

*The impact of mobility on language teacher identity:  
Turkish, Polish and Portuguese perspectives<sup>1</sup>*

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**Abstract**

Learners moving and learning languages across contexts have always been natural subjects of applied linguistics research. In recent years, however, teachers'

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mobility across contexts and their temporary work and stay due to internationalization in education has been an equally important development. While research on language teacher identity is now an established field of study (De Costa & Norton, 2017), there seems to be more need for research in mobile language teacher identity and the processes these teachers go through in their short-term stay-abroad experiences in terms of their identity construction. In order to partially respond to this need, in this paper, we focus on the identity construction of mobile English language teachers from 3 dissimilar countries, Turkey ( $N = 4$ ), Poland ( $N = 4$ ) and Portugal ( $N = 2$ ), based on individual, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Through narrative analyses of these interviews, we demonstrate that mobile language teachers undergo complex interpersonal, linguistic, and sociocultural negotiations of identity.

*Keywords:* mobile language teachers; language teacher identity; Poland; Turkey; Portugal

## 1. Introduction

Mobility in education has become one of the most visible effects of globalization in recent decades. While the number of international students studying in foreign countries is increasing steadily, many different forms of this experience have become popular alongside the regular undergraduate and graduate degrees, such as study-abroad programs, or exchange programs like Erasmus across Europe. Becoming equally widespread is the mobility of language teachers who experience teaching their native languages or a non-native language abroad for limited periods of time due to various reasons, including lack of economic sustainability, personal decisions, commitments back in the home country. Due to the global role of English today, the case of non-native English teachers who move to English-speaking countries to teach English or their native languages is becoming increasingly popular, especially among early-career teachers. Through this experience, mobile English language teachers enhance their professional development, their linguistic and intercultural competence, and increase their chances of better job opportunities when they return to their home countries.

The purpose of this paper is to look into the mobile English language teachers' identity construction in their work – and/or study-abroad experiences. We focus on Polish, Portuguese, and Turkish teachers who have worked in the UK and the USA, and who all continue to teach in their home countries for the time being. The three groups of teachers have had a range of different relations with the English language and the experience of staying abroad for work. As EU citizens since the mid-1980s, Portuguese teachers have enjoyed free travelling

to the UK, working there or participating in EU international cooperation programs still as pre-service teachers. By contrast, Poland has enjoyed travelling and working abroad opportunities since it became an EU member in 2004. Before that, it had been ruled by the communist regime for almost fifty years and suffered all that it involved. For many Polish language teachers at that time, the knowledge of English epitomized freedom, truth, modernity, and “a window to the world”. Turkey, meanwhile, differs from the two European countries more critically in terms of its geographical location, religion, tradition, and socio-economic structure. Unlike the two, Turkey has been aspiring to become an EU member in the context of its institutional history with Europe that started with its European Council membership in 1949. Coming from a non-member country, English teachers in Turkey still go through challenging processes if they wish to work and stay in Europe, which does not always end in success. Recent years have seen an upsurge of interest among English-speaking language teachers in Turkey in scholarship programs, such as Fulbright, which send good language teachers to American universities to teach their mother tongue and continue their graduate studies. As Fulbright seems to be the most widespread form of stay-abroad experience concerning early-career English teachers in Turkey, we have chosen to incorporate them in our investigation of language teacher identity in stay-abroad contexts, whereas Polish and Portuguese participants were teachers who had spent time living and working abroad with no institutional support. Below, we start reporting on our study after a brief literature review. This is followed by the discussion of our findings.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Language teacher identity

The identity turn that started to establish its place in applied linguistics more than two decades ago is now beginning to flourish in the field of language teacher education (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2017; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Cheung, Said, & Park, 2015; Clarke, 2008; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Tsui, 2007; Werbińska, 2018). Conventionally, teacher identity scholarship has focused primarily on the distinction between professional identity and personal identity (e.g., Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). In this framework, professional identity concerns professional knowledge, development, and practice, as much as teachers’ encounters with the school’s culture and the educational system at large. Teachers’ professional identity construction is conceptualized as a process that takes the teachers from their “default identity” (Richards, 2006, p. 60) in which they take on pre-determined teacher roles constructed when they were students, and transform

them. This transformation is inherently related to teacher professional development, which is a never-ending process of learning by itself, since teachers naturally learn through various channels including their classrooms, school communities, colleagues, professional development courses, seminars and workshops (Borko, 2004).

