Humanities & Social Sciences Communications

ARTICLE

https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-04276-8 OPEN

Understanding teacher identity construction through hybridity theory: a case study of a Chinese-Canadian teaching English in China

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Globalization has given rise to a new generation of English language teachers, including transnational teachers, who have complex teacher identities that the traditional "native" versus "non-native" English teacher dichotomy fails to capture adequately. Researchers have problematized this dichotomy by applying theories such as poststructuralism. However, there is a lack of consensus on a theory that can challenge the monolingual model and the language hierarchy to support the development of teacher identity. Consequently, this case study draws on the theory of hybridity from sociology and uses narrative inquiry and interviews to explore the evolution of a Chinese-Canadian English teacher, Sally, in constructing her teacher identity, which includes both achievements and challenges. The study contributes to the literature by attempting to lessen the impact of the language hierarchy and the "native" versus "non-native" dichotomy through empirical evidence supporting hybridity theory. The findings reveal the complexity of Sally's teacher identity development across various contexts, resulting in numerous struggles. This complexity aligns with hybridity theory. Moreover, Sally outlines her coping strategies, which could help transnational teachers overcome obstacles and successfully broaden their teacher identities. The study discusses theoretical and pedagogical implications for the development of English language teacher identity and teacher training.

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Introduction

The world has become increasingly interconnected and pluralistic. Consequently, the relationships between people's language choices, culture, and identity within various communities are becoming more dynamic, complex, context-dependent, and imbued with power (Jackson 2014, p. 271). Researchers have been challenging the "native" speaker ideology for over two decades, beginning with Wiley and Lukes' (1996) analysis of popular linguistic ideologies, monolingualism, and standard English perspectives, yet they have not fully addressed issues related to such ideologies. The "native" speaker ideology is founded on prejudice and stereotypes, granting superiority to the knowledge and voices of Western English language teaching institutions and endowing people with the perceived 'right' to categorize language teachers as "native" or "non-native" English speakers (Lowe and Kiczkowiak 2016). For example, Braine (2010) noted that people typically distinguish "native" speakers from their "non-native" counterparts based on country of origin, names, ethnicity, skin color, and accent (pp. 9–10). Lee (2017) argued that the assumed hierarchy of "native" and "non-native" speakers is an ideological construct driven by colonialist notions of cultural stratification and language ownership, which led to the establishment of the "native" speaker model.

As such, for a few decades, researchers have been attempting to challenge the monolingual model and the "native" English teacher versus "non-native" English teacher dichotomy (e.g., Angay-Crowder et al. 2021), a model that is both inequitable and inadequate for reflecting today's complex, globalized world. The monolingual model and language hierarchy have been criticized by numerous researchers (e.g., Frigolé and Tresserras 2023). Some researchers have come up with alternative theories, such as the translingual approach (e.g., Lee and Canagarajah 2019; Nagashima 2023), translanguaging (Garcia and Lin 2017; Li 2021), and multiplicity of identity (Norton 2016), to reduce the negative impacts of the "native" speaker model. Along the same line, in the current study, hybridity theory will be adopted as the theoretical framework and introduced to the field as an alternative theory by capturing the complexity of identities in a pluralistic and globalized world. This theory not only problematizes language hierarchies but also attempts to soften the dichotomy between "native" versus "non-native" English teachers (Rubdy and Alsagoff 2014).

Although some previous researchers have examined the concepts of "third space" and "hybridity," they have applied these terms to different notions and situations. For example, while some education researchers have used the concept of 'third space' (Bhabha 1994) in curriculum development (Wang and Flory 2021), in shaping pre-service teachers' teacher identity (Chu 2021; McIntyre and Hobson 2015; Williams 2014), and in teaching English as a foreign language (Ai and Wang 2017), "hybridity" is a term often used by scholars across various fields to challenge traditional views of identity and identity formation in post-colonial contexts (e.g., in sociology, Bhabha 1994; and in feminism, Anzaldúa 1987). In the field of language education, Gutiérrez et al. (1999) have advocated for the use of hybridity in diverse language learning classroom contexts.

In the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), several theoretical concepts are frequently employed, such as translanguaging as a pedagogical approach and political stance for decolonization (García and Lin 2017; Li 2021), the concept of identity multiplicity (Norton 2016), and translingualism (Lee and Canagarajah 2019; Nagashima 2023). Research in translanguaging suggests that learners' linguistic repertoires are highly beneficial for acquiring an additional language and advocates for the equality of all languages (Li 2021). Similarly, the concept of identity multiplicity, recognizing that identity is fluid, dynamic, and often marked by struggles, can facilitate language learning (Norton 2016). Lastly, translingual teaching and learning methods are used by teachers to encourage students' innovative negotiations within the native speaker model (Lee and Canagarajah 2019; Nagashima 2023).

