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# The Cultural Identities of Foreign Language Teachers

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Foreign language teachers are often migrants. They have traveled and lived in other countries either to learn or to teach a language. In 2005, Domna Stanton characterized language teaching as a cosmopolitan act-- “a complex encounter made in a sympathetic effort to see the world as [others] see it and, as a consequence, to denaturalize our own views” (p. 629). Do foreign language teachers ‘denaturalize’ their views of their native culture through their encounters with the other culture? Could it be that “engagement with the Other necessarily mean[s] an abnegation of the inherited culture” (Mani, 2007, p. 29)? This study investigated not only in how far foreign language teachers affiliate with more than one culture but also how this cultural identity affects their classroom practice. To what extent do foreign language instructors claim multiple cultural identities? What advantages and disadvantages do foreign language instructors experience in the classroom in respect to their cultural identities? To what extent do foreign language instructors feel their cultural identity is relevant in the classroom? Results showed that foreign language instructors engage with their cultural affiliations intellectually, by embracing but not embodying “the other” culture.

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*“...language study is both knowledge and performance, awareness and experience. It is the recognition of this boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar and the actual crossing of that boundary.”*

-Claire Kramersch

*“There is a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name, not of the solution, but of the challenge.”*

-Anthony Appiah

## INTRODUCTION

Foreign language (FL) teachers are often migrants. They have traveled and lived in other countries either to learn or to teach a language. Recent research in second language acquisition (SLA) has described teacher identity as an “immensely complex

phenomenon” and a “profoundly individual and psychological matter” which merits further investigation in order to gain a deeper understanding of foreign language learning itself (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005, p. 39). However, the cultural dimension of teacher identity has rarely been taken into account in SLA research. Work published in this area has addressed the role of identity in teacher education (Bartlett & Erben, 1996; Cross, 2006; Van der Walt, 2007), has investigated the cultural and professional identities of nonnative speaker (NNS) teachers of English as a second language (Brown & Miller, 2006; Dewi, 2007; Pavlenko, 2003), and an even smaller body of research has explored how FL teachers position themselves vis-à-vis the languages that they teach (Clark, 2008; Siskin, 2007). The following review of literature will focus on these three main strands of research and then point to their relevance for our own study of the cultural identities of FL teachers.

### **Identity in teacher education**

The first strand of research to be discussed explores identity in teacher education through various lenses. Even though the studies do not specifically consider the cultural dimensions of teacher identity, they still give insight into the complexity of teacher identity. Bartlett and Erben (1996) studied the identity formation of Australian pre-service teachers of Japanese as a foreign language. They found that the participants in their study performed what Janmohamed (1992) described as “border crossing” (p. 99) in that they sought to master the Japanese language and culture while still preserving their Australian identity and remaining under the control of the economic and political interests of their own nation-state. Looking at teacher identity through the lens of Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Cross (2006) sought to expand the knowledge base in teacher education and to address what he perceived as a gap between teacher education and what teachers actually do in their classrooms. Van der Walt (2007) drew upon Bhabha’s (1994) conceptualization of a ‘third space’ characterized by English teachers’ conflicting ideas between their own identity as speakers of their home variety of English and the pressure to adopt a world Englishes perspective in teaching as advocated by their methods courses. Unfortunately, however, none of these studies employed an interview protocol, which would have allowed the teachers themselves to actively and explicitly reflect upon their own identities. Such a reflection could give insight into the process of teacher identity formation and may also explore its cultural dimension. This study addresses not only the cultural identities of FL teachers but also how teachers describe the relevance of their cultural identities in the classroom.

## Identity of NNS teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL)

The second strand of research to be discussed investigates the identity of NNS teachers in an ESL context. Brown & Miller (2006) explored the identity-related challenges experienced by a highly diverse pre-service ESL teacher cohort, calling for the concept of the native speaker (NS) ideal in ESL teaching to be “continually and systematically challenged” (p. 127). This echoed work by Cook (1999; 2007) and Pavlenko (2003), who emphasized the importance of seeing nonnative ESL teachers as competent L2 users rather than failed NNSs within the context of ESL education. Another study by Dewi (2007) examined shifts in native Indonesian teachers’ professional identities as a result of studying and working as ESL teachers in Australia. The status of English as a global language and the positioning of these investigations in a second language context represent fundamental distinctions between these studies and our own. Instead of exploring the identities of NNS ESL teachers, our study focuses on both NS and NNS German and Spanish instructors at an American university, and how they describe their cultural identities in this context.

Thomas (1999) explored the issue of credibility that NNS teachers face in English language teaching (ELT). Her narrative gives insight into the inner struggles that NNS teachers of American English experience when their authority is questioned by their learners. She argues that NNS teachers first have to prove themselves in their classrooms and their workplaces as proficient users of English in order to be accepted as professionals. With respect to the cultural identities of NNS teachers, Thomas (1999) takes an important stance when she describes NNS as “sometimes strangers on the periphery” (p. 5), pointing to the root of their credibility issue, namely the question of who they are, how they see themselves and how they are perceived by their colleagues and students. Unfortunately, Thomas does not inquire into the ways in which these teachers themselves describe their cultural identities and whether NNS teachers feel they need to represent American culture in their classrooms.

In an empirical study, Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) examined how NNS of English in a graduate TESOL program perceived themselves vis-à-vis English NS teachers. Even though participants described NNS teachers as “dependent on textbooks” (p. 136), they did not express a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis NS professionals. Interestingly, the majority of the participants stated pedagogical expertise as the crucial qualification regarding their professional identity; “whether NS or NNS are better language teachers” (p. 142) appeared to be “rather irrelevant” (ibid.) to them. However, the participants did not mention their cultural affiliations; nor did the researchers inquire into issues on the teachers’ cultural identity in the classroom. Hence, previous research has done much to explore issues on the linguistic authority and credibility of NNS ESL teachers. Still, the cultural dimension of FL teacher identity has not been considered enough.

