

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia Linguistica 19 (2024)

ISSN 2083-1765

DOI 10.24917/20831765.19.20

ARTYKUŁY RECENZYJNE

Joanna Aleksiejuk

Uniwersytet Komisji Edukacji Narodowej, Kraków, Polska

ORCID 0000-0001-7183-2961

Listening to teachers' polyphonic voices.

Dorota Werbińska, *In-service language teachers' examination discourses: Interpretative repertoires and positioning*,

Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej, Słupsk 2022, pp. 254

The book *In-service language teachers' examination discourses: Interpretative repertoires and positioning* (2022) by Dorota Werbińska is a novel and insightful publication which uses concepts from discursive psychology to investigate the discourse used by foreign language teachers during their promotion interviews. The presented study sheds light on the understanding that Polish in-service teachers have of the most fundamental notions in their profession, such as language and the learner, and on the ways they position themselves and negotiate the positioning attributed to them in the context of a formal interview before the examination and qualification commissions.

Dorota Werbińska is an Associate Professor at the Pomeranian University in Słupsk, where she chairs the Department of Applied Linguistics. In her research, she focuses on language teacher identity, teacher wellbeing and effective teaching. She has published many papers and books on these topics, with the most notable being *The formation of language teacher professional identity* (2017), *Developing into an effective Polish teacher of English* (2011) and *Skuteczny nauczyciel języka obcego* (2004, Eng. *Effective foreign English teacher*), which met with a positive reception not only from scholars, but also foreign language teachers. The presented study would not have been possible without Werbińska's 20-year-long experience working as an expert in language teaching on the qualification and examination commissions, which decide on the outcome of the teacher promotion procedure in Poland.

The author starts the book by laying out the institutional and legal context of her research. The author presents the evolution of the teacher promotion process in Poland, from the first legislation tackling the issue in 1982, to the 1998 Education Reform Act, which laid the foundations for today's system, to the amendments introduced in 2018. At the moment of conducting the research, the teacher promotion process consisted of four stages. Graduates started off with the status of a probationary

teacher and after one year of work they could start a professional internship which lasted for nine months and ended with a qualifying examination for the status of a contract teacher. The subsequent statuses of an appointed and chartered teacher both required a period of planned professional internship aimed to expand the candidate's skills and expertise and concluded with an examination before a commission consisting of a representative of the local education authority, the candidate's school principal, two or three subject experts, a representative of a teachers' union (at the candidate's request) and, rarely, an administrator tasked with taking the minutes of the meeting. The amendment of 2018 changed the requirements for each stage as well as the rules governing the intervals of work after which a teacher is allowed to start their internship. It is worth mentioning that both the promotion process and the examination format were changed in 2022, with the aim of, among others, making them less complex and bureaucratic (ORE 2022).

The second chapter presents the theoretical framework of the research, introducing the concepts of interpretative repertoires and positioning. The former was incorporated into social psychology by Potter and Wetherell (1987) in the wake of the discursive turn, which saw psychologists direct their attention to discourse. According to Wiggins (2017), discursive psychology relies on three premises: discourse is situated, discourse is action-oriented, and discourse is constructed and constructive. Hence, the notion of interpretative repertoires allows to study not only people's conversations and, more broadly, everyday utterances, but also the ways in which speakers construct and negotiate their identities. It is defined as "a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events" (Potter & Wetherell 1987: 138), which can be used by speakers to frame their talk as a matter of fact, impartial and neutral (Potter 1996). Composed of recurrent terms or metaphors organized in a particular structure, interpretative repertoire often reflects its users' individual traits, but at the same time is shaped by the historical, cultural, and social context (Wetherell 2001). Drawing on this tradition, Werbińska in her study defines interpretative repertoires as "the patterns, norms and regular features which are produced by teachers in the promotion interview setting and which have an influence on the course of events" (p. 27). These regular features can be investigated with the use of discursive devices ranging from basic (e.g. the use of pronouns), to intermediate (e.g. disclaimers in which the speaker indicates their distance to the statement they are making – *This is not my area of interest but...*), and to advanced (e.g. agent-subject distinction, which translates into speakers positioning themselves as active agents or passive subjects of somebody else's actions) (Wiggins 2017). The author then proceeds to present selected social and Second Language Acquisition research projects that drew upon the construct of interpretative repertoires.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to positioning theory, first introduced by Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990, 1999), which views identity building as a performative act done through the processes of social interaction with a significant role played by discourse. Since different participants have different rights and duties assigned to them in the "here and now" of a specific interaction, they will be able to use different discourse modes, e.g. giving orders or grades (Harré 2012). The goal of

positioning theory is thus to investigate how certain practices encourage individuals to communicate certain things and discourage others from doing the same. It does this by using the key concepts of storylines, positions, and act interpretations, which all interact with one another (Davies & Harré 1999). Having presented the basic tenets of the theory as well as different modes of positioning, which appear to be of interest to scholars planning to employ the theory in their analysis of discursive acts, the author moves on to present selected research projects that have used the theory to study teachers, not necessarily language teachers. She decides to divide them into four different categories depending on their focus and outcomes. This division is again useful for researchers planning to adopt a specific angle within the positioning theory in their own projects. Although not very extensive, the theoretical part of the book together with its thorough reference list offers the reader a sufficient background to the study whose methodology is presented in the following chapter.

