failed most of the test my teacher made me. Who was there to blame? I did not really care for my learning then. But after all, I was only a little boy, rather lacking in self-criticism and whose main aims were fun and playing).

Although Polish students enumerated similar language issues, i.e. reading, listening and pronunciation, they extended the list of problems by adding spelling to it. Writing was not perceived by Polish students as difficult, as was the case with Turkish group.

3.2. Thematic analysis of teacher narratives: feelings and coping strategies

'Emotion and cognition are distinguishable but inseparable' Schumann (1994: 239). The culture of teaching and learning typically 'does not take time to consider feelings' (Weinglas in: Oxford 1996: 581). Yet, foreign teacher professional development is marked by emotions, experienced by teachers at particular stages of their careers. Acquiring expertise in teaching is thus strictly connected with moving alongside a continuum of various emotions. As Head and Taylor (1997: 169) point out, the stages of change are always accompanied by emotions that influence our reaction. Undertak-

ing any kind of change implies riding through stages of optimism and pessimism. The authors say that throughout the professional development teachers are likely to experience a wide spectrum of emotions, ranging from uninformed optimism, informed pessimism (accompanied by the feeling of doubt), realism (hope) and finally informed optimism (confidence).

Researchers (Babiaková 2009; Oxford 1996; Pavlenko 2007; Tabor 2008; Werbińska 2009) agree that narratives provide an opportunity to express and transform teachers' own feelings, which consequently empowers them and triggers reflection about cognitive and affective aspects of teacher development. The analysis of students' self-reports shows that early experiences of a language learner are inseparably connected with a great deal of emotional involvement. The range of emotionally loaded words as well as their density prove how personal and self- relevant this experience was for the students. The list of the most frequently mentioned emotions that appeared in the narratives is provided below. They are organized according to frequency ranking:

– Discomfort, frustration due to cognitive complexity of the language issues, difficulty, lack of predictability in the language; lack of logic and rules, which resulted in necessity to guess)

22: … Her explanation did not really cut any ice with me: "Listen" (I said) Two words in English cannot possibly mean the same thing as one Polish word. It is against common sense! After that outburst she refused to teach me any longer.
2: I had the impression that English is illogical.

– Confusion
– Discouragement

9: The amount of new words was pushing me away…
26: I made a lot of mistakes and it discouraged me…

– Fear (e.g. of initiating the conversation, of making a mistake)

8: Every lesson showed me how many issues are in front of me. In some way it was interesting but also made me scary…Later I was afraid of asking questions/
31: Learning English is scary.

– Hopelessness, lack of belief in one's coping potential

26: I started learning English in the fourth class of primary school and I had not had almost any contact with that language before. At the beginning of learning my experiences were not good, I faced some problems which at first seemed to me as obstacles impossible to overcome.
7: This situation get me down because I realized that I could not manage with idioms and phrasal verbs and I was too proud to ask my teacher for help (I have always been the best at English) = disillusionment.

– Doubt

> 17: I'm not sure which article to use while speaking or writing.
> 2: Even after many years of studying I am not always confident which tense or expression should be used or is the most suitable for a particular sentence.

- Lack of confidence

> 15: I wasn't confident to speak in front of others
> 8: I thought that they (my questions) are stupid and concern things I should be familiar with.

– Surprise

> 10: I have problems with learning the elements that are present in English but have no counterpart structures in Polish. Even after learning by heart all the rules when, how and why to use a particular tense in a particular situation, very frequently I am surprised to find out that the tense I want to use would sound strange or would be unintelligible for the native speakers of English.

– Strong dislike
– Indifference (Why bother? Attitude), lack of involvement in the process of language learning.

Analyzing the data, one can observe that negative emotions prevail. The trainees experience various ranges of tension related feelings, including discomfort, frustration, confusion, etc. They feel de- skilled and tend to question their predisposition towards language learning. At that time, the subjects felt overwhelmed by some of the language issues, which seemed too difficult to be dealt with.

When asked about the coping strategies, the subjects decided to apply the coping strategies that were available to them at that time, namely: studying harder and changing one's learning habits. These two answers were mentioned most frequently in the narratives of both Polish and Turkish students. However, there are also some differences observable in these groups. For example: Turkish students preferred to ask teachers for help and used a mixture of different strategies, whereas Polish students resorted only to few strategies. Additionally, Polish students tended to ask others for help (e.g. Mum, friend, etc.), but not a language teacher. Another difference observed is that Turkish displayed a tendency to choose problem focused or language focused strategies, i.e. strategies that would enable them to directly "attack" the problem. At the same time. Polish students preferred a combination of problem focused strategies, emotion focused strategies (e.g. building positive self- confidence) and attitude focused strategies (e.g. becoming aware of things that need improvement, change of attitude as a result of the change of teaching).

3.3. De-storying

Narrative inquiry combines two things, i.e. narrating the past and anticipating the future. J. Mitton-Skükner, C. Nelson and C. Desrochers (2010: 1168) stress the role of de-storying (restorying). Restorying is different from and more than the completion of self-evaluation or an evaluation self-check. In narrative inquiry, restorying is considered identity work for it is the process of articulating how an experience has been educative.

In this particular study, the respondents were requested to write what they had learnt from this situation, i.e. evaluate the situation from the time perspective and related it to their current state.

