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Summary

This dissertation reports on how Chinese and Dutch teachers of English as a foreign language in secondary education in different countries perceived themselves as teachers in relation to cultures associated with the English language. In different cultural contexts, teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL teachers) can have diverse ideas about language-and-culture teaching, and they may have different notions of themselves as teachers in relation to cultures associated with the English language (or ‘ES cultures’, often referred to British and American cultures). The notion of how EFL Teachers see themselves and perceive their roles in relation to ES cultures is referred to in various studies as ‘teachers’ intercultural identities’.

In this dissertation, we explore the characteristics of EFL teachers’ intercultural identity perceptions, and the relationship between EFL teachers’ cultural values and their intercultural identities. Knowing more about teachers’ intercultural identities and about how teachers’ cultural values and their intercultural identities are connected, could contribute to and inspire pedagogies and training in foreign language teaching.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction chapter gives an overview of the background to the research project, the theoretical framework for exploring teachers’ intercultural identities, and the structure of this dissertation. First, we outline the current challenges of language teaching in the intercultural contexts that EFL teachers are faced with, which provide the background to this dissertation. Nowadays EFL teachers are expected to encourage their students to develop both the competence to use the language and the competence to communicate with people across cultures. Non-native EFL teachers, who are the majority of the EFL teachers worldwide, learn about the English language and ES cultures mostly in their home countries. These teachers may face dilemmas and conflicts between their home cultures and ES cultures, and may unconsciously bring their stereotypes about ES cultures to class. It is important therefore for teachers to be aware of their intercultural identities in teaching. However, the available relevant literature does not offer a sufficient understanding of non-native EFL teachers’ intercultural identities, nor of any variables that influence these identities.

Second, we discuss notions of culture, conceptualizations of teachers' intercultural identity, and cultural values. From a sociocultural perspective, language and culture are integrated in EFL teaching and learning, and culture is both the content and context of EFL teaching, involving both the personal and professional experiences of teachers. As teachers keep receiving various cultural ideas in the context of EFL teaching, they constantly renegotiate their identities. The identity of an EFL teacher can be seen as a crucial component both in determining language teaching practice and in understanding the sociocultural context of the language classroom. Cultural values, which express shared beliefs about what is good and desirable in a particular society, can be seen as one of the predictors for teachers' intercultural identities.

Third, the introduction chapter outlines the context, problem definition, and research questions of our study. We focused on non-native EFL teachers from two countries: China and the Netherlands. The two countries differ not only in their geographic and cultural distances from ES cultures, but are also very different from each other, as can be seen from their different cultural values and ways of communicating. In both countries English is regarded as the most important foreign language in secondary schools. However, the two countries differ in their education systems, requirements for teachers, use of English language in social life, and attitudes towards ES cultures.

In this research, we explored the characteristics of EFL teachers' intercultural identities and the relationship between their cultural values and intercultural identity perceptions, with the aim of contributing to pedagogies and training in teaching about culture. We focused on two main general questions:

1. How do non-native EFL teachers in secondary education in different countries perceive their intercultural identities?
2. How are the cultural values of these non-native EFL teachers related to their intercultural identities?

The study contains four phases: (1) defining intercultural identity through a systematic review of recent studies; (2) exploring intercultural identity through interviews with a small group of teachers; (3) comparing intercultural identities of Chinese and Dutch teachers by surveying a large group; and (4) explaining intercultural identity by looking into the relationship between teachers' cultural values and their intercultural identities.

The dissertation reports the four phases in six chapters.

After the introduction and overview of the research in the first chapter, the second chapter presents a systematic review of the relevant literature which inspired us to design the present study based on a mixed method. The third chapter reports on an interview study in which Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers participated; the results of this study were later used to develop questionnaire items for the large-scale survey. The fourth chapter reports the results from the questionnaire survey, from which underlying factors of teachers' intercultural identity perceptions were found. The fifth chapter explores further the relationship between EFL teachers' cultural values and their intercultural identities. The last chapter provides a general conclusion and discussion of our findings. Figure 1.1 provides a schematic overview of the whole study and the chapters.

Chapter 2: A review study into intercultural identities of non-native teachers of English

In Chapter 2, we report on a review of relevant studies to pave the way for a theoretical basis for the perspectives and methods of the present research project. We selected 21 articles from a total of 59 potentially relevant articles in several international databases for research articles on the identities of non-native EFL teachers. Only articles that reported empirical studies were selected and the studies were conducted in both ESL (English as a second language) and EFL countries; all were published between 1997 and 2015 in peer-reviewed journals. The articles were categorized in two groups according to their themes: themes about the characteristics of teachers' intercultural identities, and themes about the formation of these intercultural identities. We provided overviews of the studies based on their aims, the adopted and related concepts, methodologies and main findings.

