



The negotiation of transnational identities and being a ‘nonnative’ English-speaking teacher abroad

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Abstract

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This paper examines transnational identity and the uses of language repertoires through a study of a ‘nonnative’ English language teacher named Jason, who originates from the Philippines. Through a narrative-interview study, I analyse how Jason relates to a professional, social, and national identity and how, through his transnational circumstances, he can negotiate these identities in different social contexts. My participant detailed how his use of language repertoires and accents in varying social and professional contexts enabled him to adapt to his surroundings and aspire to achieve professional and economic success. The shift to mobility within sociolinguistics is essential to the understanding of language and transnational identity in this paper and how repertoires of language can exert power and seek equality in social and professional contexts.

Keywords: China, language repertoires, nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), the Philippines, transnational identity

1. Introduction

This paper examines transnational identity and the uses of language repertoires through a study of a ‘nonnative’ English language teacher named Jason, who originates from the Philippines but is now working in Chongqing, China. Through a narrative-interview study, I analyse how Jason relates to a professional, social, and national identity and how, through his transnational circumstances, he can negotiate these identities in different social contexts. In this paper, multilingualism is perceived to be an entirely beneficial aspect of linguistic practice that represents mobility and diversity. This paper demonstrates, through the study of my participant, that essentialism is an outdated model of thinking for language and identity. The transnational experiences of migrants can be examined through their expansive

and changing linguistic practices (Canagarajah & Silberstein, 2012) and how they weave their transnational skills into their new settings (Duran, 2016). This linguistic diversity is related to institutional and interpersonal discourses through which identities are created and reproduced. Identity and language are not static and homogenous but fluid and situated in the act of process-making. According to Foucault's (1977, as cited in Weedon, 1997) theory of discourse, being is created through language, as is the production of knowledge, which subsequently shapes social practices, power relations, and identities. Therefore, through a transnational migrant's discourse, we can analyse the various subject positions they inhabit.

Using a constructivist approach, a connection is made with Bourdieu's (1984) forms of capital and concept of habitus, examining how Jason has been able to convert these forms of capital to suit his changing settings. Using the assumption that language is not neutral, the paper also seeks to analyse how Jason uses his repertoire of languages to exert power and to seek equality on an equal footing in professional and social contexts. As an educator with transnational experience myself, I was keen to analyse the different trajectory and identity of a fellow educator who also had transnational experience, but from a different sociocultural background. The shift to mobility within sociolinguistics is essential to the understanding of language and transnational identity in this paper as notions of stability cannot account for language variety and language formation influenced so strongly by contact with an expanding range of cultural and linguistic models (De Fina, 2016). Thus, the relevance of this research is its contribution to the study of increasing mobility in sociolinguistics. A biographical background gives a detailed account of Jason's transnational persona, followed by a theoretical framework that gives an overview of theories attached to transnationalism and a transnational agent's inheritance of identities and accumulation of capital. The methodology of the narrative interview is then discussed and studied through an exchange with my participant.

Transnationalism has been defined on an individual scale as focusing on 'social contacts across borders' (Portes, 2001) as this sets it apart from other elements of globalization. In this paper, transnationalism is a consequence of globalization (Higgins, 2011; Vertovec, 2009;), for globalization is a "complex, overlapping and disjunctive order of ethnoscaples, technoscaples, financescaples, mediascaples and ideoscaples" (Appadurai, 1990, as cited in Block, 2006, pp. 5-6). Within ethnoscaples, the flow of people as migrants seeking economic opportunities is a major factor in modern society; ideoscaples describe the movement of ideologies across borders; technoscaples and mediascaples, the movement of technology and use of media to pass information across borders; and financescaples, the international movement of financial capital. It is useful to employ Faist's (2000) three levels of migration model, which consists of the macro, meso, and micro. Within the macro-level, we see economic, political, cultural, and demographic factors that influence migration. At the meso-level, social, transactional, and symbolic ties are considered; and at the micro-level, individual values and desires are factored such as wealth, status, comfort, autonomy, and affiliation. According to Block (2006), "transnationalism is a useful tool for understanding migration today" because "it captures nicely the way that migrants today often maintain social, economic and political contacts across geographical and nation-state borders" (p. 20).

