Positioning Theory for English-Medium Instruction (EMI) praxis: Insights and implications for teaching and research

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Abstract

Developed as a socio-constructivist theory with the aim of understanding discursive construction of selves, Positioning Theory has been applied to the analysis of conversations and narratives across disciplines. This paper provides an overview of Positioning Theory developed by Rom Harré and his colleagues and describes the basic concepts and principles of the theory. By illustrating how it has been applied to studies in contexts that involve English language learners or teachers, the paper identifies ways that Positioning Theory may positively impact classroom practice and outlines areas for further research that EMI classroom practitioners can carry out. A number of practical guidelines for conducting positioning analysis are also offered.

Keywords: positioning theory, positioning analysis, English-medium instruction, positioning and identity.

Resumen

La teoría del posicionamiento en la práctica de la instrucción por medio del inglés: avances e implicaciones para la enseñanza y la investigación

Desarrollada como una teoría socio-constructivista para comprender la construcción discursiva de uno mismo, la teoría del posicionamiento se ha aplicado al análisis de conversaciones y narrativas en diferentes disciplinas. Este artículo ofrece una visión panorámica de la teoría del posicionamiento, desarrollada por Rom Harré y sus colaboradores, y describe los conceptos y principios básicos de la teoría. Tras mostrar de qué forma se ha aplicado a diferentes investigaciones referidas a estudiantes y profesores de inglés, este artículo identifica diversas maneras en que la teoría del posicionamiento puede

tener una influencia positiva en la práctica del aula y esboza algunas áreas relevantes para futuras investigaciones que podrían explorar aquellos docentes que trabajan en entornos en que el inglés funciona como medio de instrucción. Asimismo, se ofrece una serie de guías prácticas para realizar análisis de posicionamiento.

Palabras clave: teoría del posicionamiento, análisis del posicionamiento, instrucción por medio del inglés, posicionamiento e identidad.

1. Introduction

Introduced as a socio-constructivist theory in the 1990s by Rom Harré, Positioning Theory has its origins in discursive or cultural psychology and narratology and aims to explore and explain how social interaction and selves are constructed in and through discourse in culturally constructed and morally shaped contexts (Davies & Harré, 1990). Given its focus on social interactions, the theory has been widely used in investigating a range of topics across disciplines over three decades. In educational research, it has been further developed and used "as an *analytic lens* and *explanatory theory* to show how learning and development of identity evolves through discourse" (Green et al., 2020). In particular, researchers of literacy (e.g., Green et al., 2020; McVee et al., 2018) as well as those of mathematics education (e.g., Herbel-Eisenmann et al., 2015) have used Positioning Theory extensively, developing it further for educational research.

Positioning Theory can be especially useful in investigating issues in diverse classrooms where numerous social factors are intertwined and influence the construction and distribution of rights and duties. For example, in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class in English-dominant contexts, various social categories, such as race, ethnicity, language background and proficiency level, age and life experiences, gender, or disciplinary expertise may intersect in complex ways that shape classroom interactions. Positioning Theory helps unpack such complexity so that researchers and educators may better understand the affordances and limitations that members of the classroom community may have to say and do things in various interactions.

In this paper, we first offer an overview of Positioning Theory, in which we define its essential constructs and describe its main principles. We then explain how Positioning Theory can be used as a framework for guiding praxis involving academic and professional discourses in the context of

academic English language use. The paper concludes with a discussion of the ways that positioning can impact classroom discourse in daily teaching and offers evidence-based implications for English language teaching and action research in EMI or similar contexts.

2. Positioning Theory: A brief overview

Individuals have certain rights and duties based on the roles that they have in their lives. However, these rights and duties are not distributed in a random fashion, nor is their distribution always a priori in a given conversation. Positioning Theory explores how rights and duties are challenged, disputed, negotiated, rejected, or accepted in discursive social practices. By studying rights and duties, the theory illustrates how individuals are "located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants" (Davies & Harré, 1999: 37), which is called positioning. Describing Positioning Theory as "part of the burgeoning growth of 'psychology as a moral science'", Harré and Dedaic (2012: 49) acknowledge that Positioning Theory has been developed as an answer to the following questions:

> How do we investigate the way that unequal access to resources, and unequal rights to exercise skills a person of a certain category (child, woman, medical doctor), come into being, are sustained, and could be challenged? How can we analyze the situation that then obtains, and how can we explore the discursive means by which a certain distribution of rights and duties was established?