In this study, we draw upon Pieterse's (2019b) theory of hybridity to continue this line of research, where a learner or teacher's identity can evolve internally, without the need to physically cross borders. This theory advocates for the equity of all English teachers in the field of TESOL. The terms "hybrid identity" and "hybrid teacher identity" have been used by various researchers (e.g., Ai and Wang 2017; Canagarajah 2006; Liyanage and Canagarajah 2019; Liu 2021; Roy 2016). One of the primary aims of this paper is to adopt Pieterse's theory of hybridity from sociology to formally conceptualize "hybridity" in identity and identity formation in TESOL, particularly when a learner or teacher encounters diverse cultures within or beyond national borders.

However, there is a scarcity of empirical studies on hybridity and teacher identity, an area that merits further exploration by researchers. Thus, the current study, informed by hybridity theory, aims to investigate the case of Sally, a Chinese-Canadian English teacher, to understand how her diverse social contexts in Canada and China impact the formation and evolution of her hybrid English teacher identity as a Chinese-Canadian, as well as the challenges she encounters and the coping strategies she employs.

Review of Literature

Globalization and teacher identity. Globalization has been a prevalent force for some time, and learners and teachers alike are continuously shaping and reshaping their identities within this globalized context. This identity-shaping process is further complicated by the enduring legacies of globalization and colonization. Consequently, teacher educators must be more cognizant of how aspiring teachers situate themselves within various historical and institutional settings. They must also recognize the potential strategies for the formation and reformation of teacher identities (Kumaravadivelu 2012). Even in non-colonized countries within the expanding circle, like China, 'native' speakerism appears deeply entrenched. Liu (2022) discovered that all participant groups in her study, as well as the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in China, were still largely influenced by the monolingual model, often without acknowledging its inherent limitations.

From a post-structuralist perspective, identity is perceived as multifaceted, dynamic, and characterized by conflicts and struggles (Norton 2013). Concurrently, the development of teacher identity is a gradual and iterative process fraught with challenges (Vähäsantanen 2015). Various conceptual frameworks exist for understanding teacher identities, including Foucault's (1983) theory of ethical self-formation, which envisions the self as engaged in continuous self-improvement. Clarke (2009) also argued that teachers can take proactive measures and make ethical choices to resist negative influences and effectively utilize new linguistic and social resources. For transnational teachers who have crossed borders, these negative influences may highlight the inadequacy of monolingual ideologies and practices to meet their needs (Canagarajah 2018). Frameworks such as these suggest that there are numerous possibilities and opportunities for English language teachers to define and redefine their identities, including the ability to reject or embrace identities or labels assigned by others.

Some scholars, like Aneja (2016), have challenged the native speaker paradigm with the concept of "(non)native-speakering" and have advised English teachers to avoid discussing the binary of "native" and "non-native" speakers with students, who could be misled by these labels. It is impractical to categorize all English teachers strictly as "native" or "non-native" because cultural "purity" is a myth (Smith 2008). Moreover, these labels can lead to the marginalization of teacher identities in certain contexts (Reeves 2018). As a result, such classifications should not be applied in the evolving domain of teacher identity within today's globalized world (Grey and Morton 2018). A further rationale for moving beyond the "idealized native" English teacher is that the term "imperialism" is no longer sufficient to capture contemporary global dynamics (Pieterse, 2019b). Instead, the term "globalization" is proposed as a more appropriate descriptor.

Globalization, transnationalism, and the hybridity theory. Globalization is defined as "the trend of growing worldwide interconnectedness" (Pieterse 2019a, p. 59). To address the implications of globalization, Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992) introduced transnationalism as a novel analytic framework for comprehending migration. They conceptualized transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (p. 1). Pieterse (2019a) further explored the phenomena of globalization, proposing three paradigms: (1) enduring differences of cultures; (2) convergence of cultures; and (3) the in-betweenness of cultures. Globalization facilitates increased cross-border mobility, leading to cultural intermingling and the potential blurring of national boundaries. For instance, nations like Canada or New Zealand exhibit cultural diversity due to immigration. Immigrants in these contexts may experience multiple cultures and feel a sense of belonging to more than one culture, a phenomenon known as cultural hybridity. Hybridization is defined as "the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" (Rowe and Schelling 1991, p. 231, as cited in Pieterse 2019b). In essence, hybridization (or hybridity) in this study denotes the transformation of ideologies and identity—encompassing teacher identity—due to exposure to two or more cultures, whether within or beyond national borders. Such transformations originate from an individual's internal self, not solely from physical border crossings.

Hybridization advocates for resistance to cultural hegemony and may ultimately dismantle language hierarchies. We intend to adopt the hybridity theory from intercultural communications to further challenge the binary of "native" versus "non-native" English teachers for several reasons: (1) Hybridity challenges existing theories that emphasize boundary setting, instead highlighting fuzziness and border crossing (Pieterse 2019b); (2) Hybridity moderates power relations between centers and peripheries, the dominant and the dominated, proposing a reduction in hierarchy (Pieterse 2019b); (3) Hybridity counters essentialist views of identity and race (L. Lowe 1991, as cited in Pieterse 2019b).