Aiming to go beyond the personal-professional dichotomy, more recent work on language teacher identity with a post-structuralist outlook has focused on the multiplicity, fluidity, and situationality of identities. While this multiplicity is informed by teachers' age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, race, class, personal interests, and even "extra-curricular" activities (Mockler, 2011), they are in constant interaction with each other (Danielewicz, 2001; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). Furthermore, this construction is influenced by the conditions of the local context, and the political, social and institutional expectations (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). Teachers seem to be involved in a continuous process of interpretation and negotiation of meanings, social roles and positions in encountering new environments. These encounters might contradict teachers' backgrounds, social memberships, beliefs, emotions, values and ideologies, knowledge, use of language, and attitudes (Miller, 2009). Besides, they might be jeopardized when the teacher strictly adheres to the formal teacher role, or the default identity, at the expense of, for example, developing an ongoing relationship with the learners. In line with this thinking, De Costa and Norton (2017) argue that language teaching *is* identity work.

## 2.2. Language teachers and stay-abroad experience

Against the background presented in the previous section, research focusing on the identity construction of more mobile language teachers is still limited (e.g., Arber, Blackmore & Vongalis-Macrow, 2014). Mobile professionals have been studied across many different contexts and primarily in sociological, economic, or anthropological literature. Terms such as *hyper-mobility* (Frändberg & Vilhelmson, 2003) have been coined to emphasize the short-term and frequent nature of some forms of mobility common among educated people across the globe. Language teachers', particularly English teachers', mobility is not a new phenomenon. In applied linguistics, there has been a long tradition of focusing on language teacher diaries (e.g., Bailey, 1990; Jarvis, 1992), yet these studies concentrate on the process and reflection on language learning, and do not focus on teacher identity construction per se. As a similar field of study in SLA, there has been continuous interest in study-abroad contexts, but mostly from the perspective of students' language learning and identity negotiations (e.g., Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013; Du Fon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2009, 2013; Pellegrino, 2005).

For language teachers, the experience of living abroad necessitates a re-assessment of their firm beliefs about teaching and learning (Bodycott & Walker, 2000). This is an inevitable part of professional development and identity construction in certain respects. First of all, especially novice teachers go through the entire process of adjusting to professional life in another country, which makes their transition from student life to teacher life a more challenging process (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). Not only do they have to learn to move from their default identity, but they also need to restructure themselves in a new political, social and institutional environment. As Barkhuizen (2017) underlines, language teacher identities are negotiated over time and space, including moves back and forth the imagined communities and classrooms, or the society. Secondly, English teachers who stay abroad usually deal with multiple languages. As Motha, Jain, and Tecele (2012) emphasize, being transnationals, these teachers have complex language learning histories themselves. Thus, in many situations, they cannot fit somewhere within the native-non-native dichotomy, which makes their stay-abroad experience even more complex. Thirdly, and especially in the case of those who teach English abroad, the presence of international students enhances teachers' intercultural understanding and leads to their development of strategies in promoting intercultural learning in their classrooms (Volet & Ang, 1998). Many teachers of English are exposed to a wide range of international students for the first time in their lives, which brings a whole new set of identity negotiations to the picture. In addition, they enhance their qualities of a flexible, lifelong learner who is able to participate in ongoing change and who is confident in him/herself in this change (Walkington, 2005). Hence, staying abroad is an experience which has far-reaching implications for language teachers' linguistic, cultural, and professional identities.

Against this background, the present study aims to problematize the notion of stay-abroad identities involving language teachers from three entirely different national backgrounds. Focusing on Turkish, Polish, and Portuguese teachers' interviews, we aim to illuminate the effects of this global movement by attending to its identity dimension.

### 3. The study

The present investigation is one part of a larger project aimed at exploring English language teachers' professional cultures. Five researchers (4 female and 1 male) across three research teams took part in this study, which was conducted across the three respective countries. The data collection for the study spanned the year 2017 and continued until February 2018. While Polish and Portuguese participants were accessed through single institutions, the Turkish participants

were interviewed in two different universities located in Istanbul and Ankara. The authors of this paper have all taken part in the interviews. All of them have extensive teaching experience and taken part in a set of different research projects that involved one-to-one interviews. The interviews for this study were conducted in English. Below, we provide demographic information about participants. This is followed by detailing our data collection and analysis.