Cross-border identity formation constitutes a vital aspect of transnationalism as it reflects the complexities of migrants' lives better, in that it incorporates both the 'here' and 'there' (Kelly & Lasis, 2006). Identity is a multifaceted and fluid concept, which can be defined as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 4). There is no truth to the essence of identity, and no essentialised realities nor categorisation can determine an individual's being, for it is multidimensional. Transnational identity is something constantly in process that contradicts itself and changes according to the social context in which an individual may immerse themselves (Weedon, 1997). Life trajectories can demonstrate the factors behind the negotiation of identity and related linguistic practices of an individual, such as Jason, who has moved across national and linguistic boundaries (Heller, 2012). The movement "across space and over time" (Levitt & Khagram, 2008, p. 2) creates an interest among researchers of transnational studies to investigate how the crossing of borders helps construct self-perceived identities (Duran, 2016). Migrants become transnational agents (Levitt & Khagram, 2008) who construct numerous identities that are consistently in process. Social identity is comprised of an individual's sense of who they are based on group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), particularly the perceived legitimacy and stability of the individual within that group and how they negotiate their position within it. National identity is determined as a sense of belonging to a nation state, in the case of my participant, the Philippines. It can be related to social identity in that the individual feels they belong to a group, which, in such a case, is a nation to which they subscribe. Professional identity is defined as an individual's self-conceptualisation of their professional life based on attributes, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999).

Bourdieu's (1984) notion of capital is a useful analytical tool to understand why multilingual practices are used as linguistic capital to aid the accumulation of social, cultural, and economic capital. His concept of 'habitus' is the framework in which an individual's evaluations and expectations lead to a conscious prioritising of practices. From this, various forms of capital, such as cultural, economic, social, and linguistic, are given meaning and value (Bourdieu, 1984). In using these notions of capital to describe transnational identities, we go beyond economic possession and seek to incorporate how power and prestige can also be garnered through the ownership of social connections, education, cultural values, and other assets. Bourdieu believes that capital is not formed through an objective structure but via unpredictable events in the social world; therefore, its value is determined by the social and spatial context in which the agent is in (Kelly & Lasis, 2006). Thus, the value that transnational individuals place on practices and forms of capital is important to our understanding of how they construct their transnational identities. The creation of a 'transnational habitus' (Vertovec, 2009) means that identity is constantly in process through multiple orientations.

2. Method

2.1 Biographical Background

The focus of my research is a 33-year-old Filipino man named Jason, who originates from Ozamic City in Misamis Occidental Province, the Philippines. He is a transnational migrant, a label I have ascribed to him for this paper. Jason considers himself multilingual as he speaks Tagalog, English, a reasonable level of Mandarin Chinese, and Bisaya, which is his local dialect. Multilingual is a tag he has inhibited himself and uses to his advantage in a transnational context as he balances his professional, social, and national identities. Jason was chosen as the participant as he represents the shift towards mobility in sociolinguistics. Predominantly an economic migrant, he uses his sociolinguistic portfolio to benefit his social and professional circumstances in transnational settings, which is an occurrence increasingly common in both Asia and around the world as movement across borders of human capital and linguistic capital is ever more prevalent. Jason graduated from La Salle University in Ozamic City with a degree in secondary education and then went on to do a qualification in TESOL. He immediately migrated to China to work as an English language teacher and found his first job in Xi'an at the University of Xijing teaching conversational English. Two years later, he moved to Jiangxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Nanchang where he also taught conversational English for a further seven years. Currently, Jason is working as a primary English language teacher at Chongqing New Epoch School in Chongqing, where he has been for the previous two years. Jason acquired these jobs through an agency that specialises in finding employment within China for nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs).

