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College of Education and P-16 Integration

2022

8 National Perspectives on Mexican Transnational EAL Teachers: Ideological and Professional Challenges

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David Martínez-Prieto and Kristen Lindahl

> 'Los están aventando al ruedo' ([*The government*] *is making them enter the fray*), she said just when I was about to leave. 'Y no les están ayudando nada' (*and they are not helping at all*), she concluded in a solidarizing way with her transnational fellows.
> *David Martínez-Prieto, Field notes, 13 June 2018*

For almost a century, Mexican migration to the United States increased steadily (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2018). From the Mexican revolution (1910–1923) to the first decade of the 21st century, many Mexicans migrated to the US seeking better living conditions (Ramos Martínez *et al.*, 2017) due to the prevalent poverty and insecurity in some regions south of the Río Bravo (Durand, 2007). However, due to the current economic slowdown in the US economy and the sharp increase in anti-immigrant policies, some first and second-generation Mexican transnationals have settled (back) in Mexico in the last decade (Sánchez Moreno, 2016). While some Mexican transnationals are forced to involuntarily return to Mexico, US policies have accelerated the voluntary decision of many other Mexican-origin families to (re)settle in the communities they once left (Espinosa-Márquez & González-Ramírez, 2016).

The phenomenon of return migration has multiple implications for education in Mexico, particularly regarding the English language teaching (ELT) field. Many transnationals enroll in ELT programs at Mexican universities because they score highly on English proficiency exams in comparison to their Mexican national counterparts due to time spent living in the US (Cortez Román & Hamann, 2014). In this regard, Mexican academia has analyzed the advantages that Mexican transnationals bring and the challenges they face when they enroll in English educator preparation programs because of their bicultural and bilingual skills (Christiansen *et al.*, 2017; Mora *et al.*, 2016; Mora Pablo *et al.*, 2014).

While the (re)incorporation of transnationals into English educator preparation programs has been previously explored, the present study contributes to the transnational discussion by highlighting the voices of Mexican national language teachers[1] regarding Mexican transnational English teachers. We also examine the perspectives of Mexican teachers with respect to language policies that seek the (re)incorporation of transnationals as English language teachers in Mexican public schools. Specifically, we focus on the perspectives of in-service English teachers from the Mexican states of Puebla and Oaxaca, two of the regions with the largest rates of return migration in Mexico (Ramos Martínez *et al.*, 2017).

Review of Literature

We approached the perspectives of Mexican national English language teachers (MNELTs) on the (re)incorporation of transnationals as English language teachers through two key theoretical lenses: the concepts of institutional power and governmentality of Foucault (1998) and a critical approach to English teaching (Yazan & Rudolph, 2018) that problematizes rigid essentializations in this process. We saw these two frameworks as complementary in that our data illustrate how Mexican national teachers' perspectives were influenced by institutional practices which were based on an *a priori* binary distinction between Mexican nationals (many of whom are 'non-native' speakers of English), and transnationals, (many of whom are 'native' speakers of English or who have 'native-like' proficiency in English due to time spent in the US).

Disciplinary power and resistance

In Foucault's (1998) study of power relationships between the state and its people, he examined the way the state exercised power over its people. By doing so, he distinguished three sources of state-based power: sovereign power, disciplinary power, and governmentality (1998). *Sovereign power* is the power enacted by a centralized and unquestionable agency (e.g. a king). *Disciplinary power* is the way in which power is exercised by institutions regulated by authorities (e.g. schools), in which people are expected to behave according to the institutional rules of those in power where, institutions recognize what counts as 'valid' knowledge and foster a predetermined way to think and communicate about reality or 'discourse' (Foucault, 1998). For Foucault (1998), discourses are not merely top-down exercises of power, but spaces for rejection and resistance. Finally, *governmentality* is the way in which discourses of those in power have already been unquestionably accepted and guide the conduct of people. In this chapter, we draw upon Foucault's notion of disciplinary power to relate Mexican national English teachers and Mexican transnational English teachers with the circulating discourse around English language policies in Mexico.

Critical approaches to English teachers' identities

As in many other global contexts, ELT in Mexico has traditionally followed a binary distinction between 'native' and 'non-native' English speakers which embeds colonized ideas of race in that it posits power in the former and relegates 'non-native' participants to inferior power positions (Kramsch, 2014; Sayer, 2012). Although the 'native' speaker concept has been problematized for the last few decades in academia (e.g. Davies, 2003; Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 2001), Mexican English language teacher preparation programs still appear to follow this categorical distinction even in English-language teaching programs (Martínez-Prieto & Lindahl, 2019). In an effort to move away from categorical dichotomies, we subscribe to the notion of *critically-oriented English language teaching* (see Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2001; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018) which encompasses the intersectional analysis of social variables, such as race or national origin, instead of rigid 'native/non-native' classification. In other words, in this chapter, we adopt the approach that prioritizes dynamic notions of English language teacher identity as situated and fluid – rather than fixed and monolithic.