Advocates of hybridity (or hybrid identity) regard it as advantageous, particularly in negotiating language and culture, which can be an asset (Smith 2008). Individuals in hybrid spaces benefit from possessing both local and global knowledge. A hybrid identity may also be more open to diverse backgrounds, such as cultural or linguistic differences, fostering inclusivity in multicultural communities (Zhao and Xiao 2020, 2021). Moreover, cultural "purity" is unattainable, as cultures naturally interweave (Smith 2008). Hybridity, therefore, is a cross-boundary process that could potentially disrupt hierarchical systems (Pieterse 2004). Under the hybridization theory, it is posited that everyone in the world has been influenced by exposure to multiple cultures, for example, through media consumption or travel. An individual with a hybrid identity perceives their engagement with various cultures as a singular, unified cultural identity, including teacher identity. This perspective could level the playing field for different languages and cultures, promoting diversity and potentially mitigating the impact of hierarchical language systems.

There is an important relationship between globalization, transnationalism and hybridity. Globalization represents the global trend of increasing interconnectivity and interdependence. Concurrently, transnationalism describes the process by which individuals who cross borders manage to develop and maintain various relations in both their home and host countries. A transnational identity can thus be adopted by people, including teachers, "who have cross-cultural living experiences between the home country and the host country" (Esteban-Guitart and Vila 2015, p. 182). Hybridity, as a theory, transcends boundaries within race, language, and nation, aiming to empower marginalized populations. In this context, the theoretical framework of "hybridity" shares similarities with other existing theories such as translanguaging and translingualism. However, while translanguaging and translingualism concentrate on teaching and learning practices with a political stance, hybridity highlights identity and identity formation within diverse cultural contexts.

The era of globalization has catalyzed numerous changes in the field of education, including new institutional policies and teacher training, revealing new research gaps in the existing literature. This has inspired English language teaching (ELT) researchers to further the study of teacher identities (Elsheikh and Yahia 2020; Kostoulas and Mercer 2016, as cited in Moser and Kletzenbauer 2019).

Globalization inevitably gives rise to transnational teachers. Earlier research indicates that the boundaries between different identities become blurred, and teachers' professional and sociocultural identities are interconnected (Armour 2004; Duff and Uchida 1997; Reynolds 1996). Moreover, teacher identity is recognized as multidimensional, fluid, and subject to change over time (Ortaçtepe 2015; Tsui 2007). Given the scarcity of studies on the identities of transnational teachers, some researchers have investigated the identities of transnational teachers in Korea, Taiwan, and the United States (Lee and Kim 2021; Lin et al. 2022; Menard-Warwick 2008; Musanti 2014; Zacharias 2019).

Unfortunately, in some studies, the monolingual model still prevails (Lee and Kim 2021; Zacharias 2019). Teacher identities in some contexts have been developed based on normative requirements deeply entrenched in close-minded and monolingual beliefs and behaviors. These have become the silent "rules" in the field (Weinmann and Arber 2017). This clearly indicates that more research is needed in this area so that English language teachers can develop their teacher identities to reflect their complexity, fluidity, and distinctiveness without as many struggles and misconceptions.

In the context of Taiwan, Lin et al. (2022) study revealed that Chinese adoptees (or Asian American teachers) inevitably confront their non-white racial identities, which forces them to use their agency to defend their identities. In this labor-intensive process, informing learners about diversity from these teachers' own experiences exhibits their competency and professionalism as teachers. English teachers, such as those in Lin et al. (2022) study, can potentially benefit from the theory of hybridity, which may ease their negotiation and legitimation of their complex cultural and teacher identities.

The concept of native speakerism has been challenged by numerous researchers, and some, such as Garcia and Lin (2017),

Li (2021), Lee and Canagarajah (2019), Nagashima (2023), and Norton (2016), have provided remedies to undermine the influence of "native" speakerism. The concept of transnationalism serves the same purpose. The theoretical framework of hybridity in this study aligns with this research direction. It addresses the missing pieces in existing frameworks in TESOL and is able to provide transnational individuals (including teachers) with a new cultural and teacher identity. This identity is connected to the conception of identity for people who are multicultural and whose choice of language reflects their multiple identities and mixed cultures to varying degrees. Consequently, linguistic and cultural hybridity captures the complexity of identities in an increasingly globalized world.

As previously mentioned, there is no 100% purity in one culture, and due to globalization, cultures influence one another. Therefore, the theory of hybridity challenges the idea of a dominant culture and calls for a re-evaluation of the hierarchies of cultures. It may be used to mitigate the inequitable power relations inherent in binaries such as the opposition between East and West and local versus global (Rubdy and Alsagoff 2014), which means it could also be used to soften the effect of the language hierarchy and the dichotomy between "native" and "non-native" English teachers. Additionally, there are concepts and observations from renowned scholars who advocated similar ideas to hybridity. For example, Norton (1997) contended that language not only represents an individual's identity but is also essential in his or her construction and reconstruction of identity. Canagarajah (2006) pointed out that the spread of English as a world language means that both the global and the local must coexist.

