

*Full Length Research Paper*

# A discourse analysis: Professional identity development of language teacher candidates

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**Identity refers to all the characteristics that “specify who we are and also how we see other people” and is formed with the accumulation of our own experiences and those from social life with regard to certain roles like professional, political or parental roles. Some of the characteristics of identity that determine and describe professional part of identity are regarded as professional identity. Professional identity emerges as a result of condensation of individuals’ own or society’s perceptions around various themes. In this study we aimed to examine how language teachers develop their professional identity from earlier ages to university years. The study group is composed of 18 teacher candidates, 8 of whom are from the department of Turkish language education and 10 attend elementary education department. Data gathered by interviews and analyzed by discourse analysis. According to the findings, while the identity conveys imaginary properties in childhood, it becomes realistic later. Considerable number of students chooses their area of professions with compulsory-mostly negative- conditions.**

**Key words:** Turkish language teacher, identity, professional identity, discourse analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

Identity represents all the characteristics that “specify who we are and also how we see other people”. As a highly sophisticated construct, identity comes into being as a result of cultural practices in the society and social and individual interactions in larger contexts throughout life (Wenger, 1998; Holland et al., 2001). According to another definition, identities are combinations of knowledge, emotion, competencies and experiences with regard to a social role like teacher identity (Giddens, 1991). In short, identity is formed with the accumulation of our own experiences and those from social life with regard to certain roles like professional, political or parental roles.

Identity development is a process that starts with childhood and continues in adolescence with following stages of development. It includes individuals’ self-description, self-positioning, self-assessment and self-guidance. Individuals have a main identity composed of all identity statuses and different sub-identities such as professional, parental, sexual, and ideological identities. Besides individuals’ own efforts, these identities develop with the influence and supply of many sources like environmental factors, ethnic factors, family situation, social environment, education etc. Professional identity as one of these sub-identities is shaped with the influence of the environment, education and personal

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choices starting from childhood. Some of the characteristics of identity that determine and describe professional part of identity are regarded as professional identity. Professional identity emerges as a result of condensation of individuals' own or society's perceptions around various themes. Among the leading ones are: regarding oneself as the performer of a profession, as having necessary skills and attitudes and regarding oneself within the context of a professional community and as a member of the community, differentiate themselves from other professional groups, society's acceptance of the person's competence to perform the occupation and society's association (Brott and Myers, 1999; Smith and Robinson, 1995). Reisetter (2004) pointed out that professional identity came into being as a result of interaction between personal world view and professional views and with the processes of accepting oneself as professionally adequate.

In today's economic, political and social world, the importance of identities emerges as an undeniable fact. In this context, the importance of social environment or having identity that is suitable for profession or choosing a profession that matches identity increases because professional identity is important for many issues like labor productivity and adaptation to workplace (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Therefore, individual and professional satisfaction, success and happiness and also development and characteristics related with professional identity become quite important for employers and institutions to reach their objectives. While various researchers state that there are many factors influencing professional identity development, it is underscored that education is one of the most important factors. Although education in earlier periods is also influential, especially university education plays a great role in students' professional life and vocational calling (Crosby, 2004; Dalton, 2001). University is an educational institution where individuals come after choosing their professions. Therefore, they are now ready to acquire competencies and expertise necessary for their profession. In other words, it is assumed that students starting university education have chosen their professions and are in the process of developing their professional identity in this direction. Besides, students at universities show greater interest in identity related issues like religion, faith and political choice (Higher Education Research Institute, 2005; Smith and Denton, 2005; Riley, 2004; Mariani and Hewitt, 2008). In the university years, students start to make many preferences and follow many practices that will affect their life in the future.