### 3.1. Participants

A total of ten language teachers participated in this interview study. The teachers were accessed through participating researchers' personal contacts in their respective cities. The primary requirement for participation was a stay-abroad experience before starting or at the early stages of career as a language teacher. Although not planned as such, only female teachers participated in the study. The demographic information about the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Participant demographics

Participant and nationality	Stay-abroad date/duration	Stay-abroad country	Stay-abroad job	Current position
Ada (PL)	2004-2008	UK	Catering company staff, Interpreter	Primary school English teacher in Poland
Alina (PL)	2003-2012	UK	Lifeguard, teacher of sport	Lower secondary school English teacher in Poland
Wioletta (PL)	2004-2005	UK	Activity center staff	Primary school English teacher in Poland
Jola (PL)	2005-2006	UK	Receptionist, waitress, teacher of English in primary school	Upper secondary school English teacher in Poland
Rosa (PR)	2000-2005	UK	Substitute teacher; teacher of Spanish and French	Upper secondary school English Teacher in Portugal
Teresa (PR)	1993-2000	UK	Teacher of Portuguese	Primary school English teacher in Portugal
Seda (TR)	2010-2011	USA	Teacher of Turkish	English instructor at Ankara State University
Pelin (TR)	2009-2010	USA	Teacher of Turkish	English instructor at Ankara State University
Aycan (TR)	2006-2009	USA	Teacher of Turkish	English instructor at Istanbul State University
Ela (TR)	2011-2012 2012-2013	UK USA (1 term)	Teacher of Turkish	English instructor at Istanbul State University

### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

The primary data collection method for this study was face-to-face, single-session interviews conducted at the respective researchers' offices. Researchers

met with the participants one-by-one between May 2017 and February 2018, and conducted semi-structured interviews in English, each for the duration of approximately an hour, and starting with the question: "Could you, please, tell me about your experience in (...)". The interviewers had access to a set of questions prepared beforehand (see Appendix), but the teams differed in their approaches to using these questions. While some stayed loyal to the original question set verbatim, others had more conversation-like interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by each research team. The transcriptions of audio-recordings ranged between 5-17 single-spaced, typed pages.

We have run the entire data set through short story analysis, a form of analyzing narratives proposed by Barkhuizen (2016). There has been a growing interest in "small story" research in the field of applied linguistics in recent years (e.g., Georgakopoulou, 2015; Watson, 2007). As opposed to "big stories" that are informed by "excessive ordering" and "narrative smoothing" (Watson, 2007, p. 372), small stories focus on the quotidian, local, situational construction of identities. Inspired by this distinction, short story analysis is concerned with excerpts from longer texts such as conversations, interviews, written narratives, and multimodal digital stories (Barkhuizen, 2016, 2017), and focuses on identity construction *through* and *in* these narratives. In order to do so, Barkhuizen (2016) attends to both content (i.e., the who, where, when dimensions of the story) and context of storytelling, which he analyzes in terms of *micro*, *meso*, and *macro* scales.

The notion of scales as an analytical tool has been employed in quite a few studies in applied linguistics in recent years (see Canagarajah & De Costa, 2016). While there has been a range of scales in question in these studies (e.g., Blommaert, 2007; Wortham, 2006), the distinction between micro and macro scales are often emphasized, and in-between scale levels are proposed, such as meso-level scales. Adopting the Douglas Fir Group's (2016) perspective on learning and identity, Barkhuizen (2016) employs these three scales, which we also use in our analysis in this paper: The actual construction of talk that happens within the micro scale; the institutional scale such as duration of a semester, which takes place within the meso scale; and the social patterns that are constructed through much longer durations that we analyze as macro-scales.

A scalar approach as such provides a systematic analysis to the relationship between content and context that Barkhuizen (2016) refers to, which we find congruent with our purposes in this study. In content terms, our analyses are informed by the content of the interviews, which made way for our three major themes to emerge (i.e., personal, linguistic, and social factors) and our three sets of research questions to assume their final shape. While our starting point was to probe into factors that influence stay-abroad experiences, and the way these factors contribute to identity construction, we have specified these

questions in line with the content that emerged in our data. As for the context, we present our findings in an effort to show the interrelatedness of three major scales in the construction of narratives. Although we do not employ a close linguistic analysis of these findings, we demonstrate how these scales are in play in the construction of identities, following Barkhuizen (2016, 2017). Against this background, three sets of questions guided the study:

- (1) What are the personal and interpersonal factors that impact language teachers' stay abroad experiences? How do these factors contribute to their identity construction?
- (2) What are the linguistic/language-related factors that impact language teachers' stay abroad experiences? How do these factors contribute to their identity construction?
- (3) What are the sociocultural factors that impact language teachers' stay abroad experiences? How do these factors contribute to their identity construction?