It is important to contemplate the social context of my interview with Jason because the socioeconomic and political circumstances of Jason's life play an important part in the narrative and shaping of his identity. Jason claims to belong to the middle class within the Philippines. His father was a mechanic and owned his own garage earning a salary that enabled his six children to each receive a tertiary education. Growing up, Jason and his brothers worked in the family garage, although none of them aspired to take on a managerial role there after the premature death of their father in 2017. It seems they aspired to achieve what they considered bigger and better things away from their hometown despite classifying themselves as economically comfortable within that environment. Jason claimed that ownership of a property or a car is enough to mark out a person as middle class, but a distinct lack of social mobility encourages many in the middle class to seek greater fortune and opportunity abroad. Access to education, including higher education, marked Jason out as a highly skilled worker, but for economic reasons, he pursued employment within education outside of his home country. The Philippines has a vast number of economic migrants that comprise 10% of the population (www.migrationpolicy.org). The government has promoted the outward flow of migrants, and in 2016, the country received US\$ 26.9 billion in money transfers, according to the Central Bank of the Philippines (<http://www.bsp.gov.ph>).

2.2 Interview

The interview I conducted was a one-to-one “professional conversation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 5) that was done in a single session. The interview took three hours, and we covered an array of topics from our shared professional histories, learning trajectories, and international experience to our social lives. The main objective, however, was to ascertain Jason’s notions of transnational identity. As the interviewee was known to me from us having previously worked together, it did not take long to establish rapport, and this meant that I was able to collect enough data in a single session to make an accurate portrayal of the inherited identities my participant expressed throughout our interaction. It is worth acknowledging that this prior relationship could influence the validity of the data collected, but for the purpose of obtaining details of the participant’s transnational trajectory, it had little effect. With regard to comparisons with myself throughout the interview, I felt this added to the narrative. The main aim of the interview was to explore NNEST thinking on negotiated identities in a transnational context. It took place over Skype, an online communication platform, and was recorded and transcribed onto my research journal that also contained the participant’s background information. Following seven method stages (Kvale, 1996), I thematised and designed the interview according to my research question, conducted the interview, transcribed it, analysed and verified the data, and then reported on my findings in this paper. I was focused on co-constructing the meaning of experiences the interviewee shared with me. and I was critical in my analysis considering the social, cultural, historical, and economic features that made up the narrative of the interview. The complexities involved in choosing the relevant data from the interview were considered and made clear through my precise appraisal of identity, which prioritises naturally occurring talk that enabled me to analyse identity as a social action (Duran Eppler & Codó, 2016).

Conducting an interview allowed for a complete analysis of my participant without setting a limit to the scope of the research and the nature of their responses (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The interview took an unstructured form, which allowed the interviewee to elaborate on the issues that arose. I created some “grand tour” questions (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 136) to elicit stories from the participant that would fit in with the narrative format of research I was conducting, and I generally took on the role of the listener. We built a strong rapport throughout the process, and as a result, the historical accounts of events in my participant’s experiences came to the fore in a manner that enabled in-depth focus and analysis of identity. Miller and Crabtree (1999) note how interviews are essentially shared cultural knowledge in interaction, and this applied to the interview because of the shared history between the participant and me. Similarities in our transnational trajectories, and indeed, understanding of differences were beneficial to the sharing of knowledge and obtaining the relevant data for examining how a transnational identity may be negotiated.