In responding to these questions, Positioning Theory draws upon *positions, acts,* and *story lines,* which make up the three essential elements of Positioning Theory that contribute to the formation of selves. Harré and Dedaic (2012: 49) explain this positioning cluster:

> There are *positions* (beliefs about rights and duties which are ascribed in any episode to the actors). There are the *repertoires of acts* available to a person positioned in a certain way in a group. There are the *story lines* that are lived out in everyday encounters. Finally, there are the '*selves*' which are produced in the course of an unfolding episode.

Unlike roles, most of which are known to be fixed, permanent, and formally defined, positions are dynamic and emerge from, influence, and are

influenced by evolving story lines. However, the roles one has, along with personal attributes, characteristics, and previous experiences, might influence the construction of positions. These may be brought into the story line(s) to construct certain positions, otherwise known as prepositioning.

In the act of narrating or conversing, individuals may, intentionally or unintentionally, position themselves and others and/or be positioned by them, ultimately shaping the distribution of rights and duties and "moment-by-moment meanings of speaking and acting" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2015: 230). McVee et al. (2018: 389) note that "moral orders and the rights and duties associated with them and our own lived experiences influence story lines we can construct, or concomitantly, story lines we may refuse to enter, if we feel we have power to do so". According to van Langenhove (2017: 4), moral orders are "a set of habits and prescriptions" that govern social interactions and allow people "to judge what is proper and improper to do or say" in a story line. A variety of moral orders exists; they may be cultural, legal, institutional, conversational, or personal. Influenced by moral orders, positions and story lines developed momentarily have the power to shape identities and relationships.

3. EMI and teaching: Insights from Positioning Studies

Due to its flexibility and scalability, Positioning Theory has emerged as a useful tool for analyzing numerous topics in research settings that involve learners who speak English as an additional language. Adopting Positioning Theory as a theoretical or methodological lens in EMI contexts is particularly helpful as it helps analyze and understand simultaneous complexities associated with content knowledge acquisition and the learning and use of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF). Current immigration/refugee trends, internationalization efforts in EMI educational settings, as well as increasing globalization that demands a common language for trade, commerce, and foreign policy all contribute to the status and power of the ELF. How do students and teachers position themselves in this larger context? Who gains access to power and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and who gets excluded and how? What are the implications of access to power and symbolic capital for classroom positioning and learning? Positioning Theory makes it possible to address these questions and others by its particular focus on power, discourse, and interactional opportunities.

A large number of the positioning studies that involved English learners or teachers have focused on the ongoing negotiation of identity, agency, and access within multilingual educational settings (for a review of classroom-based positioning studies see Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018), offering practical insights and implications for English language learners and teachers. As with all forms of education, English language teaching and learning is not a neutral process; it rather is closely tied to race, ethnicity, culture, and sociopolitical issues. By extension, in multilingual and multicultural classrooms where learners are from various racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, all interactions that take place are intertwined with both the identities of learners and the classroom teacher. When educators actively work to make sense of their students' identities, they are better able to recognize students' needs, tailor the support that they provide accordingly, and cultivate learning environments that foster student agency. Likewise, when educators interrogate how their own identities shape their assumptions and pedagogical decisions, they may be able to locate areas in which they can strengthen their practice and provide greater support for students' identity development and membership within the classroom community.