### Positioning vis-à-vis the target language

A third strand of research explored how FL teachers position themselves vis-à-vis the language they teach. Working from a critical-ethnographic and discourse-analytical framework, Clark (2008) studied to what extent Italian-Canadian youths enrolled in a French teacher education program in Toronto saw themselves as multilingual and multicultural. His results supported the idea of creating space for ‘overlapping identities’, pointing to “the impact of the discourses of multi-lingualism and citizenship on social identity construction” (p. 1). Clark came to the decisive conclusion that the “different dimensions of constraints, opportunities, and ambiguities of overlapping social identities” (p. 12) proved to be complex and difficult to articulate for his participants.

In a very different study of cultural positioning, Siskin (2007) reviewed the memoirs of American NNS teachers of French as a foreign language in order to examine their beliefs regarding French language and culture. In response to the finding that some teachers aimed to transform their own identity by assuming ‘a certain subset of French behaviors’ (i.e. Parisian behaviors), Siskin advocated for the creation of what he described as ‘critical distance’ in the FL classroom – “a privileged space between outsider and insider” where teachers critically examine “their assumptions about language and culture” (p. 27); we will revisit this idea in our pedagogical implications section.

In a case study, Menard-Warwick (2008) investigated how cultural identities of FL teachers develop and manifest themselves in the classroom. Based on her interview and classroom observation data, she explored the cultural identities of two female NNS teachers of English: a California ESL teacher from Brazil and a Chilean English instructor who worked for many years in the United States. Like Clark (2008), Menard-Warwick (2008) found that both women described their identities as “split, hybrid, mixed” (p. 635). Although this study gives valuable insight into the teachers’ affiliations and their approaches to teaching culture, it considers only two teachers who had been in the profession for many years and had developed an ability to reflect on and articulate their cultural affiliations. No graduate student teaching assistants or inexperienced teachers were included in this research.

Exploring the same topic on a larger scale and by means of in-depth interviews, Atay and Ece (2009) explored the issues that Turkish teachers of English described regarding foreign-language learning and changing identities. Although all of their participants reported having “multiple identities” (p. 27), the majority stated that “their Turkish and Islamic identities” (ibid.) were their dominant cultural affiliations. To what extent these teachers felt like they had to represent the culture of the target language remained unexplored in this study.

## Rationale of the present study

Although all of these researchers have done much to open up a discourse on teacher identity, a great deal of work remains to be done if we are to understand the extreme complexity of teacher identity and its implications for the language classroom, particularly in a time when language teachers are expected to go beyond their traditional roles as purveyors of supposedly neutral linguistic codes and serve instead as teachers of *intercultural competence* (Byram & Kramsch, 2008). With the exceptions of Dewi (2007), Siskin (2007) and Menard-Warwick (2008), the aforementioned studies dealt exclusively with pre-service teachers who were not asked to reflect upon their experiences in the classroom, much less the way such experiences might relate to or even affect their sense of self. As a result, the relationship between teacher identity and its relevance as perceived by teachers has not been explored in the classroom. Furthermore, aforementioned examples of empirical research from the field of SLA have not done enough to engage with the much larger body of theoretical work that has been published on identity, multilingualism, and cosmopolitanism.

In her 2005 presidential address to the Modern Language Association, Domna Stanton (2006) characterized language teaching as a ‘cosmopolitan act’ through which “we advocate an encounter with people who are markedly different from and at the same time much like ourselves-- a complex encounter made in a sympathetic effort to see the world as they see it and, as a consequence, to denaturalize our own views” (p. 629). This encounter, according to Stanton, is made possible by “an openness to differences not only out of interest in others but also as central to the identity and beliefs of the self” (p. 638). In her own work on second language learning and teaching, Kramsch, Cain and Murphy-Lejeune (1996) and Kramsch (2003) have explored the nature of such encounters and their transformative effects upon the self. Describing language study as an awareness of the “boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar and the actual crossing of that boundary” (1996, p. 105), Kramsch argues that the “appropriation of foreign languages enables [learners] to construct linguistic and cultural identities in the interstices of national languages and on the margins of monolingual speakers’ territories” (2003, p. 260).

In her essay “Third Culture and Language Education”, Kramsch (2009) points to the limitations of purely dualistic conceptions of FL speaker identity in FL education, namely that language learners are “by definition performers of a first language (L1) and first culture (C1) and are becoming also performers of an L2 and C2” (p. 233), which creates a tension with their self-image. Referring to Bakhtin’s dialogic principle and Bhabha’s idea of “Third Space”, Kramsch draws our attention to the concept of “third culture”, a “symbolic place” (p. 238) which does not “propose to eliminate these dichotomies”, but rather to focus on the very relation between FL speaker’s L1/C1 and L2/C2, the Self and the Other. One question we would like to explore in this paper, then, is how far this type of “new”, multilingual identity might influence

and/or eclipse one's "old", perhaps monolingual identity. Do FL teachers 'denaturalize' their views of their native culture through their encounters with other cultures? To what extent does "engagement with the Other necessarily mean an abnegation of the inherited culture" (Mani, 2007, p. 29)? (See Appendix B, interview questions 4 and 10)

FL teachers may hold the answers to these questions. According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, "asking 'who you are' makes sense to you only once you believe that you can be someone other than who you are" (2004, p. 19). The 'question' of one's identity, then, does not become a question as such until one is exposed to other communities or ways of being in the world. Indeed, "the thought of 'having an identity' will not occur to people as long as 'belonging' remains their fate, a condition with no alternative" (ibid., p. 11-12). At U.S. universities, most FL instructors are either NSs of the target language who have come to the United States, or NNSs who have lived in the target environment for a certain time. NS as well as NNS teachers have therefore been exposed to culturally different settings and may relate to different cultures at the same time.