This approach to identity-oriented English language teacher development exhibits *criticality* in that it questions the *a priori* and discriminatory distinction of 'native' and 'non-native' language teachers and learners – which not only embeds notions of linguistic 'nativeness', but also operates in tandem with other discourses of race, nationality and former colonialism, which fosters the marginalization of the (so-called) 'non-standard forms' of language (Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Phillipson, 2016). By adopting critical notions of identity in language teaching in our discussion of Mexican national and transnational English language teachers, we analyze how Mexican national English language teachers (MNELTs) position themselves in spaces of acceptance, rejection and resistance towards the (re)incorporation of transnationals as language teachers in Mexico.

The (unheard) voices of Mexican national English teachers

While research about English teaching in Mexico is rather extensive, Mexican national teachers' perspectives are still an area of opportunity for researchers (Sayer, 2012). Even though it is not extensive, much of the existing literature portrays the situation of Mexican national English teachers as challenging in terms of hegemonic ideologies related to race, social origin, 'nativeness' and power access prevalent in the field of ELT. For example, Sayer (2007, 2012) examined the contentions that novice English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators faced because many of them were not considered 'real' English teachers based on colonial and racist ideologies of employers. That is, Sayer (2007, 2012) analyzed the struggle of EFL language teachers to be recognized as legitimate English

language teachers by school administrators. In a similar manner, López-Gopar (2016) explained the difficulties that indigenous English language teachers faced in Oaxacan schools due to colonial ideas in which Spanish and English language-dominant cultures were seen as 'developed' in comparison to 'underdeveloped' indigenous-language dominant cultures. As in Sayer (2007, 2012), these difficulties related to the way in which indigenous teachers' cultures and languages were not valued as effective in the language teaching process.

Similarly, in Puebla, Martínez-Prieto and Lindahl (2019) discussed the educational legitimacy contentions of a Mexican national language teacher, Lety, who, because of the prevalent ideologies in her English language teacher preparation program, appeared to have internalized the notion of 'native speaker fallacy' (Phillipson, 1992) in her own teaching identity. Those included the ideological contentions that EFL teachers encounter when seeking to be recognized as competent EFL teachers by educational institutions. Lety's internalization of this fallacy was manifested in contradictory ways, however. For example, while Lety believed that pedagogical preparation was essential for English language teachers' success and development, she also acknowledged that as a program administrator, she would prefer to hire 'native' English language teachers, such as Mexican transnationals, whether they had undergone formal teacher preparation or not. The above examples suggest that the ELT field in Mexico is ideologically driven, and establish a need for critical perspectives on English language teacher development and learning.

EFL policies in Mexico are permeated by ideological positions that constrain the participation of language teachers in the enactment of language policies. For example, Trejo-Guzmán (2010) reported that English language teachers were not consulted in top-down administrative decisions in terms of curriculum development in Mexican institutions, which led to disappointment and a discontinuation from improving their teaching practices. In this same regard, Avalos-Rivera (2016) examined how ELT in Mexico has been traditionally related to less effective teaching practices in which teachers' voices from relevant institutional decisions are usually ignored.

Transnationals and English language teaching in Mexico

Another arena in which MNELT's voices have been underrepresented is the discussion of the impact of 'transnational returnees' on the ELT field. While prior research has tended to refer to Mexican-origin but US-raised individuals as 'returnees' (or *retornados*), we conceptualize these individuals in our research as 'transnationals'. This is because our participants, during this and other simultaneous research, clarified that many transnationals did not return to Mexico from the US only once, but instead engaged in frequent back-and-forth transnational movement (as in Sánchez, 2007).

As noted, from the early studies of transnational language teachers (Petron, 2003) to more recent analysis of Mexican transnationals pursuing English teaching degrees (i.e. Mora *et al.*, 2016; Mora Pablo *et al.*, 2014), much research about transnational pre- and in-service teachers centers on the perspectives of transnationals exclusively. With some exceptions (Martínez-Prieto & Lindahl, 2019; Sayer, 2012), most extant literature has not incorporated the viewpoint of EFL teachers who were educated in Mexican higher education institutions, and now teach in the Mexican context.

To summarize, the literature suggests that Mexican English language teachers' professional legitimacy may be jeopardized due to the general absence of their input into ELT and learning discussions, the most recent of which involves transnational educators of English. This absence may be perpetuated by nativespeakerism and deficit ideologies in ELT which have been internalized by society, institutions and teachers.

Research Questions

This study includes the Mexican national teacher perspective in the discussion of how transnational educators are being incorporated into the ELT field in Mexico. It addresses the following questions:

(1) How do MNELTs construct their own identity as language teachers relative to Mexican transnational English language teachers?
(2) How do MNELTs view the (re)incorporation of Mexican transnationals as English language teachers in the Mexican education system?