2.3 Narrative

Stories open identities, and this was the main reason for researching my participant's identity through the narrative. My participant was at the heart of the research with no fixed agenda, and I was able to humanize him (Norton, 2000). It is a reflectionist account of a co-construction, which is influenced by the interaction between myself and the participant, with whom I had a professional and social relationship. Within this paper, reflexivity is "an ongoing, multifaceted and dialogical process" (Byrd-Clark & Dervin, 2014, p. 1), which is continually evolving and open to reconstruction in a social context. Hence, it is neither a given nor static. What Barkhuizen (2011) termed "narrative knowledging" accounts for my research in this instance because it works as "the meaning making, learning, or knowledge construction that takes place during the narrative research activities of co-constructing narratives, analysing narratives, reporting the findings and reading research reports" (p. 395). I chose to use a cross-sectional analysis of the interview and utilize excerpts from 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou, 2015) to link the three chosen themes of negotiated social, professional, and national identities the participant interchangeably used throughout the interaction. The use of 'interactional text' (Wortham et al., 2011, as cited in Gray & Morton, 2018) meant that our respective identities could emerge as we adopted interactional positions within the interview. I could focus on *why* things were said as opposed to *what* was said. I was influenced by prior studies done with the narrative enquiry such as that by Gray (2018) and his study of intersectionality, language, and queer lives. Another study conducted using the narrative that influenced my research was that done by Borba and Ostermann (2007) where they researched whether travestis' embodiment of (trans)gender identity was manipulated in using the Brazilian Portuguese grammatical gender system. In both of these examples, interactional text was taken from short stories in interviews done with the chosen participants.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Introduction

The interview began with a brief conversation about changes at the school where we had both previously worked together:

- S: How's things going at the school?
J: Uh, the school has got like a new name now. They changed it to... or I think they applied to change it to Chongqing Foreign Language School or something...
S: You're kidding right?
J: No, no but shit ... the implication of getting this new name though for me is gonna gimme a hard time coz when I go home the immigration when I come back won't know the name of the school and I won't get back in.

- S: I'm sure you'll be fine, just write to the embassy informing them about it.
- J: Yeah, you're right. Man, I was sad when you went ... you know your shit man! (laughter)

It is immediately clear from the beginning of the interview how unstable life can be as a transnational migrant. The simple changing of an institution's name is enough to worry Jason into thinking about how it could gravely affect his future professional status. The constant flux in his life as he adapts to ever-changing circumstances and to constantly evolving processes means he is in a position where his identity must be negotiated under immense pressure both from within, as he seeks to improve his position economically and socially, and from the outside as policies and attitudes change around him.

By claiming "*you know your shit man!*", Jason was using language as a social tool to bring me onside. Despite his casual approach to the conversation, he is aware of being interviewed; and by nature, he is seeking to impress and look good in my eyes. This was a common feature of our relationship and will be discussed more when analysing Jason's professional identity. Jason's deep laughter after making this comment is used as a 'play frame' (Coates, 2007), meaning the establishment and reinforcement of intimacy between us. Laughter punctuated the entire interview both serving as a genuine show of friendship and appreciation and as a means of setting the tone of the interaction.

Goffman's (1974) concept of framing is when individuals frame the situation they are in according to their primary frameworks, which are descriptions of events with social meaning. Thus, through the framing of an event such as an interview, interpretations are determined by both interviewer and interviewee. The co-construction of this frame analysis leads a lot to what Briggs (1986) called "frame breaking" (p. 56), which is evident in the following brief exchange after the opening conversation.

- S: Who are you mixing with now that I've gone?
- J: To be honest man, I'm just thinking about the ladies. You know, I got my woman back home but she's not really into me so I'm kinda just looking for something here.
- S: Always about the women, isn't it Jason?" (laughter)

The key change (Goffman, 1974) was when I said, "*always about the women, isn't it Jason?*" I said so in a light-hearted manner, but in the context, it was clear that I was not open to indulging in that direction of interaction. Using tone and laughter was my cue to take the interaction into a more serious paradigm. This served as an example of the co-construction being manipulated by myself as I was keen to move on to less frivolous topics of conversation, with the interview's objectives in my mind. Key changes were frequent throughout the interview as our friendship often led the narrative off-topic, and with time constraints, it was important to remain on track.

3.2 Negotiation of Professional Identity

In a ‘small story,’ Jason responded to me asking about why he had gone to China:

- J: Actually, when I was in high school, I wrote an essay as an assignment about what I’ll be doing in 15 years. I wrote I’d become a teacher in China, and this did materialise. China was my goal and I got here ... it’s helped in a lot of ways, it’s like ... it opened my mind to the world. It honed my teaching skills and made me independent. I was like 20 when I came here but now, I’m resilient. I got many obstacles when I got here but I’m still standing. I took a risk moving abroad but I wanted to be richer and using my English I got at school was always the way, you know? Like you, no?