As Kramsch (2003) points out, "the words that people utter both *refer* to a concrete believable world and *represent* a speaker's or a discourse community's stance and authority towards that world" (p. 105). Language is, of course, more than the sum of grammar and vocabulary. Precisely because language is always situated and contextualized by culture, the question of the cultural belonging of FL teachers emerges with radical importance for the language classroom. The cultural affiliations FL teachers bring to the classroom may affect not only their confidence and level of comfort when teaching about a specific target language culture, but their cultural affiliations and their experience in a C2 might also shape their cultural knowledge and the way they evaluate it. For example, a Spanish NS instructor from Cuba may not affiliate at all with Spanish culture because s/he has never experienced or embraced it herself/himself, which might result in a less enthusiastic and perhaps even unconfident way of teaching about it. On the other hand, a NNS teacher of German may have spent several years in Berlin and teach about the regional culture and the Berlin dialect with much excitement, or even consider herself/himself a "Berliner". Thus, the cultural identities FL teachers have developed may affect the way they view teaching about culture, and the relevance of their own cultural affiliations. Therefore, the main concern of this article is not only in how far FL teachers affiliate with more than just one culture but also how this cultural identity influences the way they perceive themselves in the classroom. In keeping with these objectives, three main questions guide this study:

*Q1: To what extent do foreign language instructors claim multiple cultural identities?*

*Q2: What advantages and disadvantages do foreign language instructors experience in the classroom with respect to their cultural identities?*

*Q3: To what extent do foreign language instructors feel that their cultural identity is relevant in the classroom?*

Because much has been published in regards to the terms *cultural* and *identity*, it is necessary to delineate here just how we conceive of these highly contested words within our own discussion, and to reference those scholars whose work has played an invaluable role in our understanding of them. A very useful distinction between the words *culture* and *cultural* has been made by Arjun Appadurai (1996), namely that “the noun form has to do with its implication that culture is some kind of object, thing, or substance” whereas the adjectival form *cultural* refers to “the realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons” (p. 12). As we are interested in “stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality” (*ibid.*, p. 13), we have chosen to use the adjectival form in this sense. Where *identity* is concerned, we have drawn most closely on the work of Bauman and Kramsch, who, despite moving in different scholarly circles, both see identity as existing in an “evolving context” (Kramsch, 2003, p. 106), as “something to be invented rather than discovered” (Bauman, 2004, p. 15). The combined notion of *cultural identity*, then, is a highly complex product of several processes, which is not at all static, but rather subject to frequent reappraisal.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

A total of twelve graduate student teaching assistants participated in the research, all of whom were working towards doctoral degrees in either German or Spanish at the same large, Midwestern research university. The number of participants was divided evenly across the two languages. Each of these groups included two NSs of the target language, two NNSs with heritage in the target language, and two NNSs without heritage in the target language. The purpose of establishing these different groups was not to draw comparisons between German and Spanish instructors or even between NS and NNS instructors, but rather to achieve an inherent variety within the participant group, as well as to reflect the wide range of biographies present within most FL teacher cohorts. Our participants’ ages ranged from 26 to 45, with an average age of 31. Seven teachers were female and five male. Our NNS participants had all spent time abroad in a culture of their target language; their stays lasted somewhere between six months and thirteen years. Three of our four NS participants had also spent time in a different culture of their native language, with the exception of Maria, who had never lived abroad before coming to the United States as a graduate student. Katrin, a German NS, stated that she was both Dutch and German due to her upbringing in both countries. While all NNSs were

Americans, our NS participants hailed from different German- and Spanish-speaking countries, including Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Cuba, and Colombia. Two of our NS teachers, Claudia and Katrin, were raised bilingually; John, one of our German heritage participants, was also of Cherokee heritage. For a complete breakdown of the participant group, see Appendix A.

### **Instrument and data collection**

Data were collected by means of a semi-scripted interview consisting of 11 items. These items corresponded to four main areas of inquiry including: personal background (e.g., reason for learning the language or wanting to teach it), cultural identity (e.g., expressed affiliations, perceived position vis-à-vis the target language and culture), cultural identity in the classroom (e.g., representing the target language culture, desired self-image in the classroom), and ambition (e.g., developing students' cultural awareness). Interviews lasted anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes and were conducted by a single researcher. Each interview was recorded in its entirety and responses were transcribed and analyzed in order to address the research questions. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

## **RESULTS**

Prior to discussing our study results, it is important to briefly consider the potential limitations posed by the interview questions. In order to elicit meaningful responses which would not obligate our participants to reduce their cultural identities to homogenous and straightforward objects, we chose not to ask the question "What is your cultural identity?" Rather, participants were invited to speak in terms of cultural *affiliations*, the sums of which we interpreted to be constitutive of their cultural identities. Because there is currently no stable discourse or vocabulary available to clearly articulate the practices of "claiming" an "affiliation" with a foreign culture, the possibility that our interview questions posed an instance of tutelage to our respondents was inevitable. Hence, the meaning that our participants ascribed to these words during the interview was contingent on their own interpretation. It was therefore crucial for us to carefully examine our data in order to tease out the implied meanings, tensions, and contending emotions that resided in our participants' responses.