Methodology

We adopted a qualitative approach (Merriam, 2009) incorporating 15 semi-structured interviews of five educators and conducted an in-depth analysis of participant responses about their perspectives and language teacher identities. Below, we provide our positionality, context, participants, procedures and data analysis.

Positionality

Due to our qualitative approach, we consider it relevant to reveal the way our worldviews may have influenced our research decisions and interpretation (Sikes, 2004, 2010). David Martínez-Prieto is a Spanish/English bilingual who identifies as a Mexican national professor, but also considers himself transnational, owing to the extended time spent in the US. He attended Mexican and Australian universities to pursue a degree in ELT, and after graduation, he worked intermittently in Mexican universities as an English and German language teacher and professor of language

pre-service teachers for almost five years. Martínez-Prieto also attended and worked at universities in the US to pursue doctoral-level education and has mainly lived in the US for a decade. Because of his academic experience in both countries, Martínez-Prieto positions himself as a Mexican (trans)national. Kristen Lindahl identifies as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher educator in the US, and resides in a state bordering Mexico, where she works with many transnational and Mexican American teacher-candidates. She is also a Spanish/English bilingual but is more of a heritage learner of Spanish due to the language loss experienced by her father and paternal grandparents as Mexican Americans living in the US. Lindahl has spent extended time in Latin America, including the countries of Mexico, Perú and Ecuador among others.

Participants

As listed in Table 8.1, we interviewed five Mexican ELT educators who were working in public and private institutions in the Mexican states of Oaxaca (n = 4) and Puebla (n = 1). All our participants hold degrees in ELT from a Mexican university. While all participants self-identified as Mexican nationals, their identities were rather fluid. For example, Marcela (all names are pseudonyms) identified herself as *Mixteco*, an indigenous group in Southern Mexico, and has worked in public and private universities and language centers. Another participant, Yoalli, lived in the US for more than 18 years before moving to Mexico. While, according to our conceptualization, Yoalli was a transnational EFL teacher, she clarified that, due to the educational milieu of Mexican education, she was classified as a 'Mexican national English language teacher' because she 'already attended higher education in Mexico'. For this reason, she did not qualify for most of the (re)incorporation opportunities granted to recent transnationals in the Mexican education system. Two of our participants had administrative positions, had taught for around 10 years, and had more institutional power compared to the others: Bety, in Puebla, who worked for a private school, and Lupita, in Oaxaca, who worked for a public university. Roberto, our only male participant, worked as a teacher in the *Programa Nacional de Inglés* (PRONI; National Program of English in Mexican public schools) which had been piloted for almost seven years at the time of the interviews. Bety, Lupita and Roberto considered themselves '*Mexicanos*' or Mexican nationals. The age of our participants ranged from 24–32 years.

Context

The xenophobic discourse prevalent during the 2016 US presidential election, coupled with continued negative focus on Mexican immigrants during the first years of the Trump administration, continue to echo

Table 8.1 Participants

Participant	Professional Position	Context	State	Age	Years in US (if any)	Self-reported national identity
Marcela	English language teacher	Public and private universities	Oaxaca	24	–	Mixteco-Mexican
Yoalli	English language teacher	Public university (former PRONI)	Oaxaca	27	18	Mexican
Bety	English language teacher/ Coordinator	Private school	Puebla	32	–	Mexican
Lupita	English language teacher/School administrator	Public university	Oaxaca	32	–	Mexican
Roberto	English language teacher	Public school (PRONI)	Oaxaca	35	–	Mexican

throughout Mexican media down the Río Bravo, the river that constitutes much of the Mexico/US political border (Sayer *et al*., 2019). While transnational return migration of Mexican nationals to Mexico increased during Obama's presidency, it was not until the election of Trump that the Mexican government focused on transnational communities. Following the Trump election, not only did the Mexican government analyze the locations and reasons for return Mexican migration, but also enacted policies to reincorporate Mexican transnationals into the country's society. In this regard, Puebla and Oaxaca are among the states with the highest rates of transnational migration (Ramos Martínez *et al*., 2017).

In accordance with national legislation, some Mexican states established policies to reincorporate migrants. For example, the state government of Puebla enacted a law to hire Mexican transnationals as English language teachers regardless of their previous academic background. The Governor of Puebla during 2015–2017, Antonio Gali, mandated that transnationals, due to their presumed bilingual skills in Spanish and English, should be given positions in the public-school system in order to accelerate their adaptation into the local economy (*Gobierno del Estado de Puebla*, 2017).

