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FROM TURNING POINTS TO TEACHER IDENTITY LEARNING
ENVIRONMENTS:
LATE-CAREER LANGUAGE TEACHERS SPEAK UP

INTRODUCTION

Most language teacher research has focused on pre-service and early-career teachers, as the access to such teachers is relatively easy for those who work at teacher colleges and conduct teacher research. Although it is important to devote attention to the teachers at the start of their careers, it may be equally useful to investigate veteran teachers who have already left or are about to leave their job in the near future, and learn from what they have to say about their experience, knowledge, and skills. Moreover, scant research that has been focused on this group of teachers mostly derives from other countries (Babic et al.; Ben-Peretz; Day and Gu; Wamba et al.), and sound knowledge about learning from late-career language teachers' (LCLTs) experience is still lacking. The current study aims at partially bridging this gap in the belief that LCLTs' biographies can offer significant insights into teachers' knowledge about language learning and teaching.

As turning moments are central elements of retrospectively narrated biographies, the purpose of the current study is to examine how the turning points experienced in the past and recollected by the four LCLTs are conceptualized in what they say about their subsequent professional lives. In other words, the overarching question is whether former language-related incidents affect what happens to the language teachers later. Although the idea of a transformational moment leaving a mark on a person's thinking has

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been addressed in the Second Language Acquisition literature with regard to language learners (e.g. Pigott 185–91), it has not gained traction within the field. To better understand the issue, I conducted open-structured life-history interviews in which I explored what turning moments may have contributed to (or impeded) the construction of the LCLTs' subsequent teacher identities. The study is an example of research done on, with, and for language teachers and it is hoped that the learning lessons offered by the participants resonate with the experiences of many other LCLTs.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study reported here is underpinned by a theoretical framework that draws on the constructs of language biography, turning points, and teacher identity learning environments. They all are briefly described to provide a theoretical background for investigating the lessons provided by the participating LCLTs.

1.1 BIOGRAPHY IN RESEARCH

The biographical approach originated within the tradition of the interpretative paradigm by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki who innovated a biographical research method widely used and developed in social sciences. Particularly well-known is Schütze's biographical approach from the perspective of acting and suffering, which lets the narrator relate the objectively experienced selected life history processes to her own life history. Schütze suggested three steps for the interpretation of biographical interviews: 1) formal textual analysis segmented into narrative, argumentative, and descriptive elements; 2) the structural description of these aspects embracing trajectories of suffering, biographical action schemes, and other social processes; 3) single case analyses which are compared and contrasted with each other to generate a theoretical framework. The method has been developed by Wengraf (145) who distinguished two levels for analyzing life stories: the lived life stories containing hard biographical data and the told stories in which the narrator selects certain stories from her life and omits others.

Although there are different ways of collecting biographical data, the most popular ones are narratives as life stories. They include the partici-

pants' experiences, emotions, memories, and while the earlier biographies of this kind underscored the coherence of time, space, and narrator, recent biographical narratives are challenged by the concepts of disintegration and differentiation (e.g. De Fina and Georgakopoulou). In Poland, teachers' biographical accounts were, among others, investigated by Ligus or Kędzierska, and those narrated by veteran language teachers by Werbińska.

Two recent contributions concerning biography as a key concept in researching experience are noteworthy. The monograph by Eichsteller and Davis is a superb review of contemporary approaches to biographical research, especially to those who are new to the field, whereas the edited collection published by Purkarthofer and Flubacher provides insights into multiple perspectives of speaking subjects who are less concerned with reconstructing of the past but more with various meanings and effects of the lived experiences.

Drawing from these theoretical insights, I understand the language biography in this study as the LCLTs' presentations of their professional journeys with language as the main topic and their relationship with language at various points of their lives.