Furthermore, our interview protocol included questions such as "With what culture(s) do you affiliate? How did this (these) affiliation(s) take shape?" (see Appendix B) – questions which can indeed be difficult to answer in an institutional climate that might prefer teachers' identarian certainty over the multiplicity and fluidity of cultural affiliations, regardless of whether a participant is a NS of the target language. Thus, the answers elicited by means of our instrument represent a moment of situated reflection rather than permanent self-representation. As such,

our data give insight into our participants' self-reported affiliations, but through a discourse-analytical lens, also reveal the issues and emotional tensions underlying our participants' self-report.

### **Research Question 1: To what extent do foreign language instructors claim multiple cultural identities?**

Eleven out of twelve participants claimed only one primary cultural identity, which they emphasized over any other, subsidiary identities. These primary identities were in every case their own *national* identities. Furthermore, they were fixed and did not seem to represent a site of conflict, as other research on identity has suggested (Norton Peirce, 1995; Atay & Ece, 2009):

#### **Excerpt 1**

First, (*I affiliate*) with the Cuban culture, because it's my culture, it's where I was raised. And why, because I have it in me. I have in me the music; I have in me the language, I have in me the way of living, I have in me everything what is related to Cuba. —Adrian, NS

#### **Excerpt 2**

But to give up your own beliefs about wherever you're from [...] I don't know if that's desirable. I don't know if I've done that myself either. That's why I would still identify myself as-- first and foremost-- as an American from Michigan. Because that's the way it is, and why should it be different? —Greg, NNS no German heritage

#### **Excerpt 3**

I would not see myself as a global citizen, in this definition that I have in mind of it, which would be *not* affiliated or not thinking about a strong affiliation to *one* country, but being open to living abroad, with trying to sort of...ignoring or detaching from those strings that you have. And I do not do that because I am still very much in love [...] with Austria. —Anja, NS

While both the NS and NNS participants embraced their cultural identities, Greg's pondering response in Excerpt 2 showed the difficulty that some of the participants had when asked to reflect on their own teacher identity and to articulate their own cultural affiliations. It is worth noting that a NNS participant found it undesirable to affiliate more strongly with a culture of his target language than with his own national culture. Indeed, this finding is replicated in Samimy and Brutt-Griffler (1999) and Kramsch (2003).

In addition to their primary cultural identities, all of our participants did indicate other, perhaps more secondary cultural affiliations. This was due to a number of

different factors, most notably familial heritage (Excerpt 4), living abroad (Excerpts 5 and 6) and intellectual disposition (Excerpts 7 and 8):

**Excerpt 4**

My last name is Frey, F-R-E-Y. It's obviously a German, Germanic name. My dad is of Germanic background. [...] Which is not entirely absent from my motivations for learning German. [...] I'm interested in historical Germanic linguistics partially because of my heritage on my dad's side. [...] And also because I don't ignore that part of my heritage, I think that's a very important part of it. —John, NNS heritage

**Excerpt 5**

Because I lived there for so long, and so many friends and experiences, and so many positive things through it, and also negative. But it's just been a big part of my life. I mean, it was my life for a long time. So I can't separate it from who I am anymore. — Greg, NNS heritage

**Excerpt 6**

Of course, I feel I belong to the culture of my country, Colombian culture. But once you arrive here you realize that people here who are from Latin America get together and feel like an empathy or a relation, so you start being conscious of being a part of a Latin community more than just part of your country. — Maria, NS

**Excerpt 7**

On some levels I do (*identify with German culture*), because I was raised to value art and music and literature, and I think that that's identified with German culture a lot, and some of those aspects I identify with. — Michelle, NNS no German heritage

**Excerpt 8**

I think the whole 'global citizen' thing is, I guess for me it's, I tend to intellectualize it. And I'll say, well, we all-- we can all appreciate *this*. We can all appreciate art and museums. We can all appreciate music, culture. So it's like that unifying universal cultural aspect that I'm pretty in tune with. — Jeff, NNS no Hispanic heritage

While Greg and Maria expressed a feeling of belonging to a cultural community different from their own, Michelle and Jeff's responses reveal a greater emotional distance from their target culture by relating to – in terms used by the National Standards (1996) – cultural products instead of communities. Since Greg spent thirteen years in Germany and Maria perceives herself as “a part of a Latin

community” in the United States, they have a greater ability to relate to their respective C2 communities than Michelle and Jeff (both NNS teachers without heritage in the target language), who lived only one year in cultures of their L2. John, a German heritage speaker, tended towards a similarly distanced view; he embraced his German heritage on his father’s side, but not through relating to a contemporary German-speaking community or culture, but through a strong intellectual interest in German historical linguistics.

None of the NNS teachers in the study affiliated primarily with the culture of the language that they teach; similarly, none of the NS teachers affiliated primarily with the culture of the United States, where they are living and working. Taken together, these excerpts indicate that meaningful engagements with and experiences of other cultures may not necessarily lead to a profound restructuring of one’s own cultural identity.

Only one participant, Katrin, expressed ambivalence with regards to her cultural identity. Born to a Dutch father and Austrian mother, Katrin grew up in Germany and was schooled across the border in Holland. In excerpt 7, Katrin describes her cultural affiliations in a way befitting of her complex background:

**Excerpt 9**

The funny thing is that when I’m in Europe I feel that I could very much live with American culture and I appreciate many things from America. But the other way around as well...when I’m here, I’m very European. But it’s more a general thing. I don’t have a specific German or Dutch affiliation [...] — Katrin, NS

Katrin’s appreciation of “American” and “European” cultures depends on her physical distance from the culture with which she affiliates; hence, this affiliation is not stable, neither is it definite. She seems to identify with a culture the most when she is not living in it. Thus, as Bauman (2004) suggested, the question of her cultural identity arises for Katrin every time that she is exposed to the “other” culture to which she relates, while her “claiming” of cultural affiliations remains an ever-changing process determined by the place of her reflection.