Teachers' professional development has recently been the subject of many studies. According to these studies, teacher professional identity is the identity that teacher candidates try to develop as a result of continuous and flexible process and necessary education so that they and their professional works are accepted as "teachers" (Choen, 2010). Hall et al. (2010) and Kwan and Lopez-

Real (2010) supported this point of view and stated that acquisition of professional identity was shaped as a result of learning outcomes and solutions for challenges teachers can face and with the influence of the characteristics of strong teacher identities they have met in their educational lives on their life and ideas about teachers. In short, throughout educational processes, teachers consciously construct their professional identities that will affect themselves and the choices they will make when teaching (Gür, 2011).

During university education, students start to gain their professional identities besides other identities. During university education, candidate teachers are expected to mature their professional identities to start the profession. In this study, the effect of university education, which is the last step before starting the profession and where knowledge, skills, awareness and behaviors that shape teacher identity are acquired, on the process of professional identity acquisition of teachers will be examined via discourse analysis, which is one of the qualitative research paradigms.

### Discourse analysis

"Language" has appeared as an increasingly attention-grabbing phenomenon since the second half of the last century. In short, as it is both a building block and product of social life (Börekeçi, 2009), language as a phenomenon has increasingly become one of the most important object of studies in this area. With this increasing interest in language in this period called "linguistic era" by Rorty (1967), quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques that examine how language is to be researched and used in social sciences have been put forward. Discourse analysis, which is one of the qualitative techniques, considers discourse within the context it is produced. It is a method that examines language production, communication, sense-making, interpretation and spread with social and psychological points of views. It can also be defined as "an analysis carried out to understand discourse and social reality produced using a language" (Gür, 2011). Although discourse analysis studies are differently classified, they are generally grouped into two as discourse analysis proper that describe discourse and critical discourse analysis that includes power relations in discourse, power distribution, criticisms and assessments. When discourse analysis studies are considered, it is seen that discourse analysis is used in almost every field of study from communication to education, from law to political sciences. In discourse analysis, there is not one agreed technique, which can be used for every type of discourse. On the contrary, as discourse is individually produced, the methods researchers need to adapt depending on the discourse analyzed and their objectives. In this respect, discourse analysis enables researchers to have the flexibility to develop their

techniques according to the data collected. Accordingly, data to be used in discourse analysis can be speech in their own context (verbal data) or other discourse elements like written materials, written data, pictures and symbols (visual data). These raw data are prepared to be used in analysis. To this end, first of all verbal data are truthfully transcribed. To facilitate referencing, tracing and checking during analysis, lines or sentences are numbered. Similarly, visuals are also numbered. Later on, analysis is carried out descriptively or critically.

## Aim

This study seeks to research how teacher candidates configure their professional identity development. To achieve this, how teacher candidates perceive and choose their profession and develop it was assessed based on their own discourse. How elementary school teacher candidates and Turkish language teacher candidates develop their professional identities and whether there were differences between departments was discussed. In this context, what affected professional identity choice most was also studied.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study group

In this study, the study group is composed of 18 teacher candidates, 8 of whom are from the department of Turkish language education and 10 attend elementary education department. Nine of the teacher candidates were chosen among female students and nine students were chosen among male students. The study group was chosen among students with high, medium and low Grade Point Average (GPAs). All of the students are senior class students and from various regions and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### Data collection

Data were collected via group discussions. Groups discussions were carried out separately with students from different department in the researchers' office in the fall semester in 2013 and discussions were videotaped. In the interviews with the students, profound discussions were made about how they developed themselves since their childhood, how their knowledge and point of views with regard to professions have developed, how their perception and choice of profession developed as their level of education starting from elementary school increased; how they got prepared for university exam and made their preferences, how their points of view, profession perception and assessments evolved and factors that affect their profession choices. Transcription of more than a total of 12 hours of interview yielded a corpus of 9000 words. The recordings of interviews were transcribed and then two experts examined the compliance between audio and written materials and ascertained that they matched. Written form of each sentence was assigned a number. This number is composed of symbols referring to the producer of the sentence and indicating the session, line number and letters. For example, while "TA/I/123" stands for "123th sentence by student A from Turkish language teaching department in the 1st session", the number "SB/II/18" refers to "line 18 uttered

by student B from Elementary Education department in the 2nd session.