From the overviews, we found that three groups of interrelated factors shaped the intercultural identities of the teachers, namely, factors related to personal traits (such as personality, or linguistic, intercultural and teaching competence), factors related to the teaching context, and factors related to sociocultural context. The reviewed studies revealed three common characteristics of the intercultural identities of non-native EFL teachers. First, the teachers' intercultural identities were found to be flexible and were constantly adjusted depending on the challenges and conflicts they had to face. Second,

non-native EFL teachers developed different intercultural identities depending on their sociocultural and institutional backgrounds. Third, the teachers' confidence in their language skills and intercultural competence influenced their intercultural identities, which may then — in turn — have influenced their attitudes towards languages, teaching and culture, within the intercultural context.

Our review found that research on the intercultural identities of non-native EFL teachers has only recently begun to receive widespread attention. The small number of relevant studies, the limited number of participants in the studies, the limited variety of the participants, and the inconsistency of terminology used led us to conclude that only limited insight can currently be gained into how teachers consider their identities in relation to the target language and culture of their teaching. To enable further exploration of the intercultural identities of non-native EFL teachers and arrive at fruitful approaches for understanding the formation and roles of their intercultural identities, we need more in-depth case studies and large-scale surveys across countries to explore the characteristics of the intercultural identities of non-native EFL teachers. We designed an exploratory study with sociocultural perspectives and a mixed method involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The design of the study was based on the theories and research about culture in foreign language teaching, teachers' identity, intercultural sensitivity, and cultural values.

Chapter 3: A qualitative study of Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers' intercultural identities

In Chapter 3, we report on an interview study with a small group of Chinese and Dutch secondary school EFL teachers. We focused on secondary school teachers because cultural content (in addition to mere language content) is more prevalent at the secondary levels of the compulsory EFL curriculum. The aim of the interview study was to explore and compare how Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers perceive themselves in relation to ES cultures. The questions in the interview protocol were designed to elicit the teachers' notions of themselves as teachers in relation to teaching the cultures associated with the English language, and their ideas about the influence of ES cultures on their personal and professional lives.

We interviewed 5 Chinese and 5 Dutch secondary school EFL teachers. The interview questions focused on four aspects: (a) teachers' feeling of connection with ES cultures; (b) influence of ES cultures on their personal or professional identity; (c) intercultural sensitivity, i.e., teachers' perceptions of their own ability to cope with intercultural experiences; and (d) their attitudes towards ES cultures in teaching. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the answers were summarized and categorized by their relevance to the four aspects.

We found in the interviews that both Chinese and Dutch teachers maintained a strong affiliation to their own cultures. They felt connected to ES cultures by profession or personal interest. Some of the teachers noticed influences of ES cultures on their identities, and they were flexible in coping with cultural differences most of the time. They all tried to be impartial in culture teaching, because they regarded it as important to consider cultures as equal and to avoid imposing their own ideas on students. However, some of the teachers felt it was not always necessary to remain impartial because they seldom paid attention to culture teaching, or felt that it was not always easy to do so because their students were able to pick up their attitude in one way or another even if the teachers did not express it explicitly. These findings are generally consistent with the results of previous studies.

The intercultural identities of Chinese and Dutch teachers differed in all 4 aspects. These differences show a range of variance in each of the aspects, e.g., from feeling less to more connected to ES cultures, from having less to more awareness of cultural similarities, from being less to more influenced by ES cultures in personal lives, and from having less to more awareness of being impartial in culture teaching. When looking into the four aspects in each of the national groups, we found that the more distant the home culture of the teachers was from ES cultures, the less likely it was that the teachers regarded themselves as a person who feels connected to ES cultures in their personal lives, the less confident they felt in communicating with native speakers of English or about their knowledge of ES cultures, the less influences from ES cultures they saw in their personal lives, and the less awareness they reported of their own attitudes in culture teaching.

The results revealed challenges and difficulties for EFL teachers in culture teaching, not only for teachers whose home culture is far from ES cultures but also for those whose culture is close to ES cultures. For Chinese teachers, the sources of

difficulties lay mostly in their limited access to authentic materials from ES cultures and lack of immediate need for intercultural communication with people from ES cultures. For Dutch teachers, there were challenges in the form of different cultural norms (e.g., between Dutch and American cultures), and the risk of overlooking cultural differences.