Research gaps and research questions. A few empirical studies on student teachers have addressed hybridity and teacher identity. For example, Haddix (2010) explored the literacy identities of black and Latina pre-service teachers (all of whom spoke a non-standard language). The findings illustrated that their teacher identities moved beyond inferiority and toward utilizing their resources and linguistic hybridity. Similarly, both Ilieva et al. (2015) and Ilieva and Ravindran's (2018) studies on international graduate students teaching English in China and TESOL students in Canada revealed that hybrid teachers can use their agency and remain in a "third space," which is consistent with the concept developed by Bhabha (1994). Likewise, in the context of Singapore, Rubdy and Alsagoff (2014) conducted a study on pre-service Singaporean student teachers who used Singlish (the Singaporean variety of English) to communicate with their peers. They found that these teachers had hybrid identities and varying views on how they spoke and should speak English.

It seems that there is a need to further research how teacher identity is constructed within dominant discourses such as globalization and transnationalism (Elsheikh and Yahia 2020). Moreover, due to globalization, there is increased mobility, which suggests that there may be more hybrid identities now than before, whether cultural or teacher identities. Some researchers (e.g., Canagarajah 2006; Liyanage and Canagarajah 2019) have already engaged with the concepts of hybrid identity or hybrid teacher identity in the existing TESOL literature. Hence, one of the main objectives of this paper is to conceptualize "hybridity" in the field of TESOL by borrowing Pieterse's (2019a) theory of hybridity from sociology, in an attempt to mitigate the negative influence of the monolingual model.

However, there appears to be a scarcity of studies in the areas of hybridity and teacher identity. Therefore, using hybridity theory to address these gaps, this case study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the different social contexts (in Canada and China) affect Sally's English teacher identity development?
2. How did Sally cope with the challenges in her teacher identity construction due to changes in her social contexts?

Research methods

Contexts and participant. This case study focused on Sally, a Chinese Canadian who was teaching academic English to undergraduates at a university in China. Born in China, she moved to Canada with her parents during primary school and lived in one of the country's most multilingual and multicultural communities. After graduating from university, obtaining a professional certification, and gaining several years of work experience, she relocated to China and decided to pursue a career in English Language Teaching (ELT). Her Chinese language skills, which remained at a primary school level after moving to Canada, are characterized by fluency in spoken Chinese and limited proficiency in reading and writing. We selected Sally as our participant because she faced challenges related to her hybrid identity upon moving to China, where the distinction between "native" and "non-native" English teachers is prevalent. Additionally, her teacher identity was likely influenced by the shifts in her social context from China to Canada during her youth and from Canada back to China in adulthood. These significant contextual changes may have presented difficulties in the development of her teacher identity. At the time of the study, Sally had been in China for approximately five years, indicating successful adaptation to her new environment. It is thus intriguing to explore how she overcame the obstacles she encountered.

Data collection and procedure. This case study employs narrative inquiry and interviews for data collection. Narrative inquiry, which integrates storytelling with research or utilizes stories as data (Barkhuizen et al. 2014), had become a prevalent method for examining language teacher identity over the past decade (Barkhuizen 2017). This approach allows researchers to analyze data and capture various moments in teachers' identity construction timelines creatively, combining this method with diverse theories (De Costa and Norton 2017). It yields rich information on teachers' perceptions of their identities and roles, a process referred to by Barkhuizen (2011), as cited in Grey and Morton (2018) as "narrative knowledging." For the qualitative data in this study, part was gathered through personal narratives, where the participant shared her experiences with the researcher in narrative form (Braid 1996). Personal narrative is particularly apt for this study's theoretical framework of hybridity, as it explores the complexities of individuals' multiple identities and cultures, all of which are connected to their teacher identities. It can be challenging for individuals to articulate these complexities immediately in an interview setting. Personal narrative allows participants the time to reflect on and document their intricate identities. Luk-Fong (2013) has utilized narrative in her research on teachers' identities, noting that this approach reveals the multifaceted nature of identities. Moreover, personal narrative aids in collecting data to address this study's research questions about how Sally constructed her teacher identity in Canada and China and how she navigated the challenges in this process.

After providing her informed consent, Sally was given two guiding questions to reflect upon and write her personal narrative. Once she completed her 2400-word story in an academic style, she submitted it to the researchers for analysis. The researchers then conducted a content analysis of Sally's personal narrative, identifying common patterns. For instance, Sally's cultural and teacher identity appeared to develop steadily in Canada but faced frequent challenges and struggles in China.

From these patterns, three themes emerged, which the researchers used to interpret Sally's life experiences and generate insights into her teacher identity development. The researchers engaged in experiential meaning-making, transforming Sally's life story into a resource for understanding her own identity development (Braid 1996).

Following the narrative analysis, a 60-min semi-structured follow-up interview was conducted with Sally to gather more in-depth qualitative data and achieve data triangulation. The interview data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed through content analysis as well. The themes that emerged from the interview data closely mirrored those from the narrative analysis. Additionally, the interview provided deeper insights, such as Sally's underlying emotions regarding the challenges she encountered in China.