### 3.3. Findings

#### 3.3.1. Personal factors

An important life change like moving to another country surfaced in the teachers' narratives as a complex web of short stories. While all three groups refer to a range of challenges they faced throughout this experience, we have identified differences between the Portuguese and Polish teachers' narratives on the one hand, and the Turkish teachers' on the other. Overall, the "EU group" initially opted to stay abroad for better job circumstances and left their country without detailed planning. They also emphasize the "adventure" quality of staying abroad in these accounts. As highly-skilled immigrants with higher education, their experience is quite different from those working in the lower ends of the labor market. However, it also meant that both Portuguese teachers and Polish teachers had to create the idea of going to the UK individually, and find themselves jobs either before or as soon as they arrive there. This personal endeavor occupies a lot of place in the narratives, as it directly relates to teachers' biographies.

The Polish participant Wioletta, for instance, recounts that Poland becoming an EU member the year she obtained her Master's in Polish Philology meant free travel and job opportunities for people like her. She framed going to the UK as a matter of personal decision stemming from her interest in the country. Her choice of moving to the UK, as she expresses it, indicates how much she is aware of her own power in making this important life change. The Portuguese participants shared similar accounts when it comes to their initial decisions to move to the UK. Rosa explains this with a useful analogy:

Rosa: I found myself, having finished my degree, not being able to find a job in Portugal. And I've always had the "let's get out of here" bug, so I just packed and went to London, hoping to find a job as a kitchen assistant, a waitress, whatever.

Although the "bug" that Rosa talks about marks the adventure quality of moving to the UK for these women, they also recount the personal responsibility, which they felt as English teachers:

Ada: I was already working as an English teacher in a primary school in Poland (...) Children often asked me: "Have you ever been there?" "Have you ever seen London?" and I always had to answer: "No, I haven't been there". So I just felt I was not very credible as a teacher.

Both choice and the feeling of responsibility to speak better English point to personal factors behind identity construction. While these are constructed at the micro scale in the interviews, they are also informed by macro scale cultural habits like moving to another country for language improvement.

As much as the initial incentive to go to the UK, living and working there has contributed to the teachers' identity construction and showed up in their narratives as such. Ada, for instance, emphasizes that her work experience in Manchester helped her become a more confident English teacher, because she now has "so much to say" about England, and so much to share with her students. Working in different jobs while in Manchester "gave her so much experience to talk about", as she puts it. She describes the change as follows:

Ada: I feel much more confident speaking English and it's very natural for me now because before I went to England I didn't feel natural at all. It didn't feel natural for me as it is now.

In her accounts, Ada draws on an effort to construct a new identity for herself: that of a credible teacher who speaks and acts naturally in English. Her individual efforts align with her rationale to go to England. Doing so, she again draws on macro-scale discourses of achievement and combines them with the meso-scale realities of her job at school.

Portuguese teachers' narratives, on the other hand, mostly bear a positive tone as far as personal choice and identity construction; however, they also draw on difficulties they faced, such as classroom management issues. Rosa, for instance, recounts the student behavior that she came across in England as "really a shock", and what she needed to adapt to the most. Teresa, meanwhile, accepts that she had "some difficulty adapting to the school and the English environment" in her first year. Both of these teachers frame these challenges as personal identity struggles.

These trajectories make the EU teachers' stories slightly different from the Turkish teachers, mainly because the latter group all went to the US as Fulbright scholars, and taught Turkish at the university level. Therefore, the personal choice and struggle accounts that characterize European teachers' going to the UK do not show up in the Turkish teachers' narratives in the same manner. Still, in contrast to Ada's or Rosa's experience, Pelin recalls her staying in the US as by and large dramatic, and describes her initial reaction to it as a culture shock. Yet, she believes, in the end, that this experience has enhanced her individual development. In a quite striking metaphor, she expresses her development as aging five years in one. This kind of self-reflection at the personal level is not foregrounded in the other participants' narratives. Doing so, Pelin draws heavily on macro-scale discourses, and how they affected her at the micro scale.

For Seda, another Turkish participant from Ankara, staying abroad was a challenge in terms of issues such as time difference, being away from family, having to share housing with people from other cultures, and finding friends. Like Pelin, Seda also thinks finding friends in the US was difficult because her friends had busy schedules, which stopped her from socializing with them. Still, she managed to maintain tolerant relationships with them, and improved herself as an independent person, who had enhanced her travelling and organization skills as well as her coping with cultural differences. Similar to Seda's situation, Ayca did not try to make any friends in her first year, either. Different from the experience of Polish and Portuguese teachers, the Turkish teachers seemed to consider their stay-abroad experience as temporary, and therefore did not make any attempts to look for native friends. Yet, when Ayca decided to extend her stay to continue with Master's studies, she started turning to people around her, including her Turkish peers, American friends, international friends, and some professors. She summarizes her feelings in the following way:

Ayca: There were times I cried a lot called my family and other than that financial reasons. I felt very lonely there and I felt, I don't know, I felt like no one could help me there if I had a problem, so, from time to time I called them.

