

Book Reviews

Hiratsuka, T., *Narrative Inquiry into Language Teacher Identity: ALTs in the JET Program* (1st ed.). Routledge, 2022, 248 pp., \$65.59 (Paperback), \$244.00 (Hardback), \$59.19 (eBook), ISBN 9781003248729 (ebk)

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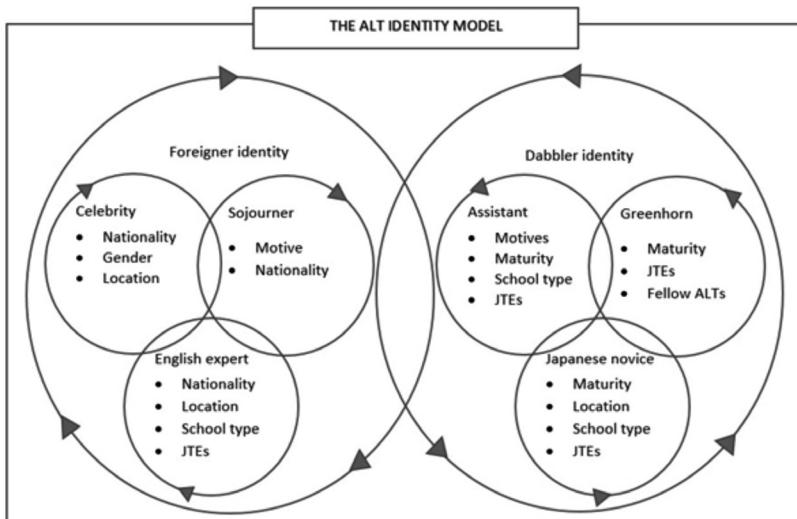
Narrative Inquiry into Language Teacher Identity by Hiratsuka, a former qualified and experienced Japanese teacher of English in Japanese schools (JTE), investigates the Assistant Language Teachers' (ALTs) multiple identities, their formations and what influences them inside and outside of the classroom contexts. ALTs are Native English speakers from different English-speaking countries with or without language teaching qualifications and experience. The book has 10 chapters themed into three parts. Part 1 (Chapters 1, 2 & 3) presents the significance and rationale of the book; the history and the empirical research on the fully paid Japanese exchange and teaching program (JET), where native English speakers from different countries come to Japan as ALTs to co-teach English with Japanese English teachers to promote English language and cultural exchange for a short period of time (1-5 years) and the concept of language teacher identity vis-à-vis ALTs. Part II (Chapters 4 & 5) deals with the methodology - narrative inquiry - data collection, analysis, and sample narratives that emerged through data analysis. Part III (Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10) discusses the findings and implications of the study.

The study focuses on representing identity and identity formation of ALTs as a whole (amalgamation of personal, professional and social identities) instead of focusing on any specific identity (mostly only professional, ignoring the other two) because focusing only on the professional side often leads to a positive and rosy picture of the JET program (Tajino & Tajino, 2000; Leonard, 2003). Narrative inquiry is one of the best ways to capture a holistic picture of identity as narratives are co-constructed within social, cultural and historical conventions (Early

& Norton, 2013; Norton & De Costa, 2018) across person(who), time (when), space(where) and context (Barkhuizen, 2016).

The participants of the study are former ALTs selected based on convenience and snowball sampling. 22 participants from different age groups, nationalities, gender and ALT batches were selected to make the sampling as diverse as possible. Out of 22, only 10 participants' narrative interviews, which are held in English via online and offline for 1.5-5 hours each over 2 years (June 2018–May 2020), were considered due to similar stories and repeated experiences. Data collection and analysis was done simultaneously “through a constant comparison of emerging themes and subsequent new data ” by using a combination of inductive and deductive methods called abductive reasoning. This cyclical process helped in achieving most appropriate themes in the data.

The findings indicate two major identities in ALTs with three sub-identities each as presented below.



The first major identity is foreigner identity. All the ALTs are viewed as foreigners by themselves and by others (local people, JTEs, students etc...). Entangled in this main identity are three sub-identities: a) *celebrities*: ALTs were treated as celebrities because of their exuding foreignness in their appearances. This has two sides. On one side, ALTs were idolized and appreciated by the local people, they were given

handsome salaries and benefits by the government. On the other hand, ALTs felt frustrated with the unusual attention by the locals disturbing their privacy b) *sojourners*: This means temporary visitors. Some ALTs join JET to explore, travel and have a break in life without the fear of commitment. For them, sojourner's identity is positive. However, for the other ALTs, this identity negatively affects them since it does not offer much scope for personal and professional advancements in Japan after the end of the contract c) *English experts*: Almost all the ALTs thought and were considered as English experts both inside and outside of the classroom irrespective of their educational background or skills. This sometimes leads to too much responsibility on the part of ALTs.

The second major identity is dabbler identity. Dabblers are someone who takes a slight or not very serious interest in a subject (limitations of engagement). Though it is not a positive identity most ALTs are seen as dabblers by themselves, fellow ALTs and by others. The sub-identities are formed based on the different limitations of engagement: a) *assistants*: to JTEs with no qualifications, intrinsic motivation, limited performing opportunities and intellectual stimulation b) *greenhorns*: young, immature and unskilled ALTs who lack professional training and development skills to succeed as a good ALT c) *Japanese novice*: ALTs who do not have basic Japanese language abilities or understanding of Japanese culture.

All the main and sub-identities are influenced by internal factors (motives and expectations; nationality and ethnicity; gender and sexual orientation; maturity and previous experiences) and external factors (location, school types, JTEs and fellow ALTs).

Narrative inquiry into language teacher identity presents a well organized and easy to read research which offers a good understanding of the complex process of identity formation. The detailed rationale about choosing narrative inquiry as a method of data collection gives any novice reader an in-depth understanding of what, where and how to use narrative inquiry in a research study. However, a more detailed explanation of "abductive reasoning" through which transcribed narratives are edited, revised and sequenced could have helped gain a better understanding of how the findings emerged. Also, other data collection methods like open-ended questionnaires, ethnographic studies could have been used for robust triangulation of the data.