Within this dialogue, Jason has inhibited his identity by relating explicitly to transnational practices. In ceding that his main objective was seeking socioeconomic opportunities in China, he places his identity across borders with the goal of accumulating capital. Linguistic capital is converted for economic capital as English has had considerable importance placed on it where Jason created a clear link between his economic and social future and his use of English. His future imagined identity, whilst at a school in the Philippines, was placed firmly in China, and linguistically, English was his method of getting there. He finished his small story by insinuating that his circumstance was like mine with the question “*Like you, no?*” I replied in the affirmative to this question to create a shared experience between us, even though my transnational identity was not borne of a desire for more economic capital but for cultural capital. There was little conversion of capital on my part but an expansion of it.

In an expansion of the conversation on moving abroad for work, I asked about why people from his hometown may move abroad.

- J: A lot of Filipinos are just after more money. They think their status will be uplifted when they go abroad but really everything just stays the same. You just work abroad, that’s all. Me, I stay grounded man when I go home, I don’t boast about my money from my job or living abroad.

Using language to label people is an essentialist practise that Jason engages in here despite the mobile fluidity he recognises in his own identity. Language is not neutral (Foucault, 1980, as cited in Weedon, 1997), and it has the power to name things. Jason can operate his power (Foucault, 1977, as cited in Weedon, 1997) by demeaning those in similar situations to him. Although he himself has been marginalised by concepts of power, he seeks to elevate his sense of self by implying his economic status is greater than those around him because of his new professional life. In each social environment where he exists, a ‘site of

struggle' (Norton, 2000) is created, and to delve deeper I asked Jason to expand on what he meant by "*everything just stays the same*". He replied:

J: The people were treating me like a kid who was lucky to be teaching in their university and this happened everywhere. The students had no respect and I definitely didn't feel more empowered than when I was in the Philippines. There I had been to university, so I was like ... looked up to, you know? The only good thing once I had got to China was the money, I could do things I wanted. It was all worth it man!

Jason's different professional settings within China have created sites of struggle where he must legitimise his professional identity, but his social status is offset by the economic benefits. Economic capital can be valued in different forms of habitus. When Jason says "*it was all worth it*", we can see how the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital has taken place. The purchasing power of economic capital was vastly different. This also relates to symbolic materials such as a degree in education from the Philippines. The dynamic circulation of capital (Kelly & Lusic, 2006) appears to have benefited Jason in his transition to China as he has converted his cultural capital from the Philippines into economic capital, although social capital from the Philippines has not been converted as the connections made through his university and hometown have had no bearing on his professional life in China.

Jason's relationship with me reveals a lot about how he negotiated his professional identity having moved abroad to China. He mentioned:

J: I was happy to work with you because it was great to see how a native teacher goes about his business. I loved how you used your language and it motivated me to improve my English and my teaching and just, like ... hanging around with you was cool and helped me with my language skills. I know the others felt the same and were always trying to chat with you! (laughter)

From this, we can surmise that it was merely my position as a 'native speaker' of English that afforded me elevated status in Jason's eyes. He has used his proficiency in English to gain cultural and economic capital but still feels like an outsider in his use of it professionally. I inquired further about what he meant by "*your language*" as I was interested to see whether he saw English as a skill he acquired merely for purchasing economic capital.

J: You know, it's just that you speak it perfectly, don't you?

S: What do you mean by perfectly?

J: Well, you grew up with it in England and me, I spoke my local language at home and just English in class but after school we all spoke the local language again. I thought I was perfect until I moved abroad.

Jason clearly lacked confidence in speaking about his linguistic skills with me as he still had the feeling of the outsider within his professional life.