The third chapter provides the reader with a detailed description of the context of the study, its participants, its design, the researcher's position and the method applied when collecting and analysing the data. The section devoted to the data sources seems particularly valuable as it discusses the rationale behind the inductive method of research favoured by discursive psychology (Potter 2004) and then lays out the author's method of data collection which resulted in an impressive record of twelve pages of handwritten notes by the participant. Also of interest is a step-by-step explanation of the process of coding which was composed of several stages following Wiggins' (2017) recommendations. The chapter is concluded with validation aspects of the research and ethical considerations.

In the fourth chapter, the author presents the outcomes of the first part of her research, namely the interpretative repertoires emerging from the promotion interview discourses of forty-eight in-service language teachers (mainly English teachers). Her analysis is divided into candidates for the appointed and chartered teacher status. Each section is accompanied by a table clearly displaying the outcomes of the analysis broken down to individual participants, which allows to quickly grasp the frequency of themes that emerged from the interviews. The studied repertoires relate to language, the learner, the teacher, parents, and the teaching profession as, according to Werbińska, any language teacher views the language teaching profession as a composite of these five concepts. Having discussed the different themes related to the concepts and their varying interpretations, the author moves on to affordances, which can be defined as factors enabling the interviewed teachers to perform their duties in an effective and meaningful way. The nature of the affordances that emerge from the teachers' discourse is twofold: they relate to opportunities created by the teacher to enable their students to succeed, such as "classroom practices focused on active methods" or "accommodating students' interests" (p. 152), but they also encompass the environmental opportunities directed at the teacher, such as "teaching small classes" (p. 154). The affordances are, again, connected to the five fundamental concepts listed above. For instance, extra contact with language was a frequently mentioned affordance relating to the concept of language and included, among others, teachers' participation in school exchanges and international projects. Following the same pattern,

constraints preventing the participants from being successful in language teaching are analysed. Interestingly, some themes that emerged as affordances from the discourse of some of the participants, were framed as constraints by others. This was the case of approaching learners as individuals with distinct needs: although viewed as necessary in order to succeed in teaching, it also came out as a major challenge to some of the participants.

The last part of the chapter focuses on the discursive devices used by the participants, which Werbińska analyses using Wiggins' (2017) division into basic, intermediate and advanced devices and, this time, provides the reader with quantitative results. However, the significance of the findings in this section remains unclear as they are not extensively discussed later in the chapter, and the author does not explain the implications of her results. In contrast, the analysis of the interpretative repertoires has led to conclusions that are very revealing. Although she appreciates the polyphonic character of teachers' voices, the author manages to distinguish the most prominent themes emerging from their repertoires: "a traditional version of teaching, a person-focused version of teaching," and, to a lesser degree, "the negotiation of educational 'latest trends' or the present rhetoric" (p. 171). It appears that the first theme, in which foreign language instruction is tantamount to studying language systems and subsystems, and which implies the perception of the teacher as the expert whose lead learners, parents, and teacher trainees should follow, is being superseded by the person-focused version of teaching which lays emphasis on the communicative purpose of language in the contemporary interconnected world. In this version, the learner is perceived as an individual with their own weak and strong points. Those two opposing tendencies are accompanied by a less visible one that reflects the latest trends in language teaching and focuses on the challenges posed by the modern times, such as emotional well-being, multilingualism or civilisational concerns. These topics give rise to the repertoires that stress the importance of foreign language as one of the skills that students should acquire to cope with the rapidly changing world (the life preparation repertoire) or the repertoires centred on the cooperation with learners, parents or colleagues. Therefore, it is evident that Polish teachers' interpretative repertoires reflect the shifts and innovations present in the modern glottodidactic theory.

In Chapter five, the author presents the findings of the second part of her study, namely the teachers' positioning which encompasses their self-positioning with regard to reflexive selves and interactive positioning. Again, the study outcomes are laid out in the form of succinct tables and accompanied by relevant citations from the interviews, which greatly enhances the clarity of this section of the book. Having investigated the ways in which teachers position themselves in their narratives, Werbińska has identified three self-positions that are particularly worthy of attention: the unique self, the ideal self, and the feared self. In the first one, teachers attempted to present themselves as exceptional professionals, such as enthusiasts/inspirers or pursuers of knowledge. The second type of positioning informed the commission about the teachers' ambitions and aspirations while the last one addressed the problems and challenges that could prevent them from attaining their ideal selves. As it was observed by the author, although self-positioning undoubtedly sheds some light on the

teachers' work experiences and the challenges they face, the positions voiced by the candidates might also derive from what they think is appropriate and beneficial in the context of the promotion interview. What seems more informative is the second part of the chapter, which discusses how members of the commission position the teachers, how they are positioned by the teachers themselves, and how the teachers respond to the positions assigned by the commission.