### Data analysis

As determination of context is of great prominence in discourse analysis, initially context was defined. The context of discourse was defined based on information from questionnaires given to the students. While defining the context, the researcher sought to determine general, historical, sociological and psychological elements that could affect the discourse. After the context was determined, critical discourse analysis method was used for analysis. Therefore, the analysis focused on the points where individual judgment, assessment and critics intensified rather than on the characteristics of the language. The ideational and contextual basis of these ideas was determined. Excerpts from the students' talks on these issues are added just below these ideas.

## RESULTS

### Context

The students who came from various regions of the country shared flats with friends or stayed in dormitories and subsisted themselves on scholarships and their families' financial support. All of the students were from middle or low income families and parents of 6 students were self-employed or farmers and the rest had regular monthly income. While the elementary education was one of the fields with the highest number of appointments during the students' high school education and university entrance exam, the number of appointments in this field was very few in the year when the study was carried out. Teachers working for state schools are chosen with central exams. As for Turkish language teaching, more appointments are expected in recent years. The graduates of both programs are not only to be successful on the KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Examination) but also rank higher among other candidates who took the exam. Both departments are four-year bachelor degree programs. While average GPA of the students at the department of elementary education was calculated to be 3.36 out of 4.00, the average GPA of the students in the department of Turkish language education was determined to be 3, 13 out of 4.00.

## FINDING AND CONCLUSION

### Construction of professional perception

In professional identity development, individual's perception, awareness and knowledge of the profession in his/her environment is of great importance. Most of the students had their first interactions with regard to professions in their immediate environments. In this context, they learnt their parents or family members' jobs. They stated that they commenced to become aware of and

learn the professions of their parents and the other adults around them before elementary school or the first years of elementary school.

Excerpt 1- SG//97: In my pre-school period, we used to go to our orchard with my family. My father would pick up fruits and vegetables and sell them to commissioners in the marketplace. After the marketplace, we would go to get our car fixed. In this way, I could understand that people did different jobs. I even remember that some friends of mine would regularly go to school's football field to play football. I used to help my father in the field and orchard as we always had jobs to do. As their fathers were civil servants, my friends would not work but play football.

(Alıntı 1- SG//97: çocukluğumda daha okula gitmezken ailemle birlikte bahçemize giderdim. Orada sebze meyve ne varsa alır hale gider komisyonculara satardı babam. İşte oradan gider arabamızı tamir ettirirdik. Ben o şekilde anlıyordum insanların çeşitli işler yaptıklarını. Hatta mahallededi arkadaşlarımdan bazıları düzenli top oynamaya giderlerdi okulun sahasına. Ben sürekli işimiz olduğu için bahçede tarlada babama yardım ederdim. Onların babaları memur olduğundan arkadaşlarımla çalışmazdı çok top oynarlardı.)

Furthermore, some students stated that they had knowledge about some professions due to various factors especially in pre-school period. These general negative narrations by people in their close environment about various subjects and with various aims also build students' perceptions of profession.

Excerpt TD//65: My elder sister used to frighten me saying that they would hand me over to the Police. Besides, I always associate doctors and other health workers with white coats with pains of injections and other pains. My first knowledge was that police was someone who takes us to police station and health workers were "people who give injections".

(Alıntı TD//65: Beni ablam seni polise vereceğiz diye korkuturdu. Ayrıca ben beyaz önlüklü doktor ve hastanede diğer çalışanları iğne olma ve acılarım ile hatırlarım hep. Yani ilk bilgilerim polisi bizi götüren, sağlıkta çalışanları ise "iğneci" olara tanıdım.)

Some students started to get informed and create perceptions of professions with the inducement of family members even before they started elementary school. This guidance had their place in their lives as first professional inculcations.