1.2 TURNING POINTS

Turning points are pivotal in any biography and they have been studied extensively in the narrative and life-history literature. In educational sciences, they are better known as critical incidents, which stand for commonplace incidents presenting an individual with a dilemma between at least two different courses of action to solve a problem (Tripp 24). Critical incidents cause a person to pause, reflect on the outcomes, think back, thanks to which a change takes place. Therefore, they are believed transformational (Pigott 195) and valuable in developing teachers' self-reflection (Badia and Becerril 226; Bruster and Peterson 174; Chien 4; Hall and Townsend 4; Griffin 208).

It is worth noting that, however critical, turning points do not have to be negative (Mohammed 26). What is more important is their personal dimension, as they are "critical" if an individual perceives them as such. Although Tripp (24) considers critical incidents in the light of teachers' classroom practices, and this is how they are usually researched, they can be better understood in the context of a person's whole life. This is because by encountering a person's language biography throughout her whole life, turning moments can be captured more easily. As they stick out or stand in opposition to what was narrated before, they usually relate to a person's relation-

ship with the environment and its affordances. By offering new goals and directions, these may effect change to the better, but they may also reinforce a person's current thinking by providing her with a vital point of evidence or reference.

In the study discussed, turning points refer to the episodes in the LCLTs' language biographies which have surfaced in their memories. Recalled by the LCLTs, they play the role of catalysts, as they have exerted an effect on the participants' ways of dealing and thinking about their language. In this respect, the present study slightly resembles Pigott's inquiry focused on language learners and their anagnorises, and can be an answer to his call (196) for more studies of this kind.

1.3 TEACHER IDENTITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The construct of teacher identity learning environments (TILEs) is suggested here as an expanded concept and inspired by two other constructs: teacher identity learning (Beijaard) and language learning environments (Benson).

For over a decade, teacher identity has been found to provide the key to the language teaching profession and this is why teacher identity learning is of paramount importance (Barkhuizen; Rudolph et al.; Schutz et al.; Yazan and Rudolph). This is a significant change given that only three decades ago language teacher education was mostly focused on teaching language skills and systems, with very little space for teacher reflection. The shift to identity and all that it involves makes teachers "more of themselves" within the contexts in which they work. Besides, it regards identity as a mark of their teachership.

It should be noted that in poststructuralist thinking, the view of identity is not essentialist. The current perspective of identity emphasises its fragmentation, fluidity and heterogeneity, the inclusion of a number of facets, or multiple teacher I-positions, that are all the time interrelated, negotiated and (re)constructed. For example, in their analysis of professional identity, Akkerman and Meijer (317–18) argue that as a result of negotiations and interrelations of various I-positions, "a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's life".

The construct of language learning environments, the second concept of the TILEs suggested here, could be very much connected with language

teachers' lives and work in foreign language contexts. Unlike in the case of teachers of other subjects, what matters is language teachers' level of proficiency in the language they teach. All language teachers graduate from teacher education programmes in which a good language command is foregrounded. Yet, routine and language attrition, especially in foreign language contexts, may represent a considerable challenge. In this sense, language learning environments would refer to teachers' individual language learning programmes, their exposure to the target language in and beyond the classroom, as well as their attempts at finding opportunities to engage in using the language they teach. Although a lot depends on a person's individual factors, such as the willingness to communicate, an individual teacher's agency, the ability to transform an incident into a language-meaningful situation, the degree to which their agency or communication readiness are stimulated is determined by the contexts in which teachers function.

In the current study, the concept of TILES would refer to language teachers' identities shaped by their individual perceptions of the working contexts, in which the teachers' professional practices related to their previous events and considered significant by them, could be observed.

All in all, the three constructs—biography, turning points and TILES—are not mutually exclusive. Contrariwise, they work in reciprocally reinforcing ways. Teacher biographies are made up of multiple turning points experienced in teachers' environments, which, in turn, (re)shape their teacher identities.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS

The qualitative study reported here used an in-depth narrative inquiry methodology. A temporal dimension was adopted which embraces a participant's whole language-related life. The focus was placed on single past experiences (critical turning points) which were stored in the LCLTs' memories and "resurfaced" in their subsequent TILES. The research questions which guided the study were:

RQ1: What are the examples of critical turning moments in the participants' language biographies that 'reappear' in their later lives?

