INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the development of language awareness and second language identities of a cohort of Chinese TESOL teachers that arose as a result of incidental classroom interactions during a TESOL Masters course in Australia. The experiences of such interactions appeared to help the Chinese teachers make stronger connections between form and meaning, and, while they also reflected deeply on the pedagogies of grammar, they gained a wider view of language teaching and learning that included pragmatic and sociolinguistic awareness.

The impact of cultural and educational exchanges and the resulting formations of second language identities is an emerging focus of research (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013). In the field of TESOL, by drawing on diverse traditions of professionalism in different communities and contexts, such movements and exchanges are creating opportunities to develop a richer discourse, and calls are increasingly being made for a plural professional knowledge and more inclusive relationships (Canagarajah, 2005; Holliday, 2005; Widdowson, 2004).

The People’s Republic of China has been one of the major contributors to student and teacher mobility in recent years; English language is now a priority subject in China, and all students entering university must take the English college test whether they intend to major in English or not, and therefore there has been much interest in upskilling cohorts of Chinese teachers of English to meet this demand. An increasingly typical initiative is to award scholarships to gain professional qualifications in English-speaking countries.

A cohort of English teachers from Jiangsu province, China, is the focus of the present study. During their Masters in TESOL course in Queensland, Australia, they experienced interactions with native speakers of English inside and outside of the classroom. As their course lecturer for several TESOL units, I was interested in the nature of the incidental language awareness arising from course activities with their native-speaking peers. I was also interested in whether they felt that these experiences had implications for their sense of identity in a second language. The following sections therefore discuss the key themes: interaction in higher education contexts, language awareness, and second language identities.
INTERACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Student interactions are key to development of new cognitive understandings and offer enhanced opportunities for learning (Ryan & Viete, 2009). Interaction in class settings is also considered to encourage heightened awareness of difference/s between students’ own and other cultures (Arkoudis et al., 2010). Individual learners in group-learning environments often discover the extent to which their perceptions, assumptions, values, and general understandings of subject content differ from those of their peers. In the case of TESOL teachers, as in this study, there is intrinsic motivation to be aware of linguistic and cultural difference, and the students in this study actively sought interaction in the class activities with domestic students. These interactions appeared to result in new forms of awareness about language.

TEACHER LANGUAGE AWARENESS

Language awareness for teachers, an area extensively investigated by Andrews (2007), has been defined by Thornbury (1997, p. x) as “the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of language that enables them to teach effectively”. There is consensus that these systems should not be restricted to the structural-linguistic, but should also include creativity and the embedding of language within culture (Carter, 1994). Andrews (2007, p. 64) notes that teacher language awareness (TLA) can prompt “a reconceptualization of the objectives of form-focused instruction” given what we know as achievable in language teaching. Svalberg (2007) identifies three functions that distinguish TLA from the awareness of other expert language users. Teachers need not only to know about language but they need to reflect on this knowledge and on the underlying language systems from a pedagogical viewpoint. In other words they need to be effective language users and analysts as well as teachers. It is argued that the interactions of the teachers in this study with native-speaking peers helped them not only to become more expert users, but also more skilled analysts of the wider systems of language. This greater affinity with a second language (L2) has been recognized as a contributing factor to the formation of second language identities (Block, 2007).

SECOND LANGUAGE IDENTITIES

Growing recognition of the centrality of language to identity (see Hall, 1996) stimulated a ‘social turn’ in linguistics in the mid 1990s. The individual/cognitive perspectives of SLA appeared inadequate, and language identities were seen as crucial factors for success in second language learning. Block (2007, p. 40) defines language identity as “the assumed and/or attributed relationship between one’s sense of self and a means of communication which might be known as a language, dialect or sociolect.” Other challengers to the individual/cognitive perspective include Norton (2000, 2014), who developed the construct of investment as a tool to