Most English teaching degrees in the states of Puebla and Oaxaca require four to five years for completion. After graduation, English language teachers either work for private schools, where they receive low salaries and few social benefits, such as social security or healthcare access (Sayer, 2012), or they compete to obtain a position in the Mexican public education system, in which salaries are relatively higher, as are social benefits. To obtain a position, or *plaza*, teacher-candidates need to present competitive examination scores – in which they are tested in English proficiency and pedagogic knowledge – in hopes of finding an opening near

their places of residency. This selection process has been criticized, as most applicants do not find positions even if they score highly in the evaluation process due to corruption and poor education planning among Mexican educational authorities (Flores Andrade, 2014). In addition, in comparison to their monolingual counterparts in other content areas, English language teachers are periodically required to take certification exams to prove their linguistic skills.

Procedures

David Martínez-Prieto interviewed the participants in Puebla and Oaxaca during 2017 and 2018. He interviewed each participant in a series of three interviews. He gained access to the Oaxacan teaching setting through a study-abroad experience in Oaxaca. He observed and modeled English classes in this state. Some of the educators he observed agreed to participate in the present study. In Puebla, Martínez-Prieto online interviewed a former classmate from an undergraduate English teaching degree program which he attended more than a decade ago in the main public university of this state. In-depth interviews best fit our research purpose, as they enabled participants to recreate their visions of reality through language during these kinds of oral interactions (Seidman, 2006). In our data collection, besides recording our interviews, we also utilized field notes to keep track of the researchers' perspectives, especially in terms of non-verbal communication, which also provided meaning in terms of smiles, laughs and other gestures (McLellan *et al*., 2003).

For a better understanding of our participants' worldviews, we subscribed to the recommendations of Saldaña (2009) and Seidman (2006) in terms of interviewing participants in a series of three interviews. Interviews took place a week apart from one another. The time between interviews allowed for clarification, efficient contextualization and confirmation of participants' previous responses. All the interviews took place in Spanish, which was the preferred language of the participants. The interviews lasted from 20–90 minutes. While David Martínez-Prieto asked the same questions to all participants during the first and second interviews, which aimed to examine the backgrounds and teaching experience of participants, along with their perspectives towards the (re)incorporation of transnationals as English language teachers, the third interview was mainly used to clarify answers that participants provided previously.

Data analysis

After transcribing all interviews, we initially coded each one independently, and then compared and discussed coding choices. This two-cycle intercoder practice aimed to provide reliability in terms of the coding scheme (Lavrakas, 2008), and consistency and consensus between authors

(Saldaña, 2009). Later, in accordance with Seidman (2006), we used axial-coding to group themes into relevant categories based on the concepts we explained in our framework, such as teacher identity (which we related to pedagogical preparation), the (re)incorporation of transnationals into the Mexican educational system, and the impact of institutional power and the acceptance or rejection of institutional policies among MNELTs. When coding, we read the interviews in Spanish in an effort to maintain original meaning; however, the data excerpts included below were translated for an English-speaking audience.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we present findings of the data analyses conducted on the responses of MNELTs working in Oaxaca and Puebla. To recall, our research questions aimed to examine how Mexican national teachers viewed the (re)incorporation of Mexican transnationals as language teachers, and how MNELTs constructed their identities in relation to transnational language teachers. Via our coding processes, we considered that the following themes answered the research questions: pedagogical preparation, ELT policies impacting transnationals, and the idea of sheltered (re)incorporation of transnational ELT educators.

Pedagogical preparation in a nativist context

One of the most salient characteristics that MNELTs recognize as part of their identity was the relevance of pedagogical preparation. Before we coded our participants' answers, it seemed that national educators were oriented negatively towards transnational ELT educators, especially in terms of the socioeconomic context in which transnationals, regardless of their preparation, were given priority over language teachers trained in Mexico. From the lens of the Foucauldian framework, Mexican nationals had internalized policies and hegemonic ideologies promoted by the Mexican government that presented a clear dichotomy between 'native' (or transnationals) and 'non-native' (Mexican nationals) users of English. That is, in terms of disciplinary power, Mexican language teachers adopted the official discourse of a clear-cut national/transnational classification. For example, when we asked Yoalli about the decision of some state governments to give English teaching plazas to recently arrived transnationals, she expressed concern that transnational educators would be educating Mexican children:

> Well, I honestly think that is a waste of positions [for transnationals]. I do believe that granting plazas to transnational returnees is kind of [pause] … but they [transnationals] will be in charge of educating the future of Mexico. I believe that just it is absurd that they receive plazas only because they come from the United States. (Yoalli, interview 1, 15 June 2018)

For Yoalli, the fact that transnationals were being given plazas because they came from the US seemed absurd, especially as they were probably unfamiliar with the contextual situation of Mexican children.

Similarly, Marcela focused more on teacher preparation with regard to the national/transnational distinction, when she noted:

> I studied four years to finish my degree. I have [a] university diploma. And for them [transnationals], they don't need anything [to be hired in Mexico]. I don't think this is right as others are [academically] more prepared. (Marcela, interview 1, 13 June 2018)

Marcela, like Yoalli, appeared to reject the incorporation of transnationals because they presumably did not have enough academic preparation. However, we noted that Mexican nationals' apparent rejection of transnationals was not related to transnationals *per se* (or to the assimilation of governmentality, in Foucault's [1998] terms), but more to the aspiration of Mexican language teachers to be recognized as pedagogically prepared educators and not just as the ones 'who only speak the language' (see Martínez-Prieto & Lindahl, 2019).