This kind of loneliness does not appear in the other participants' personal narratives. While Ayca made these life choices on a daily basis, she also draws on macro-scale cultural habits of avoiding friends in an entirely new place, being family-bound, and focusing on the short-termness of the stay rather than enjoying it. This perspective is actually enhanced further later in the interview, when Ayca recounts her experience as "feeling like a foreigner" in the US:

Ayca: I felt like a foreign there I never felt like it was my home and then, great country great people great place to live but it never felt like home and I was very happy

to be there but if I were to go back there again if I were to live there I still wouldn't want to live there I am, in spite of everything in our country, can you imagine? [giggles]

Ela's narratives differ from the other Turkish participants in that she had already been teaching English in Turkey before she went to the UK, and then to the USA for one semester. Returning to student life was an enjoyable experience for her. Yet, like the other Turkish participants, Ela complained about not being able to make friends with British students. She also remembers how her international friends were saying the same thing about British natives. Meanwhile, like Aycan, she also stated that she chose not to make friends with Americans, as her stay would be short, but she could have well socialized if she wanted to.

All in all, Turkish participants' short stories of personal issues that affect their stay-abroad experiences are marked by more emotional tones, with emphases on loneliness, making friends, feeling like strangers. This stands in opposition to Poles' focus on struggle, and the Portuguese' emphasis on the pleasure quality of their stay-abroad experiences. These differences in the construction of narratives as such seem to stem from differences in cultural habits and patterns that are developed across macro scales.

### 3.3.2. Language-related factors

The ten participants in this study come from a variety of linguistic and educational backgrounds. In the first place, their native languages and the languages they have taught abroad show differences. While only one Polish teacher taught English in the UK, all of the Turkish group taught Turkish in the USA. Meanwhile, one of the two Portuguese teachers taught Spanish, French, and other subjects, and the other teacher taught only Portuguese in the UK. These differences were reflected in the teachers' statements of rationale to go abroad. In the accounts of the Turkish teachers, improving English did not show up as the most important reason to go. Rather, the Turkish teachers, all Fulbright scholars, achieved this scholarship with their high level of English among other things. By contrast, improving their English stood out as the most important reason to go to the UK in the Polish and Portuguese teachers' narratives. Alina, for instance, who had to pass the English examinations in six months, recounts the pressure this put on her, and the strategies she and her partner developed to improve their English, such as befriending native speakers, regular reading of English newspapers, and avoiding watching Polish television. Similarly ambitious accounts were given by Wioletta, who mentions her special effort not to live or work with other Poles. Meanwhile, Jola seems to be the most ambitious when it comes to improving her English:

Jola: I rented a room in the Irish girl's house and there were only French people or Irish people (...) and that was something deliberate that I did. And I wanted to use as much English as possible and I also told everybody at the beginning to correct me. I told them that I wouldn't be offended by this, but quite the opposite. Well, I can't think of any other methods of learning English.

Unlike the Turkish teachers, Polish teachers were not affiliated with any institutions to improve their English, so they were aware at the outset that their language improvement depended solely on their individual efforts. For some, like Ada, these efforts were never enough:

Ada: At the beginning everything was a challenge to be honest because I have very big inhibitions when it comes to speaking English and I spoke only when I had to. I didn't find any pleasure speaking English because I was too ashamed and I didn't feel comfortable (...) And also learning new skills through English. For instance, I had to do my driving license there and I had no idea about cars, even in Polish.

These accounts go in parallel with the personal struggles Polish teachers went through in launching themselves into stay-abroad experiences. While they refer to meso-scale activities of improving English limited within the timescale of their stay-abroad, they also draw on macro-scale attitudes towards the improvement of English.

In the case of Jola and Teresa, the source of struggle is lacking in the colloquial. Jola states that she could understand everybody, but had some problems with the colloquial, and "dirty words" that she heard at her work. Similarly, Teresa frames her troubles as a matter of lacking "everyday terms", and "subtleties of language and culture":

Teresa: In the first year, I had some difficulty in adapting to the school, to that English environment, because I worked directly under the coordination of an Englishman, an English teacher. And I didn't feel well, because I lacked, even though I could speak English and I had some experience, I was lacking those everyday terms, those subtleties of the language and the culture, I lacked those.