The combination of narrative inquiry and interview allowed Sally more time to reflect on her experiences before recording them in her journal, compared to a traditional interview setting. The interview addressed queries arising from the narrative inquiry and probed deeper into topics of interest. Initially, the first author invited her close friend Sally to participate in the study. Sally gladly accepted the invitation and signed the informed consent form. Subsequently, open-ended questions were provided to guide Sally in writing her reflective journal, with instructions to include detailed accounts of her experiences. Upon receiving Sally's reflective journal, a 60-min interview was conducted via video conference after a 48-h interval.

Findings

Three prominent themes emerged from the analysis of Sally's narrative and interview, encompassing the following: the evolution and challenges in Sally's teacher and cultural identities due to shifts in her contexts; her attitudes toward these challenges; and the strategies she employed to overcome her difficulties. Details and excerpts are provided below to elucidate each theme.

Changes and challenges in Sally's teacher and cultural identities due to contextual shifts. Sally's teacher identity began to evolve during her tenure at a language center in Canada. Her development in this role appeared to be uncomplicated and direct. One contributing factor might be her familiarity with the environment and the support from her family and friends. For instance, she was dissatisfied with her previous job in business and sought a change. A friend assisted her by referring her to a new opportunity. Furthermore, her supervisor was not only supportive but also praised her job performance. Sally also fostered a positive relationship with her students, endeavoring to assist them to the best of her ability.

> *Excerpt 1 from narrative: They (Sally's students) sometimes told me about the challenges they encountered living in a new country (e.g. with their home stay families in Canada). And I would give them some advice, to help them transition to the new country.*

It seemed that there was minimal hierarchical structure in Sally's environment in terms of "native" and "non-native" English teachers, because Sally was raised in a diverse cultural environment.

> *Excerpt 2 from narrative: I grew up in a multicultural community. Most people respected one another's different backgrounds and heritage languages. One of the first lessons that I learned after my family and I arrived in Canada was to be open-minded and tolerant of other cultures and perspectives. Excerpt 3 from narrative: When I was in my undergraduate study, I remember one of my professors talked about the definition of "mosaic" and Canada's multicultural policies.*

Therefore, Sally "never considered the idea of being either 'native' or 'non-native'". As she said, "it never really crossed my mind. Also, no one asked me about it." The fact that Sally was teaching English in English was not due to hierarchy, it was because of the context of Sally and her students. Furthermore, Sally had the freedom to speak any language she liked with her students in Canada.

> *Excerpt 4 from interview: I was teaching English mostly in English. And my students understood me because when I met them, they were in Canada for more than one year already.*

> *Excerpt 5 from interview: Sometimes I did speak a little bit of Chinese with Chinese international students…and it was OK to do that. I felt that I can speak whichever language I liked…*

The episodes above positively contributed to Sally's teacher identity, from being "a new teacher" to a teacher that is "more experienced".

However, it seemed that Sally stumbled numerous times after she arrived in China. She was unable to penetrate the Chinese culture, and was rejected as a foreign teacher because of her ethnicity and background.

> *Excerpt 6 from narrative: Although I tried my best to penetrate the Chinese culture, I simply couldn't, and often felt uneasy or uncomfortable, especially when my Chinese colleagues expected me to be Chinese. They expected my Chinese speaking and writing levels to be the same as theirs. They also assumed that our cultural experiences were the same. When I couldn't meet the language and cultural expectations, they would think that I'm strange or simply incompetent.*

> *Excerpt 7 from interview: Two international schools didn't want to hire me as a foreign teacher because I was not white or because of my Chinese heritage. One of the principals told me that "it's because of what the parents want"…*

Due to these negative episodes, Sally began to be confused about her teacher identity. Although she decided to continue her studies in an English Medium Instruction (EMI) university in China, her situation did not get better. Instead, it got worse. In response to her new environment, Sally often felt compelled to defend her Canadian identity, as she believed it is constantly being challenged. Some people (e.g. some "native" English teachers) considered her a "non-native" speaker of English, and others (e.g. her peers) thought that she was a "native" speaker of English. In addition, some people pressured her to make a choice between being "native" or "non-native". However, as soon as Sally told them her cultural identity, the topic was dropped immediately.

> *Excerpt 8 from narrative: A white male almost interrogated me, asking me (three times) whether I consider myself as a "native" or "non-native" English teacher, with a "right" answer in mind. I simply couldn't answer the question… I said defensively, I'm Chinese Canadian! For some reason, he was completely silent after that.*

Not surprisingly, Sally became even more confused and frustrated, especially when all of those were new to her, and she was new to her life in China. The fact that Sally spoke "mostly English" in school was a sign of her insecurity in her teacher and cultural identity, and she did not feel "safe" to speak any other

language. What was worse was that she felt that she lost her voice, and she was pressured to speak Chinese.

> *Excerpt 9 from interview: Some people tried to indirectly pressure me to speak Chinese, without trying to understand my situation. I felt like if I didn't speak Chinese; people will be upset with me and that would be my fault. However, if I spoke Chinese, I may be forced into a marginalized position, which will jeopardize my survival in China.*

Although some of these episodes may have happened with good intentions, it seemed to make Sally felt "confused and discouraged". All of these negative events were overwhelming to Sally. She began to question her teacher identity, and could not associate her cultural identity with her teacher identity. This contrast of her teacher identity development in China and in Canada was due to the fact that she was experiencing struggles and adversities in developing her teacher identity in an unfamiliar setting in China.