Our participants expressed a need for the professionalization of language teachers to move away from *lingualism* (Block, 2013), in which language is mainly valued because of oral production. Lupita commented on how transnational educators may lack pedagogical content knowledge and how it can impact the EFL classroom:

> And for those who don't have a degree, but they know English … They teach it in the way they learned it. Sometimes, the pronunciation is correct. But they [transnationals] the way they learned it, it is the way they teach it to students … I've seen people who have lived in the US for 15 to 20 years, and their English is very good. And they get classes because of it. But when they teach, when they need to prepare classes and include dynamic activities … then, it [the quality of instruction] goes down. (Lupita, interview 1, 19 June 2018)

For Lupita, English teaching should move beyond the notion of merely speaking English and should acknowledge the pedagogic preparation of educators. Roberto echoed the concern that including transnationals without pedagogical training could negatively impact the professionalization of EFL teachers in Mexico, when he said:

> I have a degree [in language teaching]. And anyone [with no degree or diploma] who can speak it [English] is considered to be a teacher. That's the reason for which language teachers are looked down on. Even if we work hard, we are labeled like this. (Roberto, interview 1, 23 June 2018)

Roberto's perspective about the incorporation of transnationals is related to the identity of English language educators in Mexico in the sense that they aim to be socially recognized as professionals. Sayer (2012), López-Gopar (2016) and Martínez-Prieto and Lindahl (2019) analyzed the

difficulties that Mexican language teachers have in terms of social legitimization. In Mexico, language teaching ideologies may be embedded within colonial nativist perspectives of race and origin (May, 2013; Phillipson, 2017), which in turn impact the identities that teachers of English in this context develop over time.

However, while partially accepting nativist ideologies, some participants contested these conceptions. To contrast these two different perspectives about nativism, we present the perspectives of Bety and Yoalli below:

> When I just started as coordinator, I needed a [English language] teacher. And she [a transnational] came. She didn't have any degree, she lived in the US before. She had a good pronunciation. So I hired her. (Bety, interview 2, 10 July 2018)

Bety acknowledged her own participation in hiring practices based on oral language proficiency. Yoalli, in contrast, mentioned how she is treated in the ELT field due to her physical appearance, which resembles that of (what people assume is) a 'native' English speaker:

> I am fair-skinned [*güerita*]. So, when I apply for positions, the first thing they notice is the color of my skin, my pronunciation. And only because of that, because I'm white and because of my pronunciation, they think I'm the perfect [English] teacher. Once, in a private school, the principal said to me: 'I know what I see, I only need to see you to know you are a good teacher'. And I said, 'You haven't listened to me, seen my work, and you are already offering me an [English teaching] job'. This made me feel very uncomfortable. (Yoalli, interview 2, 30 July 2018)

Yoalli, who has achieved a diploma in English teaching after four years of training, found it uncomfortable that administrators would hire her only because she is white [*güerita*]. In other words, because English teaching is embedded in notions of racialization, nativism and colonialism in Mexico, administrators hire English language teachers because of their physical appearance. In her own acknowledgment as an English language educator, Yoalli rejected the idea that her own teaching identity is merely defined by the way she looks.

Our participants' answers, such as Bety's, suggested Mexican national teachers have internalized traditional ideas of how institutions recognize 'valid' English language teachers. Nonetheless, our participants' answers also rejected traditional nativist dichotomies – associated with larger social constructs of colonialism and race – and provided rather fluid examples of their identity as English language teachers (Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2001; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018). In other words, our participants constructed their teaching identities by (at times, simultaneously) accepting and rejecting institutional conceptions of what an English language teacher is.

To go back to and answer our first research question, 'How do MNELTs construct their own identity as language teachers relative to

Mexican transnational English language teachers?', we suggest that the (re)incorporation of transnationals as English teachers may prompt MNELTs to challenge the institutional validation and identities that Mexican institutions have granted them. While the Mexican national teachers' former training should, in theory, legitimize their knowledge and identities as English language teachers, the same institutional powers, influenced by nativist, racial and colonial conceptions, devalue their pedagogical and linguistic identities of Mexican national ELTs.