RQ2: How do these prior experiences shape the participants' understanding of teacher identity learning environments available to them?

2.2 PARTICIPANTS

The participants were four language teachers: Lena (a recently retired teacher of Russian but still teaching part-time in a private school), Alicja (a retired teacher of English but still giving one-to-one private lessons), Ewa (a late-career teacher of French and a novice teacher of Spanish) and Anna (a late and second-career teacher of German). The participants were known to the researcher and all of them willingly agreed to take part in the study. It was believed that the teachers' perspectives—teachers of different modern languages—in one study could provide valuable data about their unique teacher identity learning formations by making their tacit knowledge explicit. Apart from different language programmes and individual differences (e.g., age), the teachers also varied in their backgrounds, awareness of reflection, and language teacher identities shaped and developed by the environments in which they worked. A profile of the participants and some interview information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants and interview details.

Participants' pseudonyms	Language taught	Age when interviewed	Time of interview	Participants' professional experience
Lena	Russian	58	June 2014	Upper secondary school, lecturer at private vocational school
Alicja	English	60	July 2014	Upper secondary school, owner of private language school, private lessons
Ewa	French	57	August 2019	Upper secondary school, teacher of Spanish in primary school (grades 5 and 6).
Anna	German	55	February 2020	Older classes (grades 7 and 8) in primary school, first-career biologist, second-career German teacher.

2.3 COLLECTING AND ANALYSING THE DATA

The study used a data set based on life-history interviews—the qualitative case study method—as it is better suited than the quantitative or mixed methods case study for investigating issues rich in context (Hood 68). Once the permissions from the participants were obtained, the teachers were invited separately to talk about their professional lives. The interviews always started with an opening question/instruction: “Tell me about your journey

with foreign languages that you have studied from as far back as you remember. How did it start?” This open format of the question was considered optimal, as the LCLTs could choose what to say about their relationships with the languages they teach, as well as devote as much time to particular aspects as they considered appropriate. In this way, they assigned meaning to the content, whereas the researcher assumed the role of a sympathetic listener and conversation supporter. This seemed more natural than ticking off pre-designed questions, which is characteristic of structured interviews.

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated. Then, they were read, reread and extensively memoed. The approach was to identify the central points—the significant moments that were key in the LCLTs’ negotiations of their profession-related practices. Although presented anecdotally, but readily recollected by the study participants, the episodes could perform an explanatory function and have a crucial influence on the teachers’ professional identities. The focus was particularly placed on such phrases as “I well remember...”, “After that, I have always...”, “This episode told me that...” etc., all of which provide evidence that teachers make sense of these events in their subsequent language teacher lives. Thanks to the nature of some of the recollected episodes, which relate to concrete contexts of the educational system in Poland, the ecological validity of the participants’ narratives can be corroborated.

3. FINDINGS

The following section is organized around the research questions regarding the language teachers’ biography-based learning with a focus on their teacher learning identities. The findings are presented in the chronological order in which the participants were interviewed.

3.1 TURNING POINTS AFFECTING THE LANGUAGE TEACHER’S CAREER

All the participants in this study identified meaningful language-related incidents which took place either before or at the beginning of their professional careers. As these turning points present support for the corollaries of their individual TILES, they were selected as the momentous episodes affecting the participants’ working careers. In total, five turning points were identified:

Lena, turning point 1:

At university nobody prepared us for working at school. When I came to work I wasn't able to establish contact with pupils; I felt resistance on their part. They didn't want to work. Russian was a school subject, not a foreign language. The teacher's job was to promote it. This is why we were provided by the Russian institutes with Russian and Soviet literature, and additionally educated in post-graduate studies to prepare the learners for consuming Soviet culture in the original version. I was to promote culture that has always been close to my heart. But I had problems with methodology, didactics. I didn't know why my passion for language and culture was hardly implanted in pupils. I couldn't understand this. So I consulted a French language methodologist who agreed to see my lessons. I remember what he said, 'Leave them in peace. They'll never be Russians. They are to communicate and should have language awareness'. I started reading, learning. I understood that I lacked the teaching tools.