Sally's attitudes toward her challenges. Upon arriving in China, Sally encountered numerous difficulties on her journey to become an ELT teacher. Despite these challenges, Sally maintained a positive outlook. Although she experienced various negative emotions, her optimism shone through. For instance, during her interviews with international schools, when she discovered an opportunity to become a business teacher, she thought, "It's great that I found one path; maybe I can find more." Additionally, Sally often employed sarcasm in negative situations, which served to alleviate her negative emotions. This tactic demonstrated her determination and optimism, especially during her most challenging moments in a new country.

> *Excerpt 10 from narrative: some of my classmates think that I'm a "native" English teacher. Some foreigners, however, think that I'm a "non-native" English teacher. I …thought, "Now this is just so much fun. It's not confusing at all".*

> *Excerpt 11 from narrative: Well, at least I didn't feel marginalized, that's great. I just felt like I didn't exist…*

While Sally's positive attitudes toward the difficulties she encountered gave her the courage to move on, she would not have successfully developed her teacher identity and survived her study and/or her job without employing some strategies to counter her challenges.

> *Excerpt 12 from interview: I was trying my best to stay optimistic, but deep inside, I felt sad, alone, being misunderstood and uncertain if I could survive all of these. My confidence was nearly shattered. I was aware that if I didn't do something fast, I would run into the same issues over and over again (either being marginalized and/or being misunderstood).*

Despite the challenges, Sally persevered in her pursuit of a career in English language teaching. For instance, she faced numerous difficulties while studying, yet she still "managed to find a job as a university English teacher in China, and began working almost immediately after" completing her studies. At that university, her department paid all teachers at the same rate, differentiated only by seniority. This policy clearly demonstrated Sally's persistence and determination to find suitable contexts for her professional growth.

Sally's strategies to overcome difficulties. During her transitional period, and in some of her most challenging moments, Sally appeared to utilize various strategies to combat adverse situations. For example, when working in her first job in China, she encountered Chinese language and cultural barriers. Rather than viewing them as negative experiences, Sally considered them "valuable lessons," which not only allowed her to gain experience in her new context of China but also empowered her to move forward. Furthermore, Sally explored the ELT market in China through interviews, aiming to gather new information and identify her unique strengths.

> *Excerpt 13 from narrative: I went and interviewed for teaching jobs. I first approached a few language centers, either teaching English to Children or IELTS and TOEFL training centers… I kept trying, and interviewed at a few international schools… I found that some international schools were willing to hire me as a foreign teacher to teach business-related courses.*

> *Excerpt 14 from interview: I realized that there are places where people value my competence. I just needed to find them. I realized that I could leverage my strengths and talents to move beyond my struggles.*

Another technique that Sally utilized was that when she encountered challenges, she had the tendency to try something new, even though she was not sure of the results yet. For example, Sally did stumble on the dichotomy of "native" and "non-native" English teacher when she was attending interviews. Nevertheless, she still decided to continue her studies in China.

> *Excerpt 15 from narrative: For the first time in my life, I experienced the split between "native" and "non-native", and I really didn't know what I was supposed to do… Around this time, a friend of mine told me that I could teach English at the university level. I thought about it and decided to pursue a higher degree (in China) to upgrade my credentials.*

> *Excerpt 16 from interview: This process (of studying in a new country) wasn't easy, and there were more struggles along the way, all related to the same problems (whether I was a "native" or a "non-native" English speaker teacher). Looking back, I'm glad that I did it. My plan worked. I realized that I had a linguistic advantage, and I did find an edge. I knew that I made it, and I was gonna be OK.*

Thanks to the techniques she used to overcome her challenges, Sally finally found the contexts that were right for her, and found her teacher identity. She had a good relationship with her colleagues and students, and strategically avoided talking about the topic of "native" and "non-native" English speakers.

> *Excerpt 17 from interview: …I don't really use the "native" versus "non-native" labels to categorize myself in public…My teacher identity is a Chinese Canadian English teacher.*

> *Excerpt 18 from narrative: When I was talking to my students, or talking to my colleagues, whenever the topics of "native" and "non-native" came up, I just stayed quiet or went along with the conversation just a little bit, unless I felt that someone was deliberately trying to threaten my teacher identity, or dismissing my teacher identity as trivial and unimportant. In these cases, I'll resist in a friendly way.*

Discussion

Overall, as an English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher, Sally's teacher identity is fluid, dynamic, and fraught with uncertainties (Norton 2013). For instance, Sally's Chinese Canadian teacher identity was embraced in her multicultural

community in Canada. However, a drastic change in context made it challenging for her to identify as either a "native" or a "non-native" teacher. This shift may have led her to feel threatened in her Canadian cultural identity, causing her to question her established teacher identity and negatively affecting the one she had developed in Canada. This situation aligns with Norton's (2013) definition of identity as a construct that continuously changes and transforms across various temporal and spatial dimensions. It is also in agreement with Vähäsantanen's (2015) observations that teacher identity is a gradual and recursive journey, replete with challenges. Furthermore, Sally exercised her agency to resist assumed identities and labels she deemed inappropriate and took the initiative to broaden her teacher identity. This action is partially in line with Clarke's (2009) observation that teachers need to be proactive in developing their identities.