Teresa, as well, refers to both micro-scale experiences when she refers to her perceived weaknesses in language, and the meso-scale experience that she went through at school. This is somewhat different from the Portuguese teachers' stories. For Rosa, having no contact with the fellow Portuguese was a positive experience overall, which she thinks helped her improve her English. She states that her English was above average already, and she could go for days without speaking any Portuguese. Different from other participants, Rosa expresses her admiration for the British English openly, and compares it with the American English that she is exposed to right now:

Rosa: That was one of the best parts, and going somewhere and, "Oh, I sound British, don't I?" Of course, that can't happen now, because you get to Portugal and you get all the American influence, which is a pity. I miss that Britishness in me.

Rosa, too, refers to the macro-scale cultural affiliation of being British and how it permeates into her daily interactions.

In the case of the Turkish teachers, the narratives are constructed in a different way. The Turkish teachers all left Turkey as graduates of foreign language education programs at reputable universities, and two also had some teaching experience. They left for the target country with higher levels of English proficiency. What was missing was the knowledge of the colloquial as they all indicated in their interviews. Pelin, for instance, recounts that her academic English deteriorated while teaching Turkish in the US, but her colloquial English improved. A similar divide between academic and colloquial English is highlighted by Seda, but both Seda and Aycan recall that they had no serious problems with the academic English they heard in classes:

Seda: The first few days when I was there, I understood almost nothing in teenagers speaking but I perfectly understood everything the professors are saying because they speak the proper English.

Aycan: It was a connected flight from New York to Portland and then I wanted to ask something to the guards there and then I didn't understand what they said. It was all in English but to me it sounded like Spanish, French something else, and he repeated many times and I was like does he speak English? Is this English? What is he saying? et cetera So that was, that was very, that was the first shock but once I was in an academic environment I was like okay I can easily understand and talk about et cetera so I can, I need to tell that there are two worlds there.

Not only does Aycan recognize the difference in coping with everyday and academic English, but also she recalls impressing her American professors with her fluency. She thinks it was because of her degree in English and private tutoring, thanks to which she always used English with her students. Clearly, Aycan refers to meso-scale activities that were responsible for contributing to such outcomes. Yet, both Seda and Aycan also draw on macro-scale notions of language ideologies when they refer to "proper English" or different accents.

Unlike the rest of the participants, Ela has experience of staying both in the US and the UK. She comes from a strong English background training in a private secondary school in Istanbul, with native and non-native teachers and highly competent English lessons focusing on literature. After teaching English in Istanbul for five years, she went to England for her Master's. When asked whether she had any trouble in understanding English when she first went there, this is what she said:

Ela: I can say both in school and in daily life especially in daily life I felt that we have been exposed to American accent mostly. It was hard for me especially in the trains at the train stations I remember I asked something about the student card discount kind of thing, I didn't understand what the staff was talking about. He repeated three times and then I left quietly there [imitates] "okay I got it" I didn't understand a word, of course, but Americans say the same thing from time to time, about the British, but then of course through the end of the year it was much more easy in the States, I didn't have any difficulty. The two experiences were totally different.

Ela recalls the whole experience in a light-hearted way, far from the negative tone portrayed in the other Turkish teachers' narratives. Having experience in both countries seems to have helped her develop more common sense.

All in all, teachers' rationales for staying abroad and their proficiency in English seem to play a role in the linguistic struggles through which they went. While both Polish and Portuguese teachers recount that being European and speaking English opened the doors for them, the Turkish teachers recount relying on their high level of English. Doing so, the teachers bring together the macro-scale cultural and social differences with the meso-scale experiences they had in speaking and improving their English.

### 3.3.3. Sociocultural factors

An important part of the interviews was spent on teachers' observations and their ways of dealing with sociocultural differences between their different contexts of teaching. Strikingly enough, the Polish participants that we interviewed did not frame their short stories around these differences. One reason might be the "survivor" quality of Polish teachers' self-portrayal which kept them away from thinking about the cultural struggles they experienced in the UK, while another might be the scope of the interviews conducted with them. As such, the Portuguese teacher Rosa recounted in her short stories that she did not have any problems making friends with the British, or finding her way in her daily life, like going to the doctor's. These portrayals refer to the micro and meso-scale of teachers' positive experiences of stay-abroad.

Yet, stay-abroad as a cultural experience might ring with it its own struggles. The Portuguese participant Teresa explains this as the mismatch between the mental representation of another culture and its reality. The discrepancy that Teresa talks about might be better understood in the context of an unpleasant incident that she recounts. As an Afro-Portuguese woman, Teresa had trouble with her British colleagues in terms of forming a social relationship. In the end, one of them "broke the ice", and invited her to her house party:

Teresa: We went over to that house in the weekend, it was just the English there, the blue-eyed white people. Plus me, the African, and my Jewish colleague.

