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Editorial

The last century has been described as the century of 'self', during which individuals emerged as the major focus for research in social sciences. In language education, researchers have been long exploring individual language learners' contributions to the language learning process, especially since the 1990s, culminating into publication of Michael Breen's (2001) edited volume on *Learner Contributions to Language Learning*. Likewise, this interest in individual learners' role in language learning reciprocates the increased attention being paid to language teachers' cognition of teaching (e.g., Andrews, 2007; Borg, 2015). Accompanying such interests in individual learners' and teachers' cognition, there is also a growing awareness that language learning and teaching are not just about cognition. Language learning and teaching are now believed to involve a social process in which language learners/teachers constantly position themselves favorably and are being positioned by various counterparts in the same process (e.g., Gao, 2010; Tao & Gao, 2017). The need for researchers to examine such interactions in the language learning and teaching process motivates continuous efforts to explore identities and English language education. Works such as Norton (2000), Block (2007), Barkhuizen (2017) and Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) have revealed the complexity of social relations and the significance of identity as a conceptual lens to gain insights into the dynamics of language learning and teaching. These works have been mostly produced in non-Asian contexts where migrant language learners and language teachers need to cope with various challenges in helping migrant language learners improve linguistic competence for adaptation to host communities. In such contexts, who we are and what we would like to be regarded as become fundamental questions that every language teacher and migrant language learner needs to address. In Asian contexts where English is largely promoted as a foreign language, Block (2007) even argued that 'the prospects of TL-mediated subject positions in the FL context are minimal to non-existent' (p. 137). Nevertheless, identity in English language education has emerged to be a major concern for English language educators and policymakers in Asian contexts.

In Asia, we have witnessed ongoing waves of enthusiasm for learning English despite the fact that most Asian countries have long-standing historical and cultural traditions, which might be undermined by such craving for English and its cultural products (e.g., pop songs and movies). For instance, in China, one of the major Asian countries, English has always been treated with some ambiguity by the political establishment since the language is often associated with powerful aggressors historically (e.g., Adamson, 2002; Bolton, 2003). In Japan, there has been an ongoing debate on how to maintain its national integrity in light of the popular crush for English (e.g., Kubota, 1998; Liddicoat, 2007). Despite such reservations, Asian countries are embracing the English language and see it as a key to globalization in which they can access knowledge and capital for development. Amidst such ambiguity, researchers have begun to show great interest in exploring the identity issue in English language education. For example, Gao and cohort researchers have conducted a series of studies on Chinese learners of English focusing on identity and motivation against the background of the craze for learning English in preparation for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing (e.g., Xu & Gao, 2014). As Olympics will be held again in 2020 in Tokyo, Japan is probably witnessing a new wave of enthusiasm for learning English, sparking debates on English and national identity. Recent developments in countries like USA and UK raise the question as to whether globalization has encountered serious challenges, but in Asia, most countries still value globalization as a crucial

strategy for them to achieve development. The identity issue in English language education has also maintained its attraction as an important research topic.

This special issue addresses this growing interest in English language learners' and teachers' identities amidst cultural, educational, political and social changes that have been happening in Asian contexts. English language educators, educational administrators and policy makers now have to consider increasingly complex identity issues inside and outside language classrooms when designing, promoting and implementing particular English-related policies, curricula and pedagogical practices. In addition, rising voices of language learners and teachers concerning their identities also offer valuable insights concerning how language learners' learning and teachers' professional practice can be further enhanced. These growing concerns about learners' and teachers' identities also trigger major conceptual and methodological shifts in research so that the complexities of identity can be fully explored to inform the development of effective, ethical and sustainable pedagogical approaches. For these reasons, the papers in this special issue appreciate and examine identity-related issues in English language education *in situ*.

The first 4 articles concern language learners' identities in a variety of contexts. Turnbull's study addresses the complex concept of national and cultural identity in Japan's English language teaching context. It draws on an ongoing debate concerning whether the hegemony of the English language will undermine or strengthen the nationalistic constructions of the Japanese identity. By exploring the attitudes and perspectives of Japanese students, Turnbull evaluated to what extent these students endorse the nationalistic constructions of Japanese identity in relation to the West and how their views can inform the development of English language pedagogy in Japan. Instead of focusing on such interaction between macro contextual discourses and language learner identities, McKinley examines the constructions of Japanese students' writer identity in academic English writing. He probed the *selves* displayed by Japanese students in academic writing in relation to their prior learning experiences. Through an ongoing analysis of Japanese students' written texts, regular student and teacher interviews and classroom observations for a year, he identified that writing instructors' expectations and personal beliefs had profoundly mediated these students' identity constructions. McKinley's findings on the mediation of significant others such as writing instructors on Japanese students' writer identity development is echoed by Huang's study on Taiwanese adolescent English learners' motivational selves and their parents' expectations. Noting that Taiwanese English learners approach the learning of English as a duty and obligation, Huang advances a cultural and relational understanding of the self system to appreciate these learners' motivation for learning English. He found that Taiwanese adolescent learners of English are expected by their parents to be successful global citizens and assume the learning of English is a part of their societal roles and social obligations. In such contexts, parental expectations and involvement seem to be inseparable from adolescent learners' self development in the motivated language learning process. In contrast to the above-mentioned studies on language learners' identity issues in home contexts, Lee, Hunter and Franken's study on an Asian migrant learner's struggle for gaining access to a university degree programme in New Zealand reveals how the learner negotiated with identity constraints imposed on her and transformed herself into a university student and successful language learner. The results have significant implications for policy makers and language educators in helping migrant learners to survive and succeed in new contexts through identity negotiation and reconstruction.

The second cluster of articles consists of 3 studies on English language teachers' identity struggles in mainland China, Thailand and Malaysia. Li and De Costa draw on an agency-centered approach to explore an English language teachers' professional identity in a private language school in mainland China where she is responsible for preparing her students for the IELTS test. They examined how the teacher went beyond what she was expected to do by the private language school and exercised agency in achieving professional identity development as mediated by the contextual affordances and constraints. Loo investigated non-local English teacher identity by focusing on conflicts and agency emergent from their narratives in Bangkok, Thailand. The results suggest that the teacher participants experienced conflicts associated with various stakeholders in the process, such as employers' expectations and students' circumstances. The study also revealed that participants with stronger social support were more willing to

accept differences between them and stakeholders with regard to their expectations of teaching. Those with weaker social support were more likely to adapt teaching in response to other stakeholders' expectations or oppose their interference. These results indicate that contextual processes and conditions profoundly mediate the pursuit of professional identities and professional growth. Unlike the aforementioned studies on teachers in private language schools, Adi Badiozaman looks at the academic identity development of English language teachers who had transited from teaching in secondary schools to lecturing in Malaysia's higher education institutions. The study examined how these university English teachers' academic identities evolved and what factors mediate their identity development. Echoing findings from the other two studies, Adi Badiozaman found that participants' self-concepts were dynamic and are mediated by various internal and external factors in both past and present contexts. Self-concept was also found to have played a key role in participants' identity development as it is closely related to motivation and career goals. These findings have important implications for the development of strategies to support university English teachers' transition into Malaysia's higher education institutions.

The aforementioned studies have examined quite a few identity-related issues with largely qualitative methodological approaches but they do not sufficiently capture the variety of contexts whereas readers of this journal grapple with significant identity-related challenges. This limitation has been caused by many constraints on the editing of this special issue, in particular the time given to the editor and authors to produce publishable manuscripts. Nevertheless, this special issue could open up a dialogic space for ongoing identity-related discussions that are of serious concern to readers of this journal in Asia and other contexts.

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