As identity research grows more nuanced in its consideration of intersectionality and power dynamics, Positioning Theory's attention to ongoing negotiations in multilingual contexts offers a lens through which researchers may examine the kaleidoscopic threads of individuals' community memberships, lived experiences, and aspirations for the future as they are enacted in interactions with one another. As one example, Gu et al. (2014) described how work-related ELF communication allowed three interlocutors with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to overcome a critical-face threatening moment at work. Through positioning analysis of one conversation, the authors were able to show how the three participants (one librarian and two teaching staff) shared cultural knowledge and constructed a multicultural identity in a single ELF interaction at a multilingual university in Hong Kong, eventually facilitating workplace communication. The positioning analysis detailed how individuals presented expert identities; challenged and negotiated them by drawing upon their institutional roles, personal histories, values and expertise in different areas; and shifted positions to establish alignment. The researchers point out that "the multilingual ELF users in this conversation reach alignment through difference and establish a commonality based on their all being multilingual and multicultural" (Gu et al., 2014: 139). While this study does not focus on

a classroom interaction, it provides insight into the usefulness of applying positioning analysis to ELF conversations. Similar analyses focusing on interactions in EMI classes may help researchers and educators recognize complexities in students' identity performance and positioning as well as identify how conflicts, tensions, or misunderstandings might occur and get resolved (or not). In this way, EMI teachers can gain a deeper and more holistic view of the students they serve as well as the nuances of classroom communication.

Such nuanced attention to identity can also help educators and researchers recognize ways that teaching practices or school policies may oppress or marginalize students. Indeed, as positions are bound up with sets of rights and duties, and therefore privileges and expectations for how individuals are expected to act, Positioning Theory is ideally suited for social justice and equity-based approaches (Warren & Moghaddam, 2018). In their study on elite appropriation of EMI policy and epistemic inequalities in Himalayan schools, Sah and Karki (2020: 2) point out similarities across different EMI contexts:

> Ghana and Rwanda have failed to continue the EMI policy because of the lack of infrastructure, teachers' proficiency in English, and preservice and in-service training programmes. Similarly, there are extensive reports from South Asian countries, [...] that EMI has not produced quality education, but it has rather reproduced inequalities for minoritized students.

These macro level issues may manifest themselves in classroom discourses. Socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, language proficiency, pedagogical and content knowledge, among others, all influence classroom conversations and shape positioning, perhaps marginalizing some learners while empowering others. The experiences of marginalization or privilege have been documented in a large number of studies in non-EMI settings that have adopted Positioning Theory (e.g. Yoon, 2008). Such research is also needed in EMI settings, where the use of ELF is inextricably linked with sociopolitical forces, thereby creating a microcosm in which global systems of power, privilege, and marginalization influence the positions that may be taken up by students and instructors alike.

Applications of Positioning Theory in understanding how power flows and reverberates within educational settings can also help educators develop strategies to avoid or counteract oppressive power dynamics as they begin to emerge. Rooted in an immanent perspective, which situates positioning

within the moment interaction takes place and between the interlocutors present, Positioning Theory offers researchers the ability to pinpoint interactional shifts that may open or close potential routes of discursive access and legitimacy. This attention to small, momentary interactions provides a means by which researchers and educators can challenge potentially negative story lines by allowing for ongoing opportunities to reposition oneself in new and different ways. By seeking out and providing moments of discursive access or opportunities for repositioning, particularly for students who have been historically marginalized, educators can help students see themselves as active agents in their learning.

Although the majority of research has focused on learner positioning, this framework can be a valuable lens for teachers' self-reflection on the positions they take up or assign to students within the classroom and how those positions impact others within the classroom or larger school ecology. Teachers' beliefs about their work influence the positions with which they align themselves, as well as the rights and duties that those positions entail. For example, Erickson and Pinnegar (2017) tied positioning to the use of metaphors to understand how four teachers approached their work. The identified metaphors of *gardener*, *traveler*, *butterfly*, and *Queen of England* illustrated a range of perceived obligations that teachers felt they had toward their students, as well as differing power dynamics between teachers and students. A student whose teacher positions themselves as a *gardener* who cultivates and nurtures, for example, has a different range of positions (and associated rights and duties) available to them than does a student whose teacher positions themselves in the more powerful and imposing position of the *Queen of England.*