Analysis of that part of narratives show that certain issues overlap. Both groups appreciate the fact of overcoming the problems and learning a lesson from this experience. Past experience empowered the subjects in the sense that it increased their self- knowledge and self-confidence, served as a motivational incentive for further work Past experiences also allowed the subjects to look at the process of language teaching and learning from a different perspective, i.e. as a long and evolving process that requires time or effort (problems are natural and necessary; various learners share similar problems).

Another point worth mentioning is the fact that past experiences helped the subjects in both groups to change attitudes or rearrange the hierarchy of what was important in the process of language learning. The support for this point lies in what one of the Turkish students said about the benefits of the past situation:

1: Learning how to overcome the vocabulary problems and take delight from it.

Comparing present and past resulted in the subjects' evaluation of the techniques, also in a negative sense (some techniques were described as ineffective). The students also expressed negative evaluation of the previous teachers and their instruction:

6: Now, I think that my teacher's method of learning vocabulary was ineffective… Teacher should know how to attract students' attention.

However, both groups display slight differences in the way they approached this part of the task. Polish students focused more on the evaluation of the techniques used to deal with the problems in general. They also commented upon the types of help and quality of support they were offered. Polish students noticed some benefits that they gained from that situation as language learners and individuals (e.g. breaking barriers, increasing self- knowledge, gaining awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses). Polish students also stressed the fact that overcoming problems

gave them satisfaction, provided opportunity for learning and becoming independent. The sample below best illustrates the point.

> 13: I would not change anything about my past decision because thanks to it I am now who I am. I cannot imagine myself doing something else than studying English language.

In contrast, Turkish students were more specific about the problems they encountered while developing particular language skills and they focused more on language learning and the teaching process. They seemed to concentrate on what they needed to improve as learners. Enumerating skills and areas that required further work, e.g. speaking, writing was also quite common. Additionally, Turkish students expressed some comments concerning the modification of their behaviour (e.g.: *I should have been more confident*) or they highlighted what teachers needed to change (e.g. be more interactive). Some of the subjects realized that they still have had some problems with language learning.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study proved that giving voice to or disclosing their own stories allows students to become more self-aware and to increase self- knowledge. Additionally, it results in gaining a new perspective on a language learning process and understanding other language learners.

The research showed some differences in the interpretation of the very task. Turkish students interpreted the term 'problems' as referring to the language itself. As a result, they focused more on language issues as well as features of the didactic process that were perceived as troublesome. In contrast, Polish students took a broader perspective. Apart from linguistic and didactic aspects, they also concentrated on affective factors, e.g. motivation, confidence, student's beliefs in their own learning potential that had some impact on their foreign language learning. The following comment provided by the Polish students summarizes this issue.

> 16: There was lack of motivation and negligence that result in mistakes, made in spelling and pronunciation. It was a vicious circle – no motivation and no progress.

When it comes to language issues, similar problems were reported in both groups, i.e. grammar, vocabulary and speaking. However, the frequency of occurrence as well as ranking of difficulty differed in both groups.

Past situation was interpreted by both of the groups as a source of power and satisfaction, a motivating factor or an *experience that provided*

a valuable lesson. Students gained awareness of the issues that are indispensable in learning as well as certain conditions that determine learning, i.e.: time or effort.. One Turkish student said: „*No pain, no gain*", whereas a Polish student commented it in the following way:

> 2: I learned an important principle: 'Practice makes perfect.'

Reflecting upon the past experiences also resulted in Polish in re- evaluating oneself, one's learning and attitude. This in turn brought surprise, disbelief or change of beliefs about oneself. The following comments issued by Polish students illustrate the point.

> 8: Now I see that in some point maybe I was learning not enough, and then it was more difficult to cope with everything.
> 19: Now, when I think of it, it seems ridiculous to me. As I mastered the construction of almost all grammatical tenses of English, I know that both Present and Past Simple are based on the same rule and I wonder why I have had problems with Past Simple while I quickly got through Present Simple.

Polish students expressed their regret upon wasted opportunities, lack of commitment (i.e. *I did not study hard enough*), lack of involvement to improve one's language skills. Interestingly such comments were not present in Turkish group.

In Hirsch and Peterson's opinion, narratives about an individual's life trajectory, including subjective descriptions of the past and the future, appear to be central to selfhood and identity (Hirsh, Peterson 2009: 524). Teacher professional identity is not an exception. All of the students in both groups focused more on the learners' side, relatively few of them were able to look at it from the teacher's perspective – the transformation from a language learner to a language teacher is a demanding process. It was easier for students in both groups to narrate the past (i.e. their experience as learners) rather than anticipate the future.

Still, some questions remain unanswered, which would justify the continuation and extension of the research. These are as follows:
- To what an extent the selected problems reflect the personally significant problems or the ones that the students were ready to report (i.e. to share with others)?
- How many of other problems that language student teachers experienced are still unsolved?
- To what extent does language proficiency limit students' spontaneity to narrate their experiences?

The research of this type has its drawbacks. Transforming from learners into teachers requires time (this type of critical reflection is referred to as

'a perspective transformation' by Leung and Kember 2003: 69). Thus, we may talk about the questioning of personal assumptions (inquiry) rather than a more fundamental change in orientation of practice during the training year.

The success of the study also depends on some personal and highly individual features, e.g. readiness for self- disclosure (revealing emotions, maturity for verbalization of the experiences).

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