Excerpt TC//36: Even before I started elementary school, my father used to say my son would be a doctor. I would say I would play the doctor when asked because I think I did not have knowledge about profession. Later I started to learn what a doctor does. In our games, if there were

elder pupils, they would play the doctor. If I were alone I would play the soldier game because all my friends liked playing the soldier. They would say "Lump playing the doctor let's play the soldier."

(Alıntı TC//36: Babam daha ben okula gitmeden benim oğlum doktor olacak derdi. Ben de bana sorduklarında doktorluk oynaycam derdim. Çünkü daha gerçekten meslekler hakkındaki bilgim yoktu herhalde. Daha sonra doktorun neler yaptığını öğrenmeye başlamıştım. Oynarlarda eğer çevremde büyüklerimden kimse varsa doktor olurdu. Eğer yalnızsam asker olurdu. Çünkü tüm arkadaşlarımla da asker olmayı seviyorduk. Onlar da derdi "bosver doktorluğu asker olalım" derlerdi.)

The students stated that even before they started the school, they regarded some people on TV and other visual media as heroes or heroines and role models in line with their interests, abilities, and that they started to make their first plans for their professions under the influence of their heroes or role models jobs.

Excerpt Tİ//26 In our neighborhood we would always argue who could be a good football player because we knew footballers made a lot of money. Besides, some friends of mine wanted to be singers and some others wanted to be computer game designers.

(Alıntı Tİ//26 mahallede sahada top oynadıktan sonra arkadaşlarla hep hangimiz iyi futbolcu olabiliriz diye tartışırdık. Çünkü futbolcuların iyi para kazandığını biliyorduk. Ayrıca bazı arkadaşlarımız şarkıcı, bazıları bilgisayar oyun yapımcısı olmayı isterlerdi.)

### **Development of profession identity and knowledge throughout years**

As elementary and secondary education students started to knowing themselves, their environments and society, their knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, values and choices with regard to professional identity commence to come into being and develop. This process, which starts as early as pre-school period, includes not only continuous development but also change. In pre-school, during school and later, professional identity understanding, which develops intertwined with a number of imaginations, come to be more realistic towards the end of secondary school. Generally, factors like possible successes and failures, income level, environment, family, school and teachers have played roles in the embodiment of professional identity.

Excerpt SD//14: When I only started secondary school, I would say I would be a doctor. In time, all my teachers found out it as well. When I got a low mark a few times, my teacher started to say "you cannot be a doctor". Little by little I started to talk more about being a doctor. I am the only boy in my family. My father told me not to go to

school or if I go to school to choose a job that would let me help him with his business in our hometown. I thought, like many other teachers in my environment, I would be able to work in my hometown if I became a teacher.

(Alıntı SD/II/14: Ben daha ortaokula ilk geldiğimde ben doktor olacağım diyordum. Zamanla bunu tüm öğretmenlerim de öğrendi. Birkaç defa fenden düşük not alınca öğretmenim bana “sen doktor filan” olamazsın demeye başladı. Ben yavaş yavaş doktorluktan daha az bahsetmeye başladım. Ben ailemdeki tek erkek çocuktum. Babam oğlum ya okuma ya da okursan buraya gelebilir hem bana yardım edip hem de mesleğini yapabileceğin bir iş seç dedi. Ben de çevrede öğretmenlik yapan birçok tanıdığım gibi öğretmen olursam memleketimde çalışabilirim diye düşündüm.)

In the following years, individuals gradually started to develop their professional identity which has already developed unconsciously with the influence of others and conditions. Most of the students stated that their choices with regard to their professional identity had developed towards the end of secondary education. They remarked that this awareness especially influenced their preferences in line with their own and their families' skills and socioeconomic levels. In this context, economic factors related with individual, family and society have come to fore as the most emphasized reason for profession preference.

Excerpt SG/II/22: While I was in high school, I wanted to study International Relations. I also wanted to study Business Administration which required Turkish-Math score. But my family had financial problems. It seemed difficult to find a job in these fields. I thought that the most appropriate job for me would be teaching as I would be able to find a position as soon as I graduate. My family wanted it to be so as well. I thought that I would study the course I wanted while working as a teacher. In fact, my score was adequate for some of the BA and IR departments. Perhaps I could study this course if I wanted. I had to choose teaching as well.