**Research Question 2: What advantages and disadvantages do foreign language instructors experience in the classroom with respect to their cultural identities?**

Nine of twelve participants found it challenging to represent the target culture authentically in the classroom and they expressed discomfort with the thought of standing in for or even speaking on behalf of the cultural Other:

**Excerpt 10**

I hate it (*representing Hispanic culture in the classroom*). [...] And it's like, if I were to come in and be all excited about Puerto Ricans and then be all excited about Mexicans, there's no authenticity to that excitement, so I don't really get into it." — Jeff, NNS no Hispanic heritage

**Excerpt 11**

And I can't represent that, it's not who I am. A little bit more with Spain, a little bit more with Cuba, as far as historic traditions, but again, like I said, if I'm trying to represent what actually is going on in Cuba now, it's not-- it's a farce. I don't have the practical experience to do it. — Claudia, NNS heritage

In fact, Jeff and Claudia's defensive and hesitant stances towards representing culture in the classroom shows that they not only find it challenging to authentically represent the cultural Other, but they reject it as something undesirable and nearly impossible. The issue of "authenticity" raised by both Jeff and Claudia is not so much one of "credibility" in terms of their linguistic expertise as NNS language teachers (Thomas, 1999); rather it is rooted in their feeling of misrepresenting or overstating their actual sense of belonging to the target culture and their experience with it.

The idea of authentic representation proved problematic for NS and NNS participants alike, several of whom acknowledged the difficulty of representing the culture of a language, which is essentially multinational:

**Excerpt 12**

It's hard to see yourself as a complete representation of what my culture is. Because what is that? Can you show me one person that represents all the culture of this country? It's so hard to think that way. — Maria, NS

**Excerpt 13**

I'm somewhat comfortable but the problem with Spanish is that there are so many different countries that speak Spanish and I haven't been to most of them. —Allison, NNS no Hispanic heritage

Precisely because authenticity entails intra- and inter-cultural variation and, hence, the relativism of culture, the teaching of cultural "facts" in the classroom beyond broad generalizations proved challenging for Maria and Allison. Such a challenge, of course, is not unique to the teaching of pluricentric languages such as German and Spanish, insofar as there is no such thing as a homogenous culture. As Kramsch et al. (1996) point out, FL teachers must train their students "to recognize both the cultural voice of a socially dominant group and the unique voice of a particular person" (p. 105) This way, teachers can create a sensibility in their students not only

for intra-cultural variation, but also for the fact that the target cultures are not monolithic.

For six of the NNS participants, being confident in one's knowledge of the culture was cited as a source of conflict. Their insecurity was closely related to the assumption that their students could consider them to be experts in the target language culture(s):

**Excerpt 14**

Some of them think that [...] I'm in touch with the German soul and so, you know, I can tell them what Germans eat for breakfast and that would be the truth. [...] And I kinda wanna problematize that for them, because I don't know everything about the German language, I don't know about every German. — Michelle, NNS no German heritage

**Excerpt 15**

To pretend that I can adequately and authoritatively answer their questions on German life-- I mean, I don't wanna pretend that. [...] Teaching culture is actually the thing I'm most uncomfortable with in the classroom because it's the thing I can least knowledgeably comment on. — Alex, NNS no German heritage

Two of the participants even described feeling distant from the target language culture, indicating that this affects their classroom practice. Unlike "critical distance" (Siskin, 2007) which might be seen as a unique perspective or privilege of multiply affiliated individuals, the distance described here seems to indicate an inability or unwillingness to connect personally with the target culture:

**Excerpt 16**

I can tell them, from my personal experiences, the way things seem to be. But I certainly don't feel like I'm an expert [...] I don't know, I guess I feel pretty distanced from German culture. [...] They (*my students*) probably are aware of that. —John, NNS heritage

**Excerpt 17**

Not very confident (*representing German culture in the classroom*)! [...] Not very comfortable, either, because I don't feel so much related to Germany. So it's- - if I talk about Germany I also talk about it with a distance because my parents are both not German and they are also critical about Germany and I'm also [...] So usually I say "the Germans are doing that" instead of "we". [...] So, yeah, there's a little distance. —Katrin, NS

John's statement "I don't know, I guess I feel pretty distanced from German culture" does not only indicate the slight uncertainty and inchoateness of his position; at large, it also begs the question of how frequently FL teachers at institutions of higher education are invited to openly talk about their cultural affiliations within an academic and pedagogical context. Katrin's position suggests that both NS and NNS teachers can feel distance towards their target language cultures.

Furthermore, two of the NS participants expressed difficulties adapting to American cultural norms in the classroom. In Excerpt 18, Maria discusses her conflicting feelings regarding the professional necessity of modifying her cultural behavior:

**Excerpt 18**

At the beginning, it took me a while to stop touching people, especially students, because here it's a big deal. I was used to talking really close to people and to touch them like...(*grabs researcher's arm*). And it has been hard to avoid this situation. [...] You have to change. Everything in your life, it's kind of a performance. [...] It's not like you can totally be the way you are. You have certain rules, which I hate...like there is a distance. [...] So, you have to get used to the system. Don't touch, don't talk too close, so you have to adapt yourself to the culture. —Maria, NS

Maria's suppression of her primary Colombian identity in the classroom illustrates how she (as a NS teacher who only recently arrived in the US) has to *create* a certain distance from her native culture in the classroom. As opposed to other teachers (Excerpts 16, 17) she does not "hate" to represent her own (Hispanic) culture when teaching (Excerpt 10), she "hates" to have to suppress her natural expression of it by adapting to U.S. pragmatics.