The first category was divided into two and consisted of positive positions, for example, that of a good teacher or a welcome person, as well as negative ones, for instance, that of an inadequate knowledge holder. Some of the negative positionings, which appeared a bit more frequently than the positive ones, seem telling and offer an insight into the weaknesses of the teacher promotion interviews in Poland. One of them is the position of botherer, which manifested itself in the members of the commission asking the teachers to hurry up with their presentations (a mandatory stage of the examination) or voicing their complaints about the workload they have to endure; in another interaction, the teacher was positioned as a role usurper lecturing the commission instead of presenting the outcomes of her work because she used rhetorical devices such as "Please, imagine a situation ..." and complemented her presentation with quotations from professional literature. Such positionings may be indicative of members of the commission treating their duty as a tedious, imposed chore that preferably should take as little time as possible. This attitude rules out a true exchange of ideas between the commission and the candidates in which both parties would enjoy equal status. Such observations are borne out by some of the teachers' responses to the commission's positioning. For instance, the teachers were at times forced to negotiate the position of a fully-fledged conversation partner after noticing that the commission members were not paying attention to their presentations. On the other hand, some of the teachers positioned the commission as members of a spectacle. They seemed to view the interview as a meaningless formality whose completion did not require much effort or preparation and expected the commission members to share such a view. The above-mentioned positionings raise serious doubts about the format of the whole promotion procedure and its purpose. Therefore, it would be interesting to use Werbińska's findings to evaluate whether the reform of 2022 has tackled the identified issues and introduced an interview format that relies less on a somewhat stilted and hierarchical scenario and instead creates a favourable environment for a true dialogue in which the teachers can reflect on their profession and the commission members can gain an insight into teachers' everyday work and, in exchange, offer their expertise. Such a continuation of Werbińska's research could inform policymakers about the implications of the recent reform.

As informative as it is, however, Werbińska's work is not free from limitations that the author acknowledges herself in the last part of the book. Two of them are particularly problematic: the first relating to the source of the data and the second to a lack of triangulation. Indeed, the fact that all the data came from promotion interviews puts into question the validity of the research outcomes. It could be easily argued that the identified teachers' interpretative repertoires in particular do not reflect the reality of their work and work environments but rather the teachers' conception of what

the commission expects to hear from a candidate for professional promotion given the current state of knowledge in the field and, even more importantly, educational policies enforced in Poland. The context of a promotion interview can be understood as a specific manifestation of the field of education as understood by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (2001). Their concept of field denotes a network of relations between actors with differing (but within this framework – objective) positions that define their access to different forms of power or capital in a given domain. The actors compete for resources and advantages based on their positions and understanding of the rules that govern the competition. From this perspective, the teachers' discourses testify more to their recognition of the rules in this social field than to the objective reality. This is why the lack of triangulation may appear particularly problematic. Had Werbińska triangulated her study with classroom observation of the teachers' lessons or interviews with their students or the students' parents, her findings would be more reliable. It would be especially valuable to further investigate the teachers' claims about their growing understanding of language as a means of communication rather than merely a system, their perception of the learner as an agent, and about the care they provide for students with special needs. However, these weaknesses can be also viewed as strengths since they invite other researchers to build upon Werbińska's observations and to expand on them.

This leads us to the strong points of the author's work, which is first and foremost its revealing insights into the shifting nature of foreign language teaching in Poland and the affordances and constraints that language teachers experience in their everyday work. These two broad topics deserve further research especially by scholars interested in Polish teachers' openness to new trends in language instruction, in the ways of enhancing the implementation of such trends in Polish schools and in the factors promoting and undermining language teachers' professional well-being. Werbińska's study will not only provide them with thought-provoking findings that can be used as a starting point in their own work, but will also provide assistance in devising their research, owing to the well-explained methodology as well as the discussion parts that tie her results to relevant positions in professional literature. Education policymakers are another group that can benefit from the author's findings as these shed light on issues of concern in foreign language instruction in Poland, for instance the perception of language as merely a tool for passing the school leaving examination, which emerged as prevalent among secondary teachers who are certified examiners. Last but not least, teacher trainees should reach for the book to confront their own understanding of the fundamental concepts in their future profession with that expressed by their seasoned colleagues. This would help them to enter the profession with greater self-awareness and better comprehension of the challenges awaiting them. Thanks to the clear and coherent academic language used in the book as well as the wealth of examples and quotations illustrating the author's conclusions, all the above-mentioned groups should find the publication accessible and rewarding to read.

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