In contrast to the existing literature that empowers "non-native" English teachers, there is a relative scarcity of journal articles discussing transnational teachers and those with hybrid identities. Nonetheless, Sally's case is relevant to some of these articles.

China presents a distinct context where distinctions within the language hierarchy are more pronounced. The general public and certain stakeholders often favor English teachers of specific accents and races. In Canada, Sally did not experience the pressures of the language hierarchy while teaching English, as she was in a multicultural environment. She primarily taught English in English, not because of "native" speakerism, but due to her Chinese language proficiency being equivalent to that of a primary school student. This limited her ability to teach in Chinese, yet her students' advanced English skills allowed them to understand her. Sally also felt at liberty to use Chinese when communicating with her students, which she did. She was intuitively practicing translingualism, potentially aiding in the development of her teacher identity in Canada. This scenario is somewhat consistent with Nagashima's (2023) study, which examined teaching practices and the negotiation of teacher identities through a translingual lens.

In China, the hierarchical structure distinguishing "native" and "non-native" English teachers is much more pronounced, and Sally found herself in an unfamiliar environment. She sensed that numerous students, parents, and administrators preferred teachers of a specific race (white) and from certain countries (e.g., USA, UK, Canada). To safeguard her Chinese Canadian cultural and teacher identity, Sally felt compelled to minimize her use of Chinese. This contributed to her struggles and challenges. The first challenge Sally encountered was the realization that she could not be perceived as a Chinese teacher (based on her first job in China) or a "native" English speaker (from her interview experiences at language centers and international schools). Unrealistic expectations from her Chinese colleagues and the belief of stakeholders at two international schools (administrators and parents) that specific profiles of "native" English speakers are favored, led to Sally's classification based on her skin color and race, reinforcing biases. This situation is congruent with the observations of Canagarajah and Said (2011), Lowe and Kiczkowiak 2016, and Braine (2010).

According to the definition of transnationalism used in this study, Sally qualifies as a transnational teacher. Having moved from Canada to China and lived there for over 5 years without plans to leave soon, her development of a teacher identity in both countries supports Duff's (2015) observation that transnational identity in applied linguistics should be flexible for individuals who have crossed borders, including teachers whose identities evolve through various contexts and socio-cultural dynamics. Moreover, Sally's teacher identity was dynamic and fluid, changing with context (e.g., from Canada to China), time, and teaching experience, resonating with the findings of Ortaçtepe (2015) and Tsui (2007). With a strong Canadian cultural identity, when both her cultural and teacher identities were threatened, she relied on her cultural identity to protect her teacher identity. She declined to be classified as a non-native teacher, instead identifying as a Chinese Canadian teacher. This aligns with the observations of Armour (2004), Duff and Uchida (1997), and Reynolds (1996), who noted that boundaries between different identities, such as a teacher's professional and cultural identities, often blur.

Sally's trajectory of teacher identity development contrasts with studies and observations by Lee and Kim 2021, Zacharias (2019), and Weinmann and Arber (2017), where transnational teachers accepted their assigned "non-native" status and the "silent" rules of monolingual values and practices in their monolingual contexts. One primary reason for these contrasts is that participants in previous studies either lived abroad for a short time or began living abroad as adults. Additionally, the contexts they lived in, both at home and abroad, embraced monolingualism. In contrast, Sally spent most of her life in a multicultural community where her cultural identity was well-accepted. This background explains her resistance to the "native" and "non-native" English teacher classification. Furthermore, unlike the transnational teachers in previous studies, Sally felt uncomfortable positioning herself in either category because she did not feel at home in the Chinese community or among some "native" English teachers.

Despite Sally's ethnicity and cultural heritage, her dominant language was English, which shaped her cultural identity as a Chinese Canadian while living in Canada's multicultural community. This supports Norton's (1997) observation that language both reflects and shapes a person's identity. Ultimately, Sally's teacher identity became a hybrid—one of a Chinese Canadian teacher—and she was comfortable in this unique space. This is consistent with Ilieva et al. (2015) and Ilieva and Ravindran's (2018) findings, where a hybrid teacher may initiate and occupy a "third space" as described by Bhabha (1994). It also aligns with Smith's (2008) observations that the interaction between the local and the global can create a unique new identity distinct from both.

Sally's trajectory of teacher identity development is in line with Pieterse's (2019b) theory of cultural hybridization. Her case is particularly interesting as she represents a "product" of globalization, embracing both Chinese heritage and Canadian multiculturalism. This background allowed her to intuitively create her own teacher identity, distinct from the traditional "native" or "non-native" English teacher labels, within a society that often embraces the monolingual model (see excerpts 8 and 17). Sally was able to navigate conversations about the "native" speaker model without conflict, maintaining relationships with those holding different beliefs (excerpt 18). Her multicultural background fostered tolerance for diverse cultures and beliefs (excerpt 2), echoing Smith's (2008) assertion that a hybrid identity can reconcile differences and acknowledge diversity, promoting a truly multicultural society, a perspective also reflected by Zhao and Xiao (2020, 2021).