Alicja, turning point 2:

I've always been a lazy person.... Our student group counsellor at university, Dr K, was a very distinguished and peace emanating gentleman. In the first year we had black lists for students who had language problems and grey lists for those who might have language problems. He talked to each of us in private. What he said made me peaceful for the rest of my life. He said, "You will always have time to learn English."

Ewa, turning point 3:

When I started studying in mid 80s there were many students in my French department who looked like flowers. It was a politically and economically uninteresting time and those girls distinguished themselves with their colourful looks. They'd been abroad, some lived in Belgium for several years, others had an aunt in Paris so it was easy for people like me to develop complexes. It helped me when one of our professors said, 'It's good to know a language but you need to have something to say in the language'. This is what I discovered. If there is no knowledge, the language won't do.

Ewa, turning point 4:

I studied in the period when you had to possess your own books, for example grammar books. That was my first university surprise. I remember sitting down

and deliberating, “How to tell parents?” It was possible to order a grammar book via French Embassy but a basic French grammar handbook cost as much as my father’s monthly salary. Although parents accepted that and would say, “A must is a must,” it occurred to me that language studies are not socially just.

Anna, turning point 5:

In the secondary school I started to attend some additional German lessons at my mum’s work. There were lots of people, much older than me. I went there because my mum wanted, not me. We only learnt from the book and I didn’t feel good there. But our teacher was offered a summer job of an educational instructor or something. He refused to take it on and phoned my mum to suggest this work to me. My mum agreed behind my back and I was to work as an interpreter to a group of Germans from East Germany. How much I learnt at that time! Only I talked to them. If I didn’t understand, I asked again. When they saw me, they used to say, “Anna’s coming, we’ve got to speak slowly.” This experience gave me much more than all learning at school. I thought I wouldn’t cope because it was my first contact with the living language. I used German for at least five hours a day non-stop. That was very good.

3.2 TEACHER IDENTITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The following section presents the results that answer the second research question revealing the LCLTs’ construction of their individual teacher identities on the basis of their accessible learning environments and in reference to their prior experiences. The incidents recollected in the previous section may be considered (trans)formational by presenting butterfly effects on the LCLTs’ subsequent worldviews, as in line with complex dynamic systems theory (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron). In other words, they may leave a mark on the teachers’ constructions of meaningful identity wholes although, like in the case of their biographic lived experiences, the subsequent identities of the particular LCLTs varied. Table 2 summarizes the five turning points and their corollaries leading to the identities found in the data.

Table 2. Turning points aligned with their corollaries.

Participants’ pseudonyms	Turning point	Teachers’ corollaries
Lena	Inability to teach	Learning language teaching, following methodological pathway.

Alicja	“You can always learn”	Disregarding the development of language competence.
Ewa	People have various access to language learning; Financial obstacles	Encountering examples of inequity between English and LOTE teachers.
Anna	“You can manage in the new language-related situation”	Looking for language learning affordances.

The following sections present extracts from the interview transcripts to elaborate on the corollaries of the turning points. Explanatory information is additionally disclosed to provide more context or point to theoretical issues of the extracts.

Lena: Constructive problem solver

Lena went on to study Russian because she was passionate about Russian literature. Upon beginning her work as a Russian teacher, she took it for granted that her school students, like her former university group mates, would share her passion. When she went into conflict with her students already in the first year of her work, she realised that it was not the students’ fault but the problems arose due to her ignorance of “accessing” young people. She decided to change it by attending methodology courses with experts in other foreign languages and transferring this new knowledge to her classroom. She understood that her language teaching was too much based on giving grades, concentrating on students’ errors, or memorizing reading texts. Reflecting this, she observed:

In the contacts with Russians my students were afraid to speak. They thought about mistakes. Only those who were almost native speakers were rewarded. That was a nightmare. I’m so happy that I have come out of this. Thanks to my contacts with Western methodology of teaching foreign languages I understood that grades could be given for different aspects of language learning. I also saw that there are too many teachers, both young and older in age, who like showing their supremacy over students and their parents.