Interviewer: And she invited you

Teresa: She invited me, and I even said, when she came to meet us at the gate, she said, "Ah, Teresa, welcome, now you are one of us".

Interviewer: And that was after how long? A year?

Teresa: A year. And I've never forgotten that. And I said, "Well, you are really racists". And my colleague looked at me, "you are really racists!" And that just came out, but at the same time, I gained some friends.

Teresa recalls this confrontation as a moment of empowerment when, after giving her response, she says that she also gained friends. Her account reveals that the macro-scale cultural patterns of racial discrimination make their way through the micro-scale interactions among colleagues.

The case of the Turkish participants is equally marked by sociocultural struggles they went through in their daily lives abroad. Among those, Pelin's recollection of her experience of daily life is the most striking:

Pelin: When I went to the city center you know I lost that contact because even scared of getting on a bus, because on the bus there were poor people, black people, the people I was unfamiliar with. So I had a little bit like, how can I say, scared to live in the campus because I thought I would get lost. This is why culture shock I mean, yes culture shock.

Pelin describes the people that she encounters in daily life, "the poor people and the Black people", as the people that she was "unfamiliar with" and apparently the idea of leaving the campus scared her. She considers this as a part of the culture shock that she went through. It seems that Pelin had a harder time in cultural adaptation. It also reflects the acknowledgement of inhibitions in her cultural distance. Pelin explains this as doing the opposite of what she used to do in Turkey. She discloses that although she was not keen on such aspects of the Turkish culture as "customs, traditions, religion" and would often criticize them, she came to support them when she started living in the USA.

These ambiguities are not altogether paralleled in the other Turkish teachers' accounts. Seda seems to be more tolerant towards the American culture, and recounts changing her perception by revising her previous stereotypes. Her open-mindedness is actually a two-way mindset. As a Turkish teacher at the university, she remembers being received by others positively, and thinks that she changed the Turkish image in her students' minds:

Seda: My students were especially beginner ones maybe it was the first time for them to see a Turkish person so they were actually a little bit sometimes surprised because

the image they have in their minds a little bit kinds of stereotype they hear on TV they watched on TV and then there is me who has a modernist style who is speaking English who is teaching English and who is hanging out with them at nights so I think I changed the image little bit in their minds and it was a little bit shock for them because they knew some Turkish people beforehand.

Not only cultural habits, but Seda's outlook on students' various identities have changed. As one of the colleges she was working for was an all-girls college, she had the opportunity to observe same-sex relationships in this school:

Seda: My point of view totally changed for in that point for example, my students were lesbians and you know they were very happy in their own life, then I start to make comparisons with, like American life style Turkish life style, oh my God these girls wouldn't be able to really enjoy their lives in Turkey, I was saying to myself so that really changed in my mind.

Similar "radical" cultural observations and changes have been observed by Ayca. When asked whether her stay-abroad experience has changed her perception of culture, she immediately recounts "romantic relationships" where she had to learn new customs such as dates on Friday nights or friendships, which she found different from her Turkish friendships in terms of the quality of time spent together. Yet, she opens up the most on the change she went through in terms of her perception of religion:

Ayca: It changed many things it has changed my views about religion, about culture and about my family, about many stereotypes that we had about cultures et cetera. I mean I studied different language different culture et cetera but going there and living there is a different thing that you know, it's not that my family is a conservative family but you know I became less religious.

Ela's accounts did not bear strong traces of cultural differences that made their way into her stay-abroad experience. The only point that she emphasized is the cultural stereotypes that she had had about the British culture and how differently she perceived them:

Ela: We have stereotypes as you know people would say British people are cold this and that e:h this description of coldness I mean where and why I realize that I cannot have a British family but on the buses at the shops on the streets they are very kind polite and they are not bothered by your questions at restaurants they are extremely kind in that sense I didn't feel that they're cold but to me I think you cannot make friends there.

All in all, it might be suggested that the Turkish participants went through questions of who they are vis-à-vis the native and international people they met in the US more seriously than the Polish and Portuguese teachers. They had more

cross-cultural encounters that they recalled as struggles, and they referred to the macro-scale patterns and practices more often than the Polish and Portuguese participants in constructing these encounters in their short stories.