It's important to note that Sally's hybrid teacher identity was not an "extension" of the "native" vs. "non-native" model but rather a sign of her resistance to "native" speakerism. She intentionally avoided or minimally engaged in discussions about the monolingual model when it arose (excerpt 18). In essence, Sally rejected categorization within the existing hierarchy, desiring to maintain her unique identity, even if it differed from her peers and colleagues (excerpt 17). This stance aligns with Pieterse (2004), who views hybridity as a subversion of the colonial mindset. Sally's refusal to participate in the hierarchy is a form of

"silent" opposition against hegemony and the colonial mindset that may affect the "colonized."

Sally's upbringing in Canada's multicultural community, a state known for its cultural mosaic and supported by multicultural policies (excerpt 3), suggests that others with similar backgrounds may exist. However, hybrid identities are not limited to English teachers struggling with the "native" and "non-native" binary. They are also relevant for those already classified within the monolingual model, including children of mixed-race marriages, individuals who have studied abroad, and those considered "ideal native" English teachers. These individuals can develop varying degrees of hybrid teacher identities. The hybridity theory, as applied in this case study, aims to foster equity and fairness in English language teaching and to move beyond the oversimplified "native" and "non-native" binary rooted in colonial rule.

Conclusion

This study enriches the existing body of literature by employing a more inclusive theoretical lens—hybridity theory—to explore teacher identity. It aims to counteract the negative impacts of the native versus non-native binary system. Implementing hybridity in practice is a key objective of the current case study. We also call on professionals in the field of English language teaching to consider integrating this theory, informed by the following pedagogical implications.

Firstly, teacher trainers should avoid using the terms "native" and "non-native" English teachers when referring to student teachers (Aneja 2016). Instead, they should emphasize the complexity and diversity of teacher identities and encourage the utilization of English teachers' linguistic and cultural resources (e.g., being multilingual, multicultural, or open-minded) in their teaching. Drawing on Sally's experiences in this study, her predominant use of English stemmed from a fear of not surviving in China, likely due to negative experiences trying to "fit in" with her Chinese colleagues and supervisors during her first job. Therefore, for teacher trainees with bilingual, multilingual, or multicultural backgrounds, sensitivity to "native" and "non-native" categorizations in a monolingual context may be heightened. It is recommended that TESOL program trainers respect the linguistic resources of their trainees and avoid reacting positively or negatively to the exclusive or predominant use of English. This approach ensures both monolingual and multilingual students feel comfortable using their languages, potentially encouraging multilingual trainees to leverage their linguistic assets during teacher training.

Moreover, TESOL programs and other stakeholders in English language teaching should minimize adherence to the monolingual model's normative rules, which may favor one group of teachers while sidelining others. Schools could highlight the benefits of a diverse faculty team, including teachers of various ethnicities and backgrounds, who speak different varieties of English, such as Chinese English, rather than focusing solely on "Standard" English. Additionally, English teachers should avoid perpetuating the "native" speaker model's rules when teaching students (and parents) to prevent the next generation from internalizing its prejudices. For example, they should abstain from using the term "native" speakers and refrain from asking students to imitate "native" English speakers without a clear pedagogical rationale. English teachers might also enlighten learners about the realities of a diverse and globalized world by introducing them to various English dialects, accents, speakers, and cultures.

Even though this study focused on a single participant, it was probably the first attempt to integrate the hybridity theory to the field of TESOL. Future research should engage a larger and more diverse group of participants across different contexts. While this study relied solely on narratives and interviews, future studies should employ a wider array of data collection methods, such as questionnaires and classroom observations, for data triangulation. Furthermore, inspired by hybridity theory, subsequent empirical research could include comparative studies to examine English teacher identities and the spectrum of backgrounds they represent, including those who have adopted the binary identity labels. Lastly, in-depth investigations of hybrid teachers' language use and identity dilemmas, and connections between hybridity theory and existing frameworks like translanguaging, multiplicity of identity, and translingualism, are encouraged.

Data availability

The data of the current study are available upon reasonable request.

Received: 21 September 2023; Accepted: 16 December 2024;
Published online: 03 January 2025

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Author contributions

As the first author, AZ made contributions to the design of the work; and the acquisition, analysis, interpretation of data, and revisions. The corresponding author YX contributed to the design of the study, literature review (including hybridity theory), data analysis, editing and revisions. Both authors reviewed and approved the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

The research committee of the School of Foreign Languages of Wenzhou University of Technology approved this study with an ethical approval letter on Dec 12th, 2023 (Approval number: 121223SFL). The study fulfilled all the ethics requirements regarding human participants. The research was conducted following the Declaration of Helsinki's appropriate rules and regulations that apply when involving human participants.

Informed consent

The participant provided her written informed consent prior to participating in this study. We informed her of the purpose and procedure of the study, her rights, and protection of her privacy.

Additional information

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