In EMI contexts, how EMI teachers construct professional identities for themselves and position their students are closely linked to how they position the English language, EMI, and their areas of expertise. As shown by numerous studies (see Fenton-Smith et al., 2017), the EMI instructors' perceptions and attitudes about English and EMI influence their classroom practices and relationship with their students. In EMI settings, Positioning Theory can be a valuable tool in research related to tensions that instructors face as they navigate the myriad responsibilities of the profession. In his study on the EMI-related perspectives and experiences of six faculty members within the Faculty of Business and Economics at a large EMI tertiary institution in Hong Kong, Trent (2017: 236) portrays how the participants, who were economic and finance professors, struggled between

"the discourse of rationality" and "the discourse of potentiality". According to Trent (2017: 227), the discourse of rationality:

> advocated the minimization of time spent addressing the language needs of students in favour of engagement in practices and activities that are more likely to bring rewards, such as promotion and contract renewal, which were identified as research-related activities.

The discourse of potentiality, on the other hand, involved various imagined possibilities, such as building awareness of language, seeking and adopting teaching strategies to "cope with the language demands of economics and finance" (Trent, 2017: 231), as well as building close relationships with English language instructors. Those two competing discourses, which are commonly reported in various other studies on EMI contexts, offered competing subject positions to choose from, such as 'academic economist,' 'researcher,' and 'teacher' to those professors, ultimately creating tensions in their identity negotiations.

Relatedly, Positioning Theory may be used to understand conflict or frustration that may occur when teachers have *forced positions* (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) imposed upon them. Within the context of EMI, the long-standing tension between the dual teaching responsibilities related to teaching content and language provides an example of such forced positioning and its implications. For example, Block and Moncada-Comas (2019: 13) demonstrated how three STEM lecturers in an institution in Catalonia appeared to be unwilling to position themselves as English language teachers, instead drawing "on their understandings of their rights, duties, and obligations as STEM discipline-bound lecturers". Thus, the lecturers did not perceive the presentation of linguistic features or correction of students' language errors to be part of their teaching practices. Rather, in positioning themselves purely as content teachers, they actively resisted taking on the language-related duties that their forced positions as EMI instructors entailed, creating tensions between institutional expectations and individual choices.

Instructors may also impose forced positions on students based upon assumptions about their personal experiences and future trajectories. In a particularly salient study of physics lecturers in EMI contexts in Sweden, Airey (2012) found that lecturers' choice of instructional language was related to the institutions in which they taught. Physics lecturers at smaller

institutions used less English because they assumed that their students would be future teachers or engineers in less need of the English language; meanwhile, lecturers at larger institutions were more likely to teach in English due to their assumption that their students were future physicists and members of the academy. When viewed through the lens of Positioning Theory, this distinction highlights the ways that such assumptions can both afford and constrain the positions that students may take up. Students in larger institutions, positioned as being in greater need of English, are given a greater right to education in English, and correspondingly, their lecturers perceive that they have a greater duty to use English in their teaching. On the other hand, students in smaller institutions are not afforded this right to the same degree, potentially limiting access to future opportunities. Such studies demonstrate how positioning analysis can help researchers and educators disentangle and better understand areas of conflict and tension, not only within the classroom itself, but also within the larger institutional and social context.

4. Doing positioning analysis: Guidelines for EMI teachers

As seen from our review above, Positioning Theory has guided researchers in their investigations of numerous topics in contexts that involve English language teachers and learners, though we should note that the number of studies conducted in EMI settings is extremely small. Still, as the positioning studies in multilingual/multicultural contexts contribute to our knowledge about English language learning and teaching in diverse settings, they also show how educators can benefit from applying Positioning Theory into their own teaching contexts. The topics that can be examined using Positioning Theory may include but are not limited to different aspects of classroom participation (e.g., membership, inclusion, communication challenges, silence), identity, agency, advocacy, social justice, cultural or content-related misunderstandings, conflict, and access to learning opportunities. Since Positioning Theory is situated in narratology and uses techniques of discourse analysis, the kinds of data best suited for positioning analysis may include conversational talk, classroom discourse, and written or oral narratives. In this section, we discuss how EMI teachers can collect data and engage in positioning analysis in order to positively shape the learning and teaching processes in their classrooms.