However, Lena faced some obstacles related to the language she taught, which can be illustrated by the following words:

I remember saying that I would stop being a teacher unless I could discuss literature, culture or art with my students. And what happened? I had students who’d

never learnt Russian before, but the books for elementary students at our disposal were those for fifth grade, hardly appropriate for upper secondary school students. I started searching for something and found a very influential group of former Russian teachers from all over Poland. We started to write our own book, available in a photocopied form; then I designed a syllabus, and to my sheer astonishment I started pursuing the methodological path. I finished a course for educators served to us by Germans. Germans taught us communicative methods, and we turned them into coursebooks. That was the time when I worked as a local teacher adviser.

At first glance, Lena's TILE does not seem to provide her with affordances. She is rather surrounded by constraints due to her methodological ignorance, her students' unwillingness to learn, or her inability to connect with them. On the other hand, all those obstacles turned out positive in initiating the change in Lena's approach to language teaching. Had it not been for them, she would never become engaged in Russian teaching methodology.

Alicja: Comfort minder

Alicja considers herself, as she said, "a lazy person" and, as she recollected in her episode, she was convinced that she would always be able to improve her language skills. However, her linguistic biography shows that it is not the case. Her phlegmatic personality negatively affected her entrepreneurial initiatives (her language school went bankrupt despite the success of similar schools in town), and only on retirement she observed:

I wish I'd learnt more English if it wasn't for my inborn laziness. Right now, despite teaching English, I would find it difficult to have this talk in English without any preparation. I know that my being lazy has somehow set me in life in the belief that it will always be fine. After the collapse of school prospering for 15 years and then the collapse of my other language company, retirement gives me some stability. Comfort again? Perhaps, but I know that taking too much care of your comfort and regular postponing things are not the best decisions.

What TILE offered to Alicja was lack of any serious challenges. As she was teaching in the 1990s—the time in Poland characterised by an increase in popularity of English accompanied by a shortage of English teachers—Alicja was one of the few English language teachers in town at that time who was able to secure her teaching position on her own terms. Her language command was sufficient to teach her upper secondary students, and

even her frequent and often unfounded absence at school was not considered a restriction. She recalled,

The school principal was very open and he accepted my absences. When I started conducting the company, there were lots of auctions. He was never against it because he was afraid I would drop the job, which I finally did.

In contrast to Lena's TILE, Alicja's position at school was very strong, as the language she taught was held in high esteem. It did not matter how good she was in her language competence because few people could verify that knowledge. The affordances in the learning environment, such as the popularity of language, students' willingness to learn it, principal's unconditioned approval for the sake of retaining a qualified English teacher at school, bolstered her teacher confidence, which prevented her from monitoring her own language skills.

Ewa: Perceiver of language-related inequities

Ewa's memory of studying French initiated her thinking about unequal access to opportunities to learn second languages (episodes 3 and 4). On the one hand, the knowledge of language is a social capital, investment in a person's life, or a way of accessing more material and symbolic resources (Norton). On the other hand, Bauman (2) found that mobility is "unequally distributed commodity" and "what appears as globalization for some means localization for others". Ewa was aware of this but, encouraged by her professor's words, also knew that her perseverance, conscientiousness and hard work could make her successful and able to express herself well in French (episode 3).