3.3 Negotiation of Social Identity

A compelling ‘small story’ Jason told me within the interaction touched on his negotiation of social identity in response to a question about the difference in purchasing power abroad and in the Philippines.

J: I can do way more here man. Philippines is like a 3rd world country and here and I get so much more, like online and in shopping malls. Thank god for English man! (laughter) I wouldn’t have shit without my English man coz it got me here you know, and I got my job and all, met you and other mates you know? I studied it hard at school, most of our classes were in English like, and I did my uni in English so I could get here.

By learning English and using it for educational capital, Jason was acting in relation to the world in a dynamic and diverse manner, thus positioning himself in a transnational context through his sense of self, influenced by how he has been subjected to cultural forces and discursive practices (Baxter, 2016). This acquisition of symbolic materials meant Jason recognised that social and economic gains would enhance the range of identities he could claim within the communities at home and abroad. He would have gained the ‘right to speak’ in the contexts of his professional and national identities (Norton, 2013). As a social practice, language learning is implicated in relations of power (Norton, 2013), and in Jason’s case, it has been used exclusively to negotiate what he sees as a higher position within society.

Jason’s multilingualism impacts upon his sense of self. Throughout the narrative, he speaks of moving through his linguistic repertoire as he navigates different contexts of power and recognizes how he relates to both the local and the global society.

J: I can speak several languages and use them when I want to. It depends where I am, you know? Even Chinese, when I’m out in town here or when I’m at the school negotiating with the other teachers and bosses. I never speak my local languages here man, there’s no point. Just when I’m on the phone with my family.

This repertoire is used among what Blommaert (2007) calls ‘orders of indexicality.’ Jason’s mother tongue in the setting of China has very little market value, nor does it in his attempts to migrate to a western country. Through language, Jason understands the sociopolitical contexts of his transnational identity and uses English exclusively to claim ‘power’ through his professional identity (De Costa, 2010).

It was interesting to see how our dialogue was shaping the narrative such as the overt sense of masculinity, as demonstrated below:

- J: Men back home exercise, like I do at the school, coz I want to be masculine and look macho. This is preferred where I'm from, you know, we're by the sea and you've gotta look good with the ladies, otherwise you're alone all the time, you know?
- S: Well, where I'm from it's quite different to be honest but I should definitely get down the gym! (laughter)
- J: Man, do the ladies like you there like they did here?
- S: Sadly not, but to be honest mate I'm just too busy to think about that.
- J: You've gotta introduce me to some English ladies, man!

This seemed to be a prevalent method for us to maintain a bond, which can be explained by the nature of dialogue we engaged in when working as colleagues at the school. As male teachers, we were in the minority at a school where the staff was overwhelmingly female. This influenced our inhabited identities as two heterosexual single men as we exaggerated our masculinity to gain a sense of parity within our surroundings. The nature of our relationship carried over into the interview and is particularly evident in the above text. Jason's gendered identity stems from his nation of origin (Kelly, 2012), for in this culture, men are considered 'macho'; and Jason had identified that in his new surroundings, this may also be the case.

3.4 Negotiation of National Identity

In a 'small story' responding to a question about keeping in touch with home, Jason opened up about his connection to his home culture:

- J: I use things like WeChat and Facebook, it depends, you know? Anything that keeps me in touch on a daily basis. If more than a day goes by I feel like I'm losing my, ...I'm being disrupted you know? I want my identity to still be intact. I am from that country and it's like, it's me. I don't want to lose those ties, I'm like brought up with those, ...and raised in that culture. It made me and I don't want to lose that culture. You know what I mean?
- S: Sure.
- J: Actually, being abroad is a learning practise but I feel disorientated around the people here man, and I want to be with people back home again. It's an awesome country I think, just a bit backward but still a great place to be. There's not so much money, which is why I have to send a lot of my wages back, you remember?