4.1. Topics and data

Research that uses Positioning Theory as a lens highlights the need for teachers to provide opportunities for students to reflexively position themselves, and then to listen carefully to how these positions are taken up rather than using one's teaching authority to impose positions on students. With its attention to ongoing negotiation of positions in dynamic story lines, Positioning Theory is useful in helping educators recognize ways that students can be empowered through inclusion in the stories that make up their educational contexts. Incorporating practices such as storytelling assignments can be a powerful way to encourage students to enact their agency through intentional reflexive (self) positioning. When students are able to draw upon their lived experiences and the story lines they bring with them into the classroom, they have opportunities to reclaim their agency and position themselves in new and potentially unexpected ways. In applying the tenets of Positioning Theory to mathematics classes, Wagner and Herbel-Eisenmann (2009) discuss the potential for "re-mythologizing" the potentially abstract and intimidating discipline of mathematics. Through encouraging students to consider story lines that go beyond traditional mathematics instruction, educators may simultaneously humanize the discipline and invite students to see themselves as agentic actors within larger narratives. Likewise, in a study that examined the development of advocacy among English language learners in a secondary school setting, Martin-Beltrán et al. (2020) describe the ways that student-created autobiographical narratives may help to position students as legitimate speakers and empowered advocates for themselves and others. The authors encourage educators to include narrative storytelling with authentic purposes and for a broader audience in their classes because "these practices intentionally position students as social justice advocates whose voices are worth listening to beyond the classroom" (Martin-Beltrán et al., 2020: 16). Storytelling assignments such as these may also be an enlightening form of action research. By allowing students to position themselves in empowering story lines and then recognizing the positions they take up, students can negotiate meaning, power, and conflict in English, thereby developing identities as not only learners but also agentic users of the language.

Furthermore, learner stories or narratives show how learners position themselves and others across time and in different settings; those narratives and stories, therefore, provide an opportunity to learn about students' diverse identities and backgrounds. While storytelling can be integrated as a

classroom activity or task, it might also be incorporated as part of a diary or journaling assignment or project. Similar practices that involve storytelling analysis may also be undertaken by instructors to examine their own positioning and its impacts on their teaching. Journaling projects in which teachers reflect on their beliefs and assumptions about their teaching, and the positions these beliefs and assumptions lead them to take up, can be especially enlightening. When teachers consider how they position themselves in the classroom and how these positions may affect the positions their students are able to take up in relation, they may be able to identify areas in which their positioning, and the story lines that such positioning sets in motion, either interferes with or furthers their pedagogical goals.

Storytelling does not necessarily have to be about telling stories of personal experience. For example, in their study, Mogul et al. (2019) asked a number of engineering students to write a social "context for a traditional 'decontextualized' engineering science problem" (Mogul et al., 2019: 1). The engineering students were expected to include various relevant stakeholders, social justice issues, and technical problems in their contextualized engineering problems. A close reading and analysis of learners' story line(s) in such recreated problems can show how students perceive and position themselves as problem solvers or engineers in their storied and languaged experiences, what rights and duties become dominant in their narratives, and how those narrated and contextualized story lines and positions might influence their English language learning practices and experiences. Video and audio recordings of classroom activities may also provide valuable insights into the ways that both teachers and students continually negotiate their positions. As one example, a case study by Schieble et al. (2015) examined how Erica, a novice teacher enrolled in a teacher education program, combined teaching videos and reflective writing with positioning theory and other discourse analytic approaches to compare her actual teaching practice with her stated teaching philosophy. Through a series of 10-15 minute recordings of her teaching, she was able to reflect on her positioning of students and the ways that they took up or challenged those positions, areas in which she was more or less successful in enacting her preferred teacher identity, and ways that her professional identity was constrained by institutional requirements. Likewise, strategically placed recording devices can be used to pick up students' reflexive and interactional positioning at times when the teacher may not be immediately present, such

as during group or partner work. Through analyzing a series of video recordings of group work, one can trace the accumulation of positions over time (see Anderson, 2009). We recognize that, while longitudinal audio- or video-recorded observations of classroom events are ideal in terms of documenting the identity development and unpacking the details of learning/teaching processes in the classroom, they may be difficult for full-time instructors to collect and analyze. Nevertheless, the inclusion of periodic and systematic audio- or video-recording classroom events, even if necessarily infrequent, will yield important findings and insights for the classroom instructor.