Cultural identity was not always perceived as a disadvantage or source of conflict, however. Six of our eight NNS participants cited the opportunity to empathize with students as one of the greatest benefits of their position as NNS teachers:

**Excerpt 19**

Actually sometimes I think that maybe, maybe it's a part of wanting to empathize with them, so I might feel a bit obligated to, or to emphasize, well, that I'm, you know I'm this guy from Michigan. I'm from the Midwest myself. So I'm not, you know, this kind of freak. That I am someone-- I am in a sense one of them. I am American. —Greg, NNS heritage

**Excerpt 20**

Well I want them to see me as someone who is not a native speaker because I want them to see that they can do it. I want them to know that I didn't start

learning Spanish until high school and that it was difficult for me and I learned it in a classroom like they did. —Allison, NNS no Hispanic heritage

Empathizing with students was also seen as a challenge, as the following quote from one of our NS participants indicates:

**Excerpt 21**

Sometimes [...] they use a word [...] and they want me to say it in English but I don't know the word in English. That makes it problematic and then sometime I wished "Man, I wish I was from America!" Then my German wasn't that good but at least I could relate to the culture. So in that sense I guess they also think "Ok, there is a distance". —Katrin, NS

Interestingly, the "distance" Katrin describes here is rooted in the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds that not only she, but also her students bring to the classroom. For her, being able to relate to the students' L1 and C1 is equally crucial and difficult. For this reason, Katrin even states that sometimes she would prefer to be an American NNS teacher of German than a NS.

**Research Question 3: To what extent do foreign language instructors see their cultural identity as relevant in the classroom?**

When asked how they would like their students to see them, eight of our twelve participants emphasized a pedagogical positioning or their personal attributes first and foremost, rather than their cultural identity, as suggested by previous research (Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999):

**Excerpt 22**

First of all, I want students to see me as a very competent teacher of Spanish. That's most important to me. [...] I wanna be seen as, like, "He's a *teacher*, we know he's a teacher. —Jeff, NNS no Hispanic heritage

**Excerpt 23**

Well, I think they think I'm crazy. But they like me [...] I think that they think I'm a character. They see me as a nice, trustful character. —Adrian, NS

**Excerpt 24**

I would like to think that they think I'm a fun teacher, you know, who's enthusiastic. —Alex, NNS no German heritage

Nevertheless, several of the participants' comments seemed to state, with varying degrees of directness, that there is indeed a relevant place for the teacher's cultural identity in the classroom:

**Excerpt 25**

When they take a look at me they see someone who doesn't look Hispanic, but I hope that part of what we are doing is breaking down stereotypes about what is Hispanic. Because according to the definition of what Hispanic is, I am Hispanic. My father was born in a Latin American country, his first language is Spanish. But for them to see how Hispanic has a lot of different faces and colors and cultures and it's not a monolith like they tend to see it [...].—Carolina, NNS heritage

**Excerpt 26**

I don't mind teaching other Latin American cultures. But what I don't know I'm not going to teach. What I'm not acquainted with I'm not gonna teach. So I'd rather focus on Cuba or for example Honduras. I lived four years in Honduras, so I know that culture and I know I have a lot of that culture imprinted on me even if I was there for just four years. —Adrian, NS

**Excerpt 27**

There are specific things in my culture that they don't know. But I like to explain it to them...like for example "In my country this is not the way you think." [...] Little things, like I explained the word "fatty". In my country, they use the word "fatty" to say "Honey, come here!". For us, being fatty is cute. In this country here, it's more like an insult. —Maria, NS

As a Hispanic heritage speaker, Carolina would like her students to recognize the many "different faces and colors" within Latin American cultures. NS Maria even expresses that she likes to explain to her students the "little things" that constitute the difference between Columbian and American culture. However, Adrian's underlying defensive attitude brings to light how the relevance that many of our teachers ascribe to their cultural identity goes hand in hand with their familiarity and level of comfort with the target culture(s).

On the other end of the spectrum, one of our participants explicitly stated that his cultural identity was *not* relevant in the classroom, even going so far as to imply that to represent it would be inappropriate to his role as a German teacher:

**Excerpt 28**

I don't typically bring up my ethnic identity. I don't think any of them have noticed it. [...] And I guess in the classroom that doesn't matter, you know. Because I'm not there to teach Cherokee culture, Cherokee language, I'm

there to teach German. [...] I don't feel like I'm portraying my own culture. But that would really have no place in the classroom, I guess. —John, NNS heritage

The subtle tension that John expresses here is between “teaching German” and not portraying “his own”, namely Cherokee, culture in the classroom. Although John is of both German and Cherokee heritage, and although he acknowledges the importance of both, he appears to truly identify with only the latter as he emphasizes: “I’m a member of the Eastern band of Cherokee Indians – through the matrilineal line up to my great-grandmother.” Later, he refers to his Cherokee heritage as his “primary ethnic and cultural identification” due to his upbringing. In contrast, he describes a “love-hate relationship” with German culture because it is so “very very different from Cherokee culture.” His contentious emotions about his mixed cultural heritage may be the reason why he neglects the relevance of his cultural identity in the classroom overall.