#### 4. Discussion

The study reported in this paper reveals that stay-abroad experience is a multi-dimensional endeavor. While it is the English language that serves as a passport for the teachers' moving and working overseas, it is a complex set of issues that shape this experience well beyond the language. Our data indicate that, regardless of the national background, three main factors recur in the teachers' stay-abroad narratives: personal, linguistic, and sociocultural.

In the case of the personal factors, language teachers in focus are extremely self-conscious in going through their experience of staying abroad. Their responses to the interview questions are highly contextualized, which shows their ability to understand their experience within larger contexts, which, in turn, confirms our decision to adopt short story analysis as our analytical tool. We have demonstrated that the major divide in terms of personal factors seems to be between the European group and the Turkish group, although we have also observed differences between Polish and Portuguese teachers' narratives, like the former being focused more on personal struggle. While the general tendency of the European group is more on acculturating to the British culture and language in the earliest and best way possible, the Turkish teachers' accounts reflect sentiments of feeling lonely, feeling like a stranger, and avoiding making friends with locals due to the limited duration of staying there. This might be interpreted as the reflection of differences between the European and Turkish cultures in terms of their perspective on adulthood. Except for one, all Turkish teachers went to the US straight out of college. A college graduate in Turkey and one in Europe have strikingly different experiences in terms of living and working, which leads them into having different expectations from staying abroad. We have demonstrated these as differences in bringing together the micro-scale and macro-scale cultural patterns.

In terms of linguistic factors that have played a role in stay-abroad experiences, the picture is less clear, as we have analyzed a mixed group in terms of first languages, and languages and levels taught, and these teachers' experiences are different from each other. What they share, however, is the motivation to improve their English in the limited time available. The Polish and the Portuguese teachers' attitudes are strikingly similar in terms of making deliberate effort into developing their English language. By contrast, the Turkish teachers did not experience many of these stages, due to their good level of English

as Fulbright scholars. It is important, however, that all teachers see colloquial uses of the language as something that they gained through their stay-abroad experience. It is also crucial to note that the European group's efforts to improve their language stems from their perceived proximity to the culture in the UK, which made it possible for them to be exposed to more natives than the Turkish teachers. Turkish teachers' conceptualization of personal distance and lack of access to native speakers due to their perception of a short and limited stay seem to have played a role in their lack of reported deliberate efforts to improve their English even more. Thus, we can conclude that the micro-scale experiences on a daily basis and the meso-scale patterns of ideas about improving English merge in different ways across the three groups of participants.

As far as the sociocultural factors that impact stay-abroad experiences of language teachers are concerned, we have noted that they failed to appear in the Polish participants' narratives. This might be due to the differences in the interview scope, such that the Polish interviews might not have directed the conversation to narratives of sociocultural factors. It might also be related to how stay-abroad experiences are perceived by Polish teachers. It is also important to mention that the major sociocultural struggles seem to stem from racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural background of the teachers, as far as our interviews with Portuguese and Turkish teachers suggest. The case of the Portuguese teacher Teresa tells us that not only national but also ethnic culture plays a role in stay-abroad experiences. On the other hand, the case of Turkish teachers portrays some ambiguities and tensions. Attitude towards Turkish and American culture, adopting native culture versus critically analyzing it, finding "religious" answers to the questions on struggle, are some examples prone to ambiguities. Apparently, Turkish teachers have found the way to deal with these questions thanks to their stay-abroad experience. The sociocultural aspects of stay-abroad experience directly connect the macro-scale issues and struggles with the quotidian experiences. The level of their incorporation into each other shows variations across these three groups.

## 5. Conclusion

Mobile language teachers' working and staying abroad is a complex area of identity negotiation, as it is a different set of experiences than, for instance, the case of study-abroad, or permanent migration. These complexities involve a diverse set of relationships between linguistic experiences and identity construction. Our data suggest that individuals might excel in one area, such as linguistic skills), but they might still perceive themselves as insufficient when it comes to personal and sociocultural struggles. These perceptions lead them into developing certain

inhibitions in making native friends, feeling alienated, or feeling as an outsider. Yet, unpacking these complexities and locating them within micro, meso and macro scales of identity construction seem to help if our purpose is to better understand how language teachers' identities are shaped by their stay-abroad experiences.

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APPENDIX

When and why did you go abroad?

What were the biggest challenges during your stay abroad?

How did you learn English abroad?

How were you received by others?

Did your stay abroad have an impact on your perception of culture (target country culture, your native culture)?

Did your stay abroad have an impact on your status as a language teacher?

Do you think you maximally used your time abroad or could have achieved more?

How does the stay-abroad affect your teaching/life/position right now?