Positioning analysis can be also applied to the content of learning materials and other similar artifacts. For example, by analyzing how individuals are positioned in a language textbook, teachers can evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the material, in terms of inclusion, representation, or diversity, for their own students. Textbooks and other similar materials include multiple examples of "intentional positioning" (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999: 22) through which individuals or groups of people from certain backgrounds are intentionally positioned in certain ways. A good example of positioning analysis of textbook content is offered in a study by Uzum et al. (2018), who illustrated how the pronoun "we" was used to position individuals and communities included in various textbooks. The authors (Uzum et al., 2018) demonstrated how, through interactional (other) and reflexive (self) positioning, the textbook authors were able to "define who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the imagined construction of community or culture" (643), and they encourage teachers to "use criticality and reflexivity when approaching exclusionary discourses and representations that neglect the particularities of individuals from different cultures" (625). In contexts where English is taught for specific purposes, it would be useful to analyze how learners are portrayed and positioned in the textbooks or materials and what implications those might have. In another study, Steadman (2020) documented how online course design (e.g., structure of discussion posts, the nature of opportunities to interact with course content, etc.) positioned course participants in certain ways, privileging certain identities over others. Extending positioning analysis beyond human-to-human interaction, Steadman demonstrated how learning materials or modalities might also impact the positions available to both learners and teachers. EMI instructors who teach online or use digital materials can conduct positioning analysis within the platforms, resources, and content they use in their teaching in

order to understand how their students and the communities that their students are part of are positioned and what the implications of those positioning acts may be for student learning in digital spaces.

4.2. Methodological Considerations

As seen, a wide range of data sources are available to teachers who wish to engage in positioning analysis, both to gain insights into their classroom interactions and to carry out action research projects. However, several important methodological considerations are necessary to design and engage in positioning analysis successfully. Numerous studies have shown the importance of conceptualizing and integrating positioning analysis across multiple settings; this sort of multifaceted approach provides a more thorough understanding of how positions shift over time and within different contexts. Tracing and examining the ways positions shift as individuals interact with different interlocutors in different settings offers a more nuanced understanding of the ways that power and interpersonal relationships impact the positions that are taken up, allowing the dynamic nature of positioning to be seen more clearly.

Regardless of the setting, detailed attention to discursive choices is an essential element of effective positioning analysis. A position in a story line can be identified through pronoun analysis and categorical membership, lexical choices, narrative/discourse strategies, as well as paralinguistic cues (Kayi-Aydar, 2021). Positions are sometimes explicitly available in a story line, as in the example, "she is an outstanding student", but they may also be more descriptive or implicit in nature. For example, in the utterance, "unlike other teachers, she tries so hard to help her students", the teacher is positioned as a caring or hard-working teacher, a position here defined in opposition to what is perceived to be the norm. Rather than being an explicit label, the position in this utterance is more descriptive in nature and therefore requires additional interpretation, and perhaps additional contextual knowledge, to be identified. Positioning may also involve silence, or the silencing of an interlocutor, as the right to speak and be heard is challenged by others in the interaction. Successful positioning analysis entails careful attention not only to what is being said, but also how it is said - and what is not said.

Earlier in the paper, we noted that positions, story lines, and speech acts are the essential elements of Positioning Theory, often referred to as a

positioning cluster (as above) or a "positioning triangle" (e.g., Davies & Harré, 1990). These elements provide an ideal starting point for those interested in using Positioning Theory and help ensure a thorough and balanced analysis. A number of questions can be asked during the data collection and analysis stages to help disentangle and examine the interplay of the three elements. These are not meant to be research questions but rather points of inquiry to *guide* the analysis. The questions are presented in Table 1.