For some of our participants, the portrayal of a sort of “identitylessness” proved more important than the transmission of their own cultural identity. Three of our participants expressed that they did not want their students to see their cultural identity in any particular way:

**Excerpt 29**

I think that on a cultural level, because I don't really pertain more to one Spanish-speaking culture than another, I would like them not to place me within one culture. [...] I like to stay away from that because I like them to be open-minded. [...] And so I guess because I don't have a particular affinity for any one place, my goal is to be as kind of broad and general as possible where my cultural references are.” —Claudia, NNS heritage

**Excerpt 30**

In general, I want to present a very broad identity to them because I think there is a very narrow idea of what that is. [...] So I would like to present as broad of an identity as possible. —Carolina, NNS heritage

## DISCUSSION

In our introduction, we raised two overarching questions, namely whether FL teachers “denaturalize their views” (Stanton, 2006, p. 629) of their native culture through encounters with the other culture, and to what extent “engagement with the Other necessarily mean[s] an abnegation of the inherited culture” (Mani, 2007, p. 29). An answer to these questions can be found in our participants’ descriptions of their personal cultural affiliations. The fact that eleven out of twelve participants claimed one cultural identity over others and that these identities were most often expressed

as being national in nature, shows that national boundaries do not simply cease to exist. Our participants' views of their native culture, or "inherited" culture, according to Mani (2007), have been "denaturalized" in that they did not recognize it as their *only* cultural identity, but as their *primary* cultural identity in addition to other secondary ones. Therefore, our data implies that engagement with the cultural Other does not necessitate an "abnegation of the inherited culture" (Mani, 2007).

If language teaching is indeed a cosmopolitan act (Stanton, 2006), our participants' cultural identities proved to be cosmopolitan in various ways: they affiliate with their target language cultures and yet they remain rooted in their primary identity, which was in every case their own national identity. To quote Domna Stanton (2006), "if cosmopolitan since the early modern period has been defined in opposition to the nation and then nationalism, it becomes clear today, after the end of the cold war, that such binary thinking must be rejected in favor of a more capacious view that encompasses both the national and the transnational, the local and the global" (p. 636). Any understanding of cosmopolitanism, which does not account for or allow the possibility of coexisting affiliations, cannot be effective as long as national communities evoke powerful emotions in those who live there, or those who *have* lived there but no longer do. A quote from Anja, one of our German NS participants, conveys this most cogently:

### Excerpt 31

"I am still very much in love or still, I should say *again*, with Austria because that only really came when I was living abroad for 2 or 3 years. That you just think of your home country and the people you miss as this heavenly country that you're not in. Which basically makes it-- that's what makes it so nice, that you can think about it as such." —Anja, NS

Hence, Appiah's (2006) notion of 'rooted cosmopolitans' seems to describe our interviewees best in that it acknowledges that "loyalties and local allegiances [...] determine who we are" (p. xviii-xix) even if we engage with a globalized world by living in other cultures and by learning to speak foreign languages. Unequivocally, the participants' primary cultural affiliations proved to lie in their own national "loyalties and local allegiances" with their respective home countries (ibid.). However, our participants only in part reflect Appiah's idea of rooted cosmopolitanism, which for him begins with the idea that in "the human community, as in national communities" we need to develop "habits of coexistence" (p. xix). His book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, vehemently argues in favor of shared universal values across cultures and thus conveys that cultural differences are vastly exaggerated. In contrast to Appiah's dismissal of cultural differences, our participants emphasized the difference between their primary and secondary cultural identities, which did not replace each other, but rather seemed to exist side by side. This did not lead our teachers to a detachment from their primary

cultural identity, but it allowed for an uncommon perspective from which they can see both cultures through a new and distinctive lens.

Therefore, FL teachers remain rooted in their own national identities while they have the opportunity to pass on their knowledge of the target culture. That this knowledge is seen by many FL instructors as inadequate, uncertain, or distant points to the need for addressing issues of cultural identity, and its relation to cultural knowledge and training, in the world of FL teacher education, which has hitherto viewed teacher identity as only of “occasional relevance to teaching” (Morgan, 2004, p. 6). Furthermore, research on FL teachers’ methods syllabi showed that cultural knowledge was not even a component of the future teachers’ course grade (Wilbur, 2007). Such minimal FL teacher training in cultural pedagogy might explain why our participants felt that they lack the background knowledge and the tools to teach culture. In agreement with Schultz (2007), we believe that building this cultural background knowledge and practical experience in making comparisons between the students’ native and the target culture should start during the pre-service education of L2 teachers. In addition, teacher educators should share with new instructors ways of thinking about culture “not just as an inheritance, but as a practice” (Mani, 2007), in order to help them to create a greater awareness that cultural knowledge is also, regardless of the teacher’s cultural affiliations, an acquired privilege. This privilege is acquired in the sense that “no one is a ‘born teacher’ of the language” - and one may add, of the culture – “into which he or she was born” (Mani, 2009, p. 149). Even NS teachers “must rehearse and hone” (ibid.) their pedagogical practices in order to effectively teach the language and culture in which they have lived. In this sense, the privilege of the NS “is as much of an acquired privilege as that of a nonnative speaker” (ibid.). Precisely because “expertise is learned” and “not fixed or innate” (Rampton, 1990, p. 98), it requires an intellectual disposition vis-à-vis the target culture, as expressed by some of our participants.

Notwithstanding, FL teachers can also act as native or nonnative informants of the countries and places they have lived in, because they may carry “visible inscriptions of his/her cultural Otherness” (Mani, 2009, p. 144), as Adrian expressed (Excerpt 26). In Maria’s case, these visible inscriptions even manifested themselves in the pragmatics of her classroom communication (Excerpt 18).

Overall, our results have shown that FL instructors engage with their cultural affiliations intellectually and open-mindedly, by embracing “the other” culture, but not viewing it as their primary cultural affiliation. In fact, many of our participants expressed a resistance to performing or representing something that they do not claim as their primary cultural identity (Excerpts 10, 11, 17, and 26). As Kramsch (2003) observed, “even if given the choice, most language learners would not want to become one of ‘them’ [native speakers]” (p. 256). In fact, none of our NNS participants stated that it is their goal to be mistaken for a NS of their respective target language (see Appendix B, question 10) – a finding that only underlines how an ‘abnegation’ of the C1 or L1 proved undesirable for our participants. Language

teaching as a cosmopolitan act does not require the performance or embodiment of the target culture in the classroom; neither does it demand a profound restructuring of one's own cultural identity. Rather, it requires the adoption of a cosmopolitan disposition, in the sense that Hannerz (1990) describes, "a willingness to engage with the Other [...] an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences" (p. 239). By bringing this willingness into the classroom, FL teachers can cross the boundaries of who they are in order to engage a group of students with the world of a cultural Other.