English language policies and transnational (re)incorporation

To answer our second research question, we found that MNELTs understood that the (re)incorporation of English language teachers in the Mexican education system will be highly affected by national and state educational policies. That is, in addition to the cultural re-adaptation to Mexico, MNELTs believed that transnationals would face the same adverse political experiences that they themselves faced when they were novice language teachers in public schools. Instead of 'othering' transnational teachers or rejecting them because of their individual experiences in the US (Dervin, 2014), participants were explicit about the inefficacy of language policies in Mexico, and educational authorities' poor analysis of and commitment to transnational (re)incorporation. For example, Roberto posited that the government was essentially making empty promises to transnational educators, saying:

> Well, [the government enacted language policies that] don't really help transnational migrants. They [the educational authorities] say: 'We are going to give them jobs', but that is not true. It's just for the news. They [the authorities] only say it to have people happy. But they [authorities] won't make sure transnationals get re-adapted. The help is very limited. (Roberto, interview 2, 30 June 2018)

Roberto questioned the superficiality of governmental actions towards the (re)incorporation of transnationals, which do not really contribute to lessening the difficulties of transnational adaptation.

When asked about the efficacy of the English language policies towards the (re)incorporation of transnationals into the Mexican education system, Yoalli confirmed Roberto's sentiment, by explaining that:

> Well, they do this [granting teaching positions to transnationals] because they [educational authorities] are ignorant. Let me tell you, they [authorities] have a mentality. They [authorities] say 'Well, they [transnationals] know English, give them English classes, so they stop fucking bothering us'. They [educational authorities] want to look as if they were doing something for them, but not really. (Yoalli, interview 3, 8 July 2018)

Yoalli held the opinion that the granting of English teaching positions was a superficial way of addressing the larger issues that transnationals would

ultimately face upon their return to Mexico. According to Yoalli and Roberto, most educational policies that aimed to provide teaching positions to Mexican transnationals were unreflective and would only complicate their adaptation in Mexico.

Recent research about language policies in Mexico suggests that language teachers' input has been ignored when educational policies are implemented, which has made some language teachers feel disappointed (Trejo-Guzmán, 2010) and voiceless (Avalos-Rivera, 2016). At the time of the present study, the Mexican government was trying to execute ambitious language policies that aimed to provide English instruction for K-12 students attending public schools (Sayer, 2015). In theory, transnationals' cultural and linguistic expertise would have contributed to achieving governmental goals. Unfortunately, the (re)incorporation of transnationals is taking place in a context in which Mexican national language teachers consider governmental actions towards language teachers as mostly punitive, and in which transnationals would be facing a similar situation. To clarify why Mexican language teachers believe that the policies of the government were punitive for English language teachers, Yoalli noted:

> The Federal government does not support language teachers with funding. I don't understand why. But my boss told me it is the way authorities punish teachers for rebelling [against their policies]. That's why they don't raise our salaries, so they keep teachers underdeveloped. (Yoalli, interview 3, 8 July 2018)

For Yoalli, educational administrations used funding as a means to ensure that teachers comply with federal policy, a phenomenon that impacted both national and transnational teachers.

Roberto noted that federal policies do not account for differences between the Mexican states, an issue that would also influence national and transnational teachers alike.

> Here, they want to implement [an educational] system in which they think the educative process is the same everywhere. There are places in which people don't even have basic services. I mean, the authorities cannot implement an educational reform without even knowing the people's living conditions. Let's say, for example, Monterrey is different to Oaxaca. It [education] cannot be the same. First, we need to analyze the situation of each place before implementing any policy. (Roberto, interview 3, 9 July 2018)

For Roberto, English language policies in Mexico were irreflectively implemented. In other words, for Roberto, the implementation of educational policies did not consider the regional socioeconomic differences of this country, ignoring the poverty of many disadvantaged students.

As we conceptualized in the theoretical framework, Foucault (1998) explained how institutions are ruled by the dominant classes. For this reason, institutions control knowledge production and the perpetuation

of 'legitime' discourses. Nonetheless, for Foucault (1998), 'legitimate' knowledge can be challenged and rejected by individuals. In the case of our participants, top-down policies provided little opportunities for language teachers to improve the learning conditions of their students and their own socioeconomic positions. This institutional failure most likely originated from Mexican teachers' rejection of national intuitions and educational programs. Marcela expressed her belief about unequal distribution of funds, as she said:

> People in the leadership positions, at SEP [Ministry of Mexican Education], their families. They take all the money. They don't distribute it to schools. And they don't give it [the money] to the ones who should receive it. (Marcela, interview 2, 8 July 2018)

For Marcela, corruption in the Mexican Ministry of Education is in part responsible for her lack of belief in the efficacy of educational policies in the country. While this series of interviews originally aimed to understand the perspectives of Mexican national ELTs, conversations inevitably led to a deeper discussion of Mexican policies in terms of ELT. In this regard, Roberto encouraged policymakers to visit classrooms before making policy decisions, stating:

> To implement any policy, politicians, the ones who make the policies which are not related at all to reality, should come to our schools and talk to teachers. No one knows students better than us. They [authorities] should come and see. (Roberto, interview 3, 9 July 2018)

For Roberto, educational authorities are unaware of the real language teaching situation in Mexico. The case of Mexican transnational (re)incorporation is highly illustrative of the ways in which the state enacts power through institutions (Foucault, 1998). Yet, in order for institutional power to be accepted, power should promote the betterment of people; as expressed by the Mexican national teachers, individuals may reject institutional knowledge, policies and power if they feel it is not in their interest. To answer our second research question, we suggest that if Mexican nationals continue to see transnational (re)incorporation as part and parcel of their generally negative views on federal English language learning policy, they may continue to be reluctant to view their transnational colleagues as equals. In a way, Mexican national teachers would see the unreflective (re)incorporation of transnationals as part of such ineffective policies.