However, the status of French in contemporary Polish school, especially in contrast to English, is threatened. What is more, the efforts of French teachers are not appreciated enough. As Ewa observed:

Someone from the ministry called my subject "second foreign language". This word "second" relieves me from work. I don't need to do anything. This is only a second language, not a major subject. The subjects at schools are divided into major and less important ones. In the opinion of students and often their parents, students should only learn major subjects because this pays off.... French is not a language chosen by students and my director told me there wouldn't be hours for me. I'm not an English teacher. French is considered difficult to learn and these days school should be light, easy and pleasant. Why should it be like this? Is

work like this? Is life like this? ... In a way I envy English teachers, some of them even not well-educated, as they have so many teaching resources. They are often system operators who switch on a laptop with a ready-made lesson. I don't have this luxury. I have to create a syllabus, search for materials, see if it can be done within the time allocated. I have to organize this all by myself.

Realising the lack of equity of foreign languages in terms of their status in Polish schools, Ewa points to the promotion of English at the expense of other languages, such as French. Her words also show what the new educational paradigm has done to LOTE (languages other than English) teachers in terms of the instability of their professional careers or divisions between language teachers.

As to TILES, Ewa experiences a constant struggle, be it by securing interesting French learning materials, fighting for the workload at school as a French teacher, or for recognition of her teaching expertise in the "second foreign language". Finally, in her late 40s, she decides to study Spanish—a language that can offer more job stability—which may also be seen as a form of struggle. Her teacher identity is constructed by her feelings of contrast with English teachers, which undoubtedly shapes her perception of inequity of languages and teachers of foreign languages.

Anna: Language user

Anna was the only participant who, on failing to obtain her professional promotion at the Faculty of Biology, had to go to school and in her early 40s become a second-career language teacher working in a village primary school. What was different in her narrative, if compared to the other participants, was the constant reference to her language learning. Here is what she says:

I always provoke. Even last Saturday when we were in the spa, which was part of the school project. Everybody sat down in the waiting room and started talking. I saw a German couple, sat down next to them in the hope of having a chat. We talked for an hour. They were there, waiting as well, not in a hurry. My colleagues could've tried to talk with them but they didn't. I always look for opportunities. I'm always like that. When we go on holidays abroad, we usually go to Austria or Germany... When we go to the zoo, I look up the names of animals. Once we went to the museum of birds and I'd learnt all their names. I don't remember them now but I could quickly reconstruct if I had to.

Interestingly, in her school, she is considered as the key German teacher, which can be illustrated by the following extract from her biography:

Last year we were offered interactive boards and someone had to give a display lesson for the teachers in our community. I expected to display a biology lesson (apart from German, I teach two hours of biology per week), and I was sure that the German lesson would be conducted by another teacher with 20 years of German teaching experience. But I was asked to teach German. The teachers from the whole community arrived. I had to prepare a plan but conducted the lesson without any tensions. It was a normal class, even the kids said that it was as usual. I speak a lot of German in the classroom. It's important for them to listen and guess from the context. But I found it amusing. Such an absurd. What am I doing here? I teach on the basis of BA credentials obtained in some evening college. If I were a head I wouldn't have allowed for such a situation. I shouldn't have given that lesson. It did amuse me.

The TILE which is offered to Anna is full of affordances which are created, or, as she says, "provoked" by her. Despite the fact that she is a second-career teacher, or that she graduated from a 'poor' college, she feels confident in language. She rationalises possible inadequacies and even offers her explanation to other language teachers' problems. This is what she says:

To tell the truth, I think that if I was made redundant, I wouldn't worry. I would have to activate myself again and I would certainly find something. This is my internal conviction. Do I shape my life? No, I simply react to what is in it on offer. Most teachers have worked in this school for the whole of their working lives. I'm always open to changes. They are not.

All in all, building on being situated within the professional learning contexts available to them, all the participants exposed a different facet of their teacher learning identity: a problem solver, a comfort minder, a perceiver of inequity of foreign languages, a language user. Yet, what they say at the end of their teaching lives seems informed by their previous life histories and experiences and emerges in their developed identity work when they reflect on performing their language teachers' jobs.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Turning moments within the context of teachers' biographies have been brought to the fore in this text for the special issue addressing informal language learning. Here, the point was to argue that language teachers' perception of some early experiences could have an impact on the choice of their subsequent thinking and leave a mark in their teacher identity learning. Five turning moments—key points triggering other events (answer to RQ1)—emerged, which were aligned with the strongly visible facets of their teacher identities shaped by their TILES (answer to RQ2), such as problem solver, comfort minder, perceiver of language inequity, and language user.