Our participants' occasional pondering or defensive stances towards teaching the cultures of their target language was perhaps rooted in the institutional climate in which the interviews were conducted. Their attempts to point out their cultural affiliations and the way their views of their native culture have 'denaturalized' over time (see Appendix B, question 4)– the complexity of what Bhabha (1994) and Kramsch (2009) have called "third space" – seem to lead us to the very essence of the Appiah quote stated at the head of this article, namely that "cosmopolitanism is the name, not of the solution, but of the challenge." For our participants, this challenge has proven to lie not only in the ability to reflect on their cultural affiliations, but also in the difficulty of articulating them. As Clark (2008) suggested, while teachers may have a "sense of place, solidarity, and belonging (...) where they belong or who they are, is not so easily defined" (p. 13). At the same time, our participants' lack of confidence and their discomfort when teaching their target culture(s) highlights the need for addressing culture during teacher training, as FL instructors often feel "left on their own devices to find cultural resources, instructional strategies and frameworks" (Byrd, Hlas, Watzke, & Montes Valencia, 2011, p. 5) to mediate cultural knowledge in their language classes.

## **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

We believe that FL teachers' awareness of the relevance of their cultural identities in the classroom and their attempts to define and articulate their cultural affiliations merits intensive attention not only in future research but also in teacher training.

FL teacher educators at US universities should emphasize the importance of thematicizing teacher identity in FL instruction and should acknowledge that it is a complex issue which should be addressed early on – not in a prescriptive way but rather as an open dialogue that encourages teachers to position themselves vis-à-vis the cultures of their respective target language (Starkey, 2007). As Siskin phrased it, "we as teachers need to make explicit our assumptions about language and culture" (2007, p. 36). As our data shows, teachers themselves still appear to lack opportunities to critically reflect on their cultural affiliations and their roots. This begs the question of how such positioning could best be encouraged among graduate student teachers like our study participants. In addition to offering a separate graduate level course on cultural identity and FL pedagogy (e.g., as suggested by

Samimy & Brutt-Griffler (1999) concerning issues related to English NNS teacher identity), mentoring new teachers on an individual level within language departments could be a practical solution. Regular conversations about their cultural instruction could help teachers to express how they view their own cultural affiliations and to learn “how to incorporate this self-understanding into their teaching” (Menard-Warwick, 2008, p. 636). Mentors to teaching assistants, likely experienced language teachers in their respective departments, could also aid novice teachers in a critical appraisal of what experiences and factors shape the development of their professional self. This way, even the potential mentioned by Siskin, namely that a teacher might affiliate with an “(idealized) native speaker/culture bearer” (2007, p. 36), could be made an object of reflection. Nevertheless, Siskin does not consider that some teachers, because they feel distanced from it, are not at risk of “emulating” (ibid.) a target language culture at all. In this case, a reflection on the roots of this distance is needed.

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## Appendix A. Participant Data

Name*	Language taught	Participant group	Age	L1(s)	Country where raised	Abroad experience
Anja	German	NS	30	German	Austria	USA (4 years), Germany (1 year), Russia (1 year), UK (2 years)
Katrin	German	NS	32	German, Dutch	Germany, Netherlands	Austria (5 months), USA (5 years)
John	German	NNS, heritage	26	English	USA	Germany (1 year)
Greg	German	NNS, heritage	45	English	USA	Germany (13 years), Saudi Arabia (1 year)
Alex	German	NNS, no heritage	28	English	USA	Germany (1 month)
Michelle	German	NNS, no heritage	28	English	USA	Austria (8 months), Germany (5 months)
Adrian	Spanish	NS	36	Spanish	Cuba	Honduras (4 years), USA (3 months)
Maria	Spanish	NS	30	Spanish	Colombia	USA (5 years)
Carolina	Spanish	NNS, heritage	30	English	USA	Spain (1 year), Chile (8 months)
Claudia	Spanish	NNS, heritage	29	English, Spanish	USA	Spain (6 months)
Allison	Spanish	NNS, no heritage	29	English	USA	Spain (3 years)
Jeff	Spanish	NNS, no heritage	31	English	USA	Rome (4 months), Germany (1 month), Ecuador (1 year), Spain (6 summers)

\*Names are pseudonyms.

## Appendix B. Interview Protocol

Name:

Age:

L1(s):

Where were you raised?

Have you studied abroad?

### I. Background

1. What was your initial motivation to learn this language?

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What was your initial motivation to go into German/Spanish studies?

2. Why do you want to teach German/Spanish?

### II. Personal Affiliations

4. With what culture(s) do you affiliate? How did this (these) affiliation(s) take shape?

5. The stated goal of many foreign language programs is to create 'global citizens'. To what extent do you feel that *you* are a 'global citizen'?

6. How do you relate to the German/Spanish language and culture?

### III. In the Classroom

7. How do you feel your students see you? How do you *want* them to see you?

8. Do you feel obligated to portray a certain cultural identity in the classroom? Where does this obligation come from? How do you respond?

9. How do you feel representing German/Hispanic culture in the classroom?

### IV. Ambitions

10. Is it your goal to be mistaken for a native speaker of the language that you teach? Why or why not? Mistaken by whom?

11. What sort of cultural sensibility, if any, do you want to develop in your students? Do you believe that students want to develop this for themselves? If yes, which students (or types of students)?