Sheltered (re)incorporation for transnationals

The participants' teaching trajectories demonstrate the challenging situation that MNELTs face. For example, during the interviews, Bety and Roberto expressed the stress they experienced every six months

because language teachers are periodically evaluated (in comparison to teachers who teach other classes, who are not subject to evaluation). Marcela expressed her disappointment because, after investing time and money in English teaching degrees, most English teachers barely make twice the minimum wage in Mexico (which was roughly US$150 per month at the time of the interviews). More concerningly, Yoalli expressed how she experienced physical and verbal harassment by her co-workers who taught other subjects when she worked at PRONI.

In this context, the Mexican national teachers in the present study expressed a belief that transnationals should be given a sheltered acculturation process into the Mexican education system for three main reasons: first, to take advantage of the cultural and linguistic skills transnationals acquired in the US; second, to provide transnationals with pedagogical tools to teach English; and third, to support their cultural re-adaptation to Mexico. Marcela, for example, commented:

> They [transnationals] bring another mentality about business. They come here [to Mexico] and they don't want to be employees. They want to be entrepreneurs. We don't learn it here [in Mexico, to be entrepreneurs]. They come here and want to create jobs, new jobs. (Marcela, interview 3, 27 June 2019)

For Marcela, the Mexican economy might benefit from the ways that transnationals seek to create new jobs and businesses because of their different entrepreneurial ideologies. For Lupita, transnationals are able to see other perspectives, and they feel empowered because of their bilingual skills:

> They [transnationals] are empowered when they come from the United States because they speak English very well … Also, transnationals are able to see another reality, because they have been to another reality, an alternate reality. So, they can understand different realities because they lived in a different one. (Lupita, interview 2, 26 June 2018)

Lupita is aware of some of the benefits of transnational migration in terms of transnationals experiencing a different reality while living in the United States. Indeed, most of our participants agreed with the notion that Mexican transnationals acquired skills in the US that provided them with some advantages over Mexican nationals.

In terms of pedagogical development of transnationals as prospective language teachers, Marcela provided an example of how transnational teachers could increase their pedagogical content knowledge as in-service teachers:

> Well, they [transnationals] should have a preparation course. For example, in the morning, they could take some [language learning] classes. And they [transnationals] can teach in the afternoon. A language teacher should know strategies and theory. There is a coordinator I know, she

> studied biotechnology there [in the United States] and for some circum-
> stances, she had to move back. Then she started teaching English, she
> liked it. So, right, she's also studying the [English teaching] degree.
> (Marcela, interview 2, 20 June 2018)

Marcela acknowledges that Mexican transnationals might bring different
academic and professional skills to Mexico; yet these skills might not be
adequate to teach English, for which they require further pedagogical
training. In this context, Lupita also recognized transnationals might
need some sheltered (re)incorporation if they go (back) to Mexico:

> I think there are interesting life stories of people who are coming back to
> Mexico. They worked in different part of the world. I do think for them
> [transnationals] to go back to Mexico, there should be a program for
> them to have a sheltered (re)incorporation … so they know the cultural
> situation that we live in Mexico. (Lupita, interview 3, 3 July 2018)

For Lupita, Mexican transnationals need to be sheltered in their (re)incor-
poration into Mexican society. In this regard, literature suggests that a
sheltered (re)incorporation of transnationals might vary regionally in
Mexico. For example, in some cases, transnational teaching contexts may
require less attention to acculturation, such as the ones described in Petron
(2003), wherein she analyzed the teaching experiences of transnationals
who taught in the Mexican state of Nuevo León, a border state with Texas,
without any teaching credentials. Overall, Petron's (2003) participants felt
they did not need any cultural scaffolding to be successfully incorporated
into Mexican education. However, the prospective (re)incorporation of
transnationals into the central and southern regions of Mexico – where
Puebla and Oaxaca are located – is different in terms of greater indigenous
influence (Martínez-Prieto, 2022) and less transnational mobility of com-
munities (Smith, 2006; Zúñiga *et al.*, 2016). This is relevant for this study
because transnational (re)adaptation might be more complicated as central
and southern communities have values and perspectives that are not geo-
graphically, ideologically and culturally close to the US.