We can see here that Jason is keen to maintain ties with his home country and keep hold of his cultural roots, an example of being both ‘here’ and ‘there.’ In Chongqing, there was no transnational community for Jason to rely on and no sociocultural networks established that would allow him fluid access to his home culture and community. The use of technology is important to maintain the linguistic and cultural ties with his national identity. Jason demonstrates ‘long-distance nationalism’ (Anderson, 1991) with his comments on the Philippines being “*awesome*,” showing that diasporic pride in the ‘homeland’ is a common theme among migrants and plays an important role in the ‘there’ aspect of transnational identity. Remittances made to his mother form a vital economic link to his home country. Guarnizo (2003) states, “remittances have become the most visible evidence and measuring stick for the ties connecting migrants with their societies of origin” (p. 61). Economic capital through remittances is a crucial link to the country of origin and is not converted into any other form of capital for personal gain. Through family ties, the economic link is salient and unnegotiable in the creation of a transnational identity.

Immediately after the small story, Jason mentioned:

- J: I even feel like I’m losing my language, ... my English you know? Nobody here speaks it, so I only practised with you and you’re gone so ... I want to get more English jobs, like ... And I worked so hard on my Aussie accent, even you said it was good, right?

Jason’s adoption of an Australian accent is an example of how transnational migrants adjust their communicative skills to fulfil their needs (Duran, 2016). Jason felt it could aid his professional identity and accumulation of social capital by adopting the persona of a ‘native speaker,’ therefore disinheriting his national identity only temporarily in order to fulfil these aims. Transnational migrants who work as NNESTs, such as Jason, self-doubt their own expertise and judgment linguistically (Phillipson, 1992); therefore, adapting their accent to sound more ‘native-like’ enables them to adapt to the established protocols and attitudes they encounter in new environments.

It is worth mentioning religion and how it is an important identity marker as it crosses borders with the migrant (Souza, 2016).

- J: There’s a Chinese priest who sends me messages everyday but it’s not great here to be honest man. My faith is still strong, but I don’t pray here and I’m not really following the gospel.
- S: Do you think a lot about home when you think of religion?
- J: Definitely, coz we’re really Catholic back home and here there’s none of that so I’ve just let it pass by really. Back home every Sunday we’ll go to the church and I’ll go with my mum but there’s no need here.

Once Jason arrived in China, there were few possibilities to practise his religion as the infrastructure was not there, so his need for refuge and a group in which he could be automatically accepted was absent. He had to seek social networks elsewhere, so religion

became a marker of his identity that was associated with ‘home’ and not relevant in his new social context.

4. Conclusion

Throughout my interaction with Jason, I was able to detect that association with a transnational identity was his tool to guide him to the social and economic standards he aspired to, through the negotiation of multiple identities according to their contexts. His language practices reflect the society from which he came, the society in which he now lives, and the society to which he aims to contribute. This fluid interchanging of his sense of self is a true reflection of current transnational trends as migrants seek to establish connections in their destination whilst maintaining links to their previous settings. Whilst speaking with myself or with his professional colleagues in English, he is reorganizing his sense of self within that particular social world (Weedon, 1997) as he also does when communicating with those he relates to his homeland and when he socialises in China with Chinese colleagues. He is therefore constructing and negotiating his identity according to the changing social and professional contexts in which he is in. Here, it is important to acknowledge the personal relationship I had with the participant and accept there may be an element of subconscious bias in the findings from our conversations; but it may be added that no interaction is entirely unbiased when considering power relations and the production of knowledge in such an encounter.

Transnational teachers draw on their embedded and cultural knowledge they accumulate from different places to construct an identity as teachers who can exert positive influences on local communities to which they migrate (Gu & Canagarajah, 2018). The diverse cultural and linguistic background that Jason possesses does not yet negotiate the current division and hierarchy of English language teachers based on language ownership (Gu & Canagarajah, 2018); but if the local community starts to relate to the benefits of such mobility, a more equal footing could start to prevail, and migrant teachers such as Jason will negotiate their professional identities to assert their credibility as language experts (Kubota, 2002). It is important that future research within sociolinguistics focuses on the concept of mobility and how this may legitimise transnational professionals in an increasingly interconnected global society.

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