Based on the participants' career trajectories, the study generally reveals that teacher identity learning is an idiosyncratic process, as different facets of their unique identities take precedence over others and their individual identity learning environments vary. However, it also transpires that a teacher's language learning history and her personal experiences make a difference. In this sense, learning one's teacher identity may be considered a process of connecting one's past with one's presence/future in which many personal and professional aspects interplay. The selected turning moments in the participants' pasts may indicate that it matters where a language-related situation happens, namely in what "space" it takes place, with whom and at what time.

Interestingly, the findings reveal that turning points in the teachers' lives may derive from negative experiences (Lena) and bring positive results (her development of methodological knowledge), stem from neutral or rather positive situations (Alicja) and bring about negative effects (her failing to expand linguistic knowledge), originate from rather unpleasant emotions (Ewa) and, however acceptable, remain negative (more noticing of language-produced social diversity), or come from positive experiences (Anna) and lead to more positivity (her agency in making use of language learning affordances found in the available surroundings). This means that TILES both constrain and enable the choices and behaviours of individuals (Benson 111), provide them with continuities and discontinuities (Werbińska 72), or both positive and negative experiences. Although their strength of the impacts on the teachers' identities vary, they contribute to their becoming a language teacher.

Another finding worth noting is the emergence of the facets of teacher identities rarely discussed in the literature, such as the existence of inequity

among LOTE teachers (Ewa's and, in a sense, Lena's cases) or the influence of the educational institution (Alicja's case) on teachers' learning or lack of learning. It should also be added that, although all participants were teachers of language, the data did not show the aspects characteristic of language teachers exclusively. The conceptions of "constructive problem solver" or "comfort minder" identities and considering the consequences they may produce can be of importance to all teachers irrespective of the subjects they teach.

The theoretical significance of the study also lies in the fact that the lessons identified in the data may contribute to better understanding of teachers' identities, the teacher learning process and establish connections between various episodes and their TILES, which will certainly help gain a bigger picture of the teacher learning situation. There is power in sharing biographies, as individuals find that they are not alone in experiencing emotions, such as anger at unequal access to opportunities (Ewa's case), regret at punishing students with bad grades (Lena's case) or not learning enough language (Alicja's case) through which they can bond. Making their voices heard and accessible to other members of professional community may reinforce the idea that reflection and identity are the foundation for teacher professional development. In contrast to the first three cases, Anna's agency offers a particularly strong account of how informal language learning may occur from enabling resources in the environment (Palfreyman 178, van Lier 55). Anna does not seem to wait to be taught but, attending to what is available to her in the local setting (using German in the classroom, initiating small talk in German with strangers, going to German-speaking countries on holidays etc.), she seeks out language learning resources in her milieu, creates her own learning opportunities, and constructs her unique teacher identity as a good language user.

Finally, as the multifacetedness of teacher identity shows, TILES offer affordances and constraints which are picked out and recognized by teachers to a different extent. Those perceived as significant, meaningful, or simply relevant to a particular teacher's sense-making are attended to whereas others may remain unnoticed or ignored. This may imply that attempts to impose one universal language teacher identity by educational bodies or teacher education programmes may fail. This is perhaps the most insightful finding from the lessons offered by the participants of the study, which may show why there are so many varieties among language teachers despite the fact that they graduate from similar language teaching programmes and work in comparable contexts. From this perspective, the interaction of individual

language teachers with their identities producing environments and what is responsible for shaping them could make a pressing case for more studies on this. Such investigations could have a major impact on some other significant aspects in language teacher education, such as teachers' linguistic and communicative competence, their job motivation, their resilience or agency, to name but a few.