Besides cultural differences, the Mexican economic system has become
more specialized in terms of professional preparation, especially in terms
of higher education, during the last decade. Roberto, in this sense,
commented:

> Every state is different. People in each region are different … For example,
> in Puebla, I understand they [transnationals] can use their skills in the
> manufacturing industry, producing cars … In Oaxaca, we need more help
> in the [agricultural] field. They [transnationals] have seen different [crop]
> growing techniques … Transnationals have different skills and we should
> use the knowledge they bring from the US. I wanted to go to the other side
> [of the US-Mexican border] before enrolling in my degree … and won-
> dered what I would bring to Mexico when I came back. (Roberto, inter-
> view 2, 30 June 2018)

Roberto, like Lupita, was attentive to what transnationals could bring to Mexican society, and also remained aware of the differences among states and regions.

For our participants, the US (im)migration process is not unfamiliar. Not only did Roberto consider migrating to the US before enrolling in his degree program, but Yoalli herself lived in the US for most of her life. Also, Lupita, Bety and Marcella reported they have friends, colleagues and family members who are transnationals. No doubt due to this closeness to transnationals, and because of the MNELTs' opposition to ineffective implementation of language policies in Mexico, our participants' perspectives in terms of transnationals' (re)incorporation were rather positive. Overall, to extend the response to our second research question, MNELTs believed that the (re)incorporation of Mexican transnationals should acknowledge the trajectories and skills of both transnationals *and* Mexican national language teachers. However, they caution that Mexican institutions must provide pedagogical and cultural scaffolding for transnationals to re-adapt and improve the educational and social situation of Mexico.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed the perspectives of Mexican national English language teachers with regard to the (re)incorporation of Mexican transnationals as English language teachers. While we initially thought Mexican nationals would entirely reject the (re)incorporation of transnationals because transnationals would represent professional competition for MNELTs in terms of the prevalent nativism in Mexican institutions, we realized that Mexican national teachers proposed a sheltered (re)incorporation of transnationals in terms of culture, skills and pedagogical knowledge. Our participants' perspectives challenged institutional policies of Mexican institutions towards transnationals' (re)incorporation. That is, MNELTs believed the execution of these policies would cause major problems to transnationals on top of their already difficult re-adaptation to Mexican society.

In this regard, our participants' identities were fluid and showed different – and, at times, contradictory – perspectives in terms of traditional native/non-native binary conceptions, the colonialism and racialization embedded in ELT, and national identification. Nonetheless, an essential common ground among all our Mexican national language teachers is the proposed alternatives to reincorporate transnationals in different ways compared to the policies carried out by the Mexican state. By doing so, Mexican language teachers used the knowledge they obtained from Mexican institutions during their training and professional development to contest the policies of these same institutions. Our findings suggest that incorporating transnational language teachers without considering the knowledge and

skills of both Mexican nationals and transnationals, would only make their adaptation process into the Mexican culture more difficult.

This chapter thus contributes to current discussion about transnationalism in EFL by including the voices of Mexican national language teachers. While previous studies have examined the ELT transnational phenomenon in Mexico from the perspectives of Mexican transnational pre- and in-service teachers (i.e. Christiansen *et al.*, 2017; Mora *et al.*, 2016; Mora Pablo *et al.*, 2014; Petron, 2003), this study shows that the expertise and perspectives of Mexican English language teachers should be pivotal in the implementation of language policies for transnational (re)incorporation. In terms of the frameworks we used for this chapter (Foucault's notions of institutional discourse and critical approaches to language teaching), we found that, through the discussion of the Mexican transnationals' (re)incorporation as English language teachers, MNELTs reaffirmed their aspiration to be acknowledged as competent and legitimate English language teachers. That is, our participants' answers suggested that the traditional conception of an English language teacher, which devalues 'non-native' language teachers based on colonialist ideas about the origin, race and mother tongue of ELTs (Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2001; Yazan & Rudolph, 2018), impacts their teaching identities and professional development in Mexico. Contrary to current literature (i.e. Phillipson, 2017; Varghese, 2016) which suggests language learning should promote social justice among its participants, Mexican institutions seem to inhibit English language teachers' empowerment from a policy standpoint. By excluding Mexican national teachers from decisions towards transnational (re)incorporation, which diminishes their power and social recognition as ESL professionals, the future of transnationals as language teachers in the Mexican education system may present a promise unlikely to be fulfilled.

Note

(1) In this study, we consider Mexican national language teachers as Mexican-origin individuals who received English-teaching training in Mexican institutions and who worked in schools and universities based in Mexico during the time of the study. For us, Mexican transnationals are those who came (back) to Mexico after living in the US for one year or more. However, as we explain later in the chapter, fixed categories are insufficient because of the fluid characteristics of our participants, such as Yoalli, who lived in the US for 18 years, or Marcela, for whom her indigenous identity took priority instead of her Mexican one.

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