Chapter 4: A large-scale exploration of Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers' intercultural identities

Chapter 4 reports on the development and use of a questionnaire to explore intercultural identities among a larger group of Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore how Chinese and Dutch non-native teachers of English perceive their intercultural identities on a larger scale, what common factors underlie their identity perceptions, and what similarities and differences there are between Chinese and Dutch teachers' intercultural identity perceptions. To this end, based on both our literature review and the results of interview study from Chapter 3, we designed a questionnaire survey in which 114 Chinese and 154 Dutch non-native EFL teachers participated.

Four underlying factors in teachers' intercultural identities were found: *'Openness to ES cultures'*, *'Connection to ES cultures'*, *'Disconnection from ES cultures'*, and *'Impartiality with respect to ES cultures'*. The results show that Chinese and Dutch teachers perceived their intercultural identities differently in three of the four factors, though both groups considered themselves connected to ES cultures. Chinese teachers perceived more difficulties than Dutch teachers in communicating with English speakers and in understanding or accepting ES cultures. In addition, compared with Dutch teachers, Chinese teachers placed less emphasis on the importance of being impartial to ES cultures and they were more likely to highlight only the positive sides of cultures than were the Dutch teachers. For both groups of teachers, such differences were found to be more connected to their nationality than other background variables, such as gender and years of teaching experience.

The survey findings confirmed our findings from the interviews about Chinese and Dutch teachers' different intercultural identities, and the context-dependent nature of teachers' intercultural identities. The questionnaire survey provided more insights by comparing non-native EFL teachers' intercultural identities in different nations, e.g., searching for general tendencies of specific groups and testing relevant contextual

variables.

Chapter 5: Exploring the relationship between non-native EFL teachers' cultural values and their intercultural identities

Chapter 5 reports on an exploration of how cultural values might be used to predict teachers' intercultural identities. The aim of the study was to explore the nature of the relationship between the cultural values of EFL teachers and their intercultural identities. Base on the review of relevant studies and Schwartz's theory about cultural values, we formulated some general expectations about the predictive power of the specific cultural values with respect to teachers' intercultural identities. These expectations were based on earlier, more general, research on people's cultural values and their attitudes towards intercultural communication, earlier studies of teachers' intercultural identities, descriptions of the values by Schwartz, our own concept of intercultural identity, and the situation of non-native EFL teachers who work in their own countries.

To examine the expectations, we adopted the English version of Schwartz's 40-item Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ), and explored the relationships between the cultural values and intercultural identity of Chinese and Dutch teachers in the analysis. To improve our understanding of teachers' roles and self-awareness with regard to teaching about culture, we explored how cultural values can be used to predict teachers' intercultural identities.

The results show that the Chinese and Dutch teachers maintained almost the same set of preferences of cultural values that had been found in those earlier studies for the respective populations in general. We found the 3 values, i.e., tradition, power and benevolence, to be connected to some of the factors, namely, Openness to ES cultures, Disconnection from ES cultures, and Impartiality with respect to ES cultures. The connections were in line with our expectations at the start of our research. In addition, these three values were found to explain more variance in the intercultural identity perceptions of the Dutch teachers than of Chinese teachers; for the group of Chinese teachers, the connection was not statistically significant.

Chapter 6: General conclusions and discussion

In Chapter 6, we go back to our central research questions and we discuss the findings of the studies reported in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. We also provide implications for future studies on intercultural identities of teachers in different countries and for pedagogies and training in language teaching in intercultural contexts.

In the exploratory study, intercultural identity of EFL teachers manifests itself as a multi-dimensional and dynamic fluid entity, rather than a fixed or prescribed model. Teachers' intercultural identities enable different processes of extending their vision from their own cultures to other cultures, and blur the boundaries between cultures. Our study highlighted the importance of critical perspectives (meaning perspectives involving awareness of different ideologies and perspectives that justify analysis of both merits and faults of cultural issues), skills of culture teaching, and self-reflections of the teachers. As long as there is teaching involving two or more cultures, more research will need to be done to explore how other groups of teachers consider their intercultural identities, what the factors behind such identities are, and how they can be helped to use reflection on their intercultural identities in culture teaching. In future research, it would also be interesting to further explore the common features of EFL teachers across countries (and possibly across other contexts), in order to identify not only the roots of their similarities but also how these similarities could be used to benefit students and EFL teachers worldwide.