Despite the insights obtained from the data, this study is not free from limitations. Investigating just four teachers may be considered insufficient. Notwithstanding, working with the teachers representing different foreign languages and the longitudinal approach adopted for data collection (the first narrative was conducted in 2014 and the last in 2020) make the study more reliable. Future studies could undoubtedly increase the sample and enrol participants of other popular foreign languages taught in Poland, such as Spanish, Italian, Ukrainian. That said, it is still hoped that by providing the honest accounts of the study participants' experiences—ranging from recalling significant incidents to their long-term influences—the present study may contribute to advancing the field of knowledge on the complexities of LCLTs' identities.

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FROM TURNING POINTS TO TEACHER IDENTITY
LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:
LATE-CAREER LANGUAGE TEACHERS SPEAK UP

Summary

Although learning is usually associated with some regulatory bodies, external education, programmes or experts, there is another kind of learning which can be gained from reflection on a language teacher's biography and their teacher identity learning in a professional environment. The present article focuses on the analysis of four veteran Polish late-career language teachers of English, French, German and Russian who share their language-teacher lives in in-depth narrative inquiry interviews with the author of this text. The article aims to find out how various language-related critical incidents, or turning points, that took place in these teachers' lives have affected their succeeding professional lives, and their individual perception of the language-teacher identity learning environments available to them. From the analysis of the data, four teacher identity constructions have been distinguished: "the constructive problem solver", "the comfort minder", "the perceiver of language-related social injustice" and "the language learner", and it transpires that the teachers' previous experiences are likely to affect how and why other things happen. This finding may have vital pedagogical implications for language-teacher educators, as the construction of teacher identities that are related to the participants' meaningful and unique past experiences may question the sense of developing one universal language-teacher identity.

Keywords: late-career language teachers; teacher biographies; turning points; teacher identity learning environments

OD PUNKTÓW ZWROTNYCH DO ŚRODOWISKA
UCZENIA SIĘ TOŻSAMOŚCI NAUCZYCIELA
– NAUCZYCIELE JĘZYKÓW OBCYCH PÓŹNEJ KARIERY ZAWODOWEJ MAJĄ GŁOS

Streszczenie

Choć uczenie zwykle kojarzy się z edukacją zewnętrzną, programami czy ekspertami, w artykule mowa jest o innym uczeniu się, tj. wynikającym z refleksji nad biografią nauczyciela języka obcego i jego tożsamości zawodowej. Przedmiotem analizy są fragmenty biografii czterech nauczycielek języków obcych późnej kariery zawodowej (anglistki, germanistki, romanistki i rusycystki), które dzielą się swoim doświadczeniem w dogłębnych wywiadach narracyjnych z autorką tekstu. Badanie ma na celu dowiedzieć się, jak różne przeszłe zdarzenia krytyczne, czy punkty zwrotne, związane z nauczaniem językiem obcym przez uczestniczki badania, odbiły się na ich karierach zawodowych i późniejszym korzystaniu z dostępnych im środowisk uczenia się tożsamości zawodowej. Z analizy danych wyłoniły się cztery konstrukcje tożsamości: nauczyciel konstruktywnie rozwiązujący problemy, nauczyciel ceniący własny komfort, nauczyciel dostrzegający społeczne nierówności pomiędzy różnymi językami obcymi, nauczyciel jako aktywny użytkownik języka obcego, które mogą sugerować, że incydenty przeszłe mają wpływ na późniejsze sytuacje zawodowe. Tekst może zawierać istotne implikacje pedagogiczne w kształceniu nauczycieli, gdyż istnienie indywidualnych tożsamości nauczycieli języków obcych, inspirowanych przeszłymi doświadczeniami, może kwestionować sens rozwijania jednej uniwersalnej tożsamości nauczyciela języka obcego.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciele języków obcych późnej kariery zawodowej; biografie nauczycieli; punkty zwrotne; środowiska uczenia się tożsamości zawodowej.