Positions	Story Lines	Speech Acts
Who constructs, assigns, takes up, negotiates, and/or refuses positions?	What story line(s) emerge in the conversation/narrative?	What rights and duties are associated with the positions that emerge?
What positions become dominant in the story line(s)?	What story line(s) become dominant?	How do positions and story lines create, challenge, or uphold power dynamics?
What personal traits, autobiographical fragments, previous histories are brought into the story line(s) to construct certain positions?	Who are the characters in the story line(s)? Who gets excluded or included, and who decides?	What are the consequences (e.g., moral, emotional, behavioral) of positionings in the story line(s) for the participants and characters involved?
When and how, in a story line, are forced positions assigned?	What moral orders shape story line(s)?	
	What strategies, if any, are used to negotiate forced positions in a story line?	

Table 1. Questions to Guide Positioning Analysis.

However, there is much benefit to incorporating the concepts of Positioning Theory, particularly self and other positioning, in smaller analyses of interactions such as classroom talk or learner narratives. Even a simple matrix (see Tables 2-3), in which teachers can mark who positions whom in the focal interaction, may provide useful insights regarding what positions are made available, who constructs them, and what they reveal about classroom interactions and language use. For example, in an analysis of classroom talk, a matrix can give teachers a visual representation of how their self-positioning is linked with and reinforced by their other-positioning, as well as the ways that each of these positions may be alternately challenged or reinforced by the positions that students take up in the same interaction. Likewise, in examining oral or written learner narratives, a matrix that splits the narrator's self- and other-positioning from the positions allocated to characters can help identify tensions and illuminate students' identity work as they locate themselves within the stories they tell. Teachers who are just getting started with Positioning Theory as a form of action research may choose to select particularly thought-provoking interactions for inclusion in matrices such as those provided in Table 2-3 as a way to familiarize

themselves with the basic principles of positioning analysis and formulate ongoing investigations based on the new awareness that this activity may provide.

	Teacher	Student(s)	Story line
Self-positioning (reflexive positioning)			
Other-positioning (interactive positioning)			

Table 2. Positioning Matrix for Classroom Talk.

	Narrator	Characters	Story line
Self-positioning (reflexive positioning)			
Other-positioning (interactive positioning)			

Table 3. Positioning Matrix for Learner Narratives.

5. Conclusion

Identifying and analyzing positions, acts, and story lines in discursive social practices, Positioning Theory sheds light on how rights and duties are morally and culturally constructed and distributed among individuals (Davies & Harré, 1999). In doing so, it can help educators and researchers trace the dynamic nature of these rights and duties across time and context as positions and story lines shift, with especially fine-grained insight into how people continually negotiate their identities through interaction. It is offered as a descriptive lens to understand social interactions and identity work; importantly, it is not prescriptive in nature, nor does it offer causation in explaining distribution of rights and duties (Green et al., 2020). It sits alongside the recognition that no interactional context is fully neutral and therefore may include unequal power relations due to social status, language background, race, ethnicity, or other social factors. As such, Positioning Theory can be a very valuable tool to help illuminate not only how learners and teachers navigate the discourses within their classroom interactions, but also how they connect their use of English to their identities and memberships within larger communities.

Positioning studies offer guidance for teachers in EMI settings who strive to

create supportive, nurturing classroom environments in which their students can thrive and develop identities as competent users of English and content experts. These studies indicate that, by giving ample opportunity for students to position themselves in various ways and contest negative or limiting positions that may be imposed upon them, educators can better know what story lines are important to their students and disrupt positions or story lines that impede students' success and well-being. Positioning-based action research, carried out either to learn more about student positioning or the effects of teachers' positioning, can also highlight areas of disconnect between intentions and results or between values and actions. It has been our goal in writing this brief introduction to Positioning Theory to offer a tool that, when understood and used appropriately, has the potential to prompt deep reflection, shape new and better classroom practice, and provide a fresh view of the many ways that our interactions shape ourselves and one another.

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