(Alıntı SG/II/22: Ben lise ikiye giderken Uluslararası İlişkiler okumak istiyordum. Türkçe-Matematik isteyen İşletme de istiyordum. Ama ailemin durumu yoktu. O alanlarda da iş imkanı çok zor görünüyordu. En isabetli işin mezun olur olmaz iş bulabileceğim öğretmenlik olduğunu düşündüm. Ailem de zaten böyle istiyordu. Öğretmenlik yaparken de okurum diye düşündüm istediğim bölümü. Aslında bazı yerlere puanım da yetiyordu. Belki istesem olurdu. Ben de mecburen öğretmenliği seçtim.)

### Development of teacher identity in higher education

Among the participants, 13 teacher candidates stated that they had not thought of becoming a teacher till the

last years of their secondary education and even till university entrance exams. They chose education departments later due to various reasons and thus they had changed their previous professional preferences in the earlier years. Here two main development models emerge. While the first group of teacher candidates develop their professional identities starting from pre-school periods with their own wills, the second group chose teaching partially with the compulsion of their conditions and constructed their professional identities in the late years of their secondary education and during higher education.

Teachers who adopted teaching as the profession in earlier times in their lives stated that they had constructed their professional identity since their elementary school years. These students marked that their teachers influenced their lives and that they had teachers as role models and carefully followed and examined their teachers. Teachers are not only source of information but also set examples that are relevant with other areas of life. It was determined that these students adopted this profession, which they aimed for in university exam preparation period and in their university and department preferences, even before they start university education. This adoption and psychological readiness for this profession enabled them to be happy and be successful in their departments. The students who did not adopt teaching as a profession at early ages and who chose this profession with the inducement of various challenges and conditions stated that they had various problems when making this decision and during their university education. In the process of making decision and preference, they stated that they were more or less disappointed and it took time for them to accept this after their decisions. The students also marked that realistic thinking and decision making should be predicted at an earlier age. Concordantly, it can be said that most of these students complain that their realistic thinking skills developed late. Some of the students in the second group stated that they would be more successful if they studied the course they had wanted to study, some of them maintained that in time they increased their low level of success in the first years of university and had developed essential skills for being a teacher. Most of these students stated that they did not think of being a teacher till they retire and that they could change their job if new opportunities emerged.

In the light of all these data, it was seen that professional identity developed starting from early age. Initially, this identity, which develops imaginatively and is far from realities, takes its final form after being continuously revised with increasing age on the basis of the conditions of the individual, family, environment and society. Two main paradigms emerge in teacher's professional identity. A group of teacher candidates who adopted and developed their professional identity at earlier ages express their commitment to teaching, the

other group of teacher candidates composed of the ones who state that they preferred this profession due to various conditions and that they could think of changing their profession if new conditions and opportunities emerge. It was seen that these students lack motivation with regard to positions, courses and other issues in the future related with their profession. It was determined that professional commitment and loyalty is lower in these students.

## DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

According to the results of this study, identity in general and professional identity develops with the influence of social environment, society and conditions but follows an individual specific developmental route. These results are in line with the results of studies by Erikson (1968) and Schwartz (2005). The results also support the findings of the study by Kroger (2003), who states that individual motives, beliefs and personal experiences are influential. But the process is different from other counterparts in Turkey; some compulsory conditions have much effect professional identity development, such as low income and Socio Economic Status (SES), living in rural areas, and etc. As a result of the study, it was understood that teacher candidates who chose teaching profession later in their educational life and with the compulsion of the conditions have low motivations. Further studies are to be conducted to determine the causes of this lack of motivation and to find out the effectiveness of various methods to increase their motivation. Again, it is necessary for universities and other related partners to determine about students who lack motivation are to do both in their university years and in their professional lives in the future.

## Conflict of Interests

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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