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In-service teachers' interpretative repertoires about language: The teacher promotion examination context[1]

While studies on interpretative repertoires have been conducted in SLA, this is still a fairly new topic with regard to language teachers. Due to various contextual differences, teachers' interpretative repertoires change, which also seems a sufficient reason why they should be investigated on a regular basis. The aim of this study is to identify and analyse Polish in-service teachers' (n=48) interpretative repertoires concerning language which emerged in the teachers' discourses in the context of their taking a promotion examination. Acknowledging the complexity of this issue, interpretative repertoires, including the SLA studies devoted to identifying them, are first discussed, followed by a description of the study. In terms of methodology, the author's field notes for data collection were used. The data were coded following the content analysis approach, and 6 conceptualizations of language emerged: language as system, language as communication, language as culture, but also as translanguaging, as preparation for exam, and as life preparation. The findings can be used to adopt new directions in future research on Polish teachers' language-based interpretative repertoires. The study may also provide information for school policies and practice.

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Słowa kluczowe: repertuary interpretacyjne, język, nauczyciele języka obcego, egzamin na stopień awansu zawodowego.

1. Introduction

Interpretative repertoires are concepts used for investigating people's talk or analysing their conversations and dialogues. An interpretative repertoire can be defined as "a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events" (Potter, Wetherell, 1987: 138). This functional aspect of interpretative repertoires implies that they are drawn upon in everyday talk. When people perform communicative functions, such as expressing opinions, arguing and debating (Potter, 1998) they fall back upon their practical ideologies[2], called interpretative repertoires to support different actions.

Investigating language teachers' interpretative repertoires about language by means of what teachers say indirectly about it, seems particularly significant. This is because teachers' views regarding language, expressed both explicitly and implicitly, often shape their pedagogical decisions and the way teachers position others, for example, their students. In other words, the way teachers conceptualize language may result in different kinds of learning opportunities being offered to students in their language classrooms.

The aim of this paper is to identify the teachers' interpretative repertoires on language which emerged in a very specific workplace situation – a teacher promotion examination – during which language teachers described their 'professionalism' and answered the commission's questions in order to become professionally promoted. Because of the dearth of studies in this context – language teachers' interpretative repertoires on language revealed in a language teacher promotion situation – this line of investigation could be insightful.

2. Interpretative repertoires in SLA researh projects

In contrast to research projects on interpretative repertoires in general education (e.g. Adamson, 2014; Jolanki et al., 2000; Lee at al., 2020; Zembylas

[2] Although the notions are similar, the original notion of practical ideologies was substituted by interpretative repertoires in Potter and Wetherell (1987).

et al., 2011), research in SLA in this area has been rather scarce. Most language learning and teaching studies employing interpretative repertoires have been conducted in Finland (Kalaja, 2016: 98–101) and there is one study dealing with in-service teachers' interpretative repertoires in the Polish context (Werbińska, 2017). By examining subject positions, the agency of a discourse user can be examined, with the focus on both meaning and content as opposed to a focus on content only (Barkhuizen, 2010). In this respect, the interpretative repertoire studies by Ruohotie-Lyhty (2016) and Pirhonen (2021) are worth recalling.

In her longitudinal research project on 11 newly qualified language teachers, Ruohotie-Lyhty (2016) explored what interpretative repertoires and subject positions foreign language teachers use in describing their professional affordances and in what ways they perceive themselves as agentive. She identifies 8 interpretative repertoires in total and assigns them to the teachers' subject positions. Hence, the subject position of a "dependent teacher" has been matched to the *guiding norms* repertoire, the *guiding authorities* repertoire, the *role expectations* repertoire, and the *circumstances* repertoire. The subject position of an "independent teacher" has been linked to the *teacher autonomy* repertoire, the *resource* repertoire, the *developmental support* repertoire, and the *responsibility* repertoire. All the distinguished repertoires emerged from the participants' discourses that relied on extrematization (Potter, 1996: 189), collectivization (Potter, 1996: 159), and quantification (Potter, 1996: 190).

Pirhonen (2021) carried out a similar study to Ruohotie-Lyhty's (2016) but with a view to exploring the first year Finnish university students' interpretative repertoires about the factors that influenced their learning of different languages. The data were collected in the form of language learning biographies from which 4 repertoires and two subject positions emerged. Within the dependent position, Pirhonen (2021) identified the *affordance* repertoire and the *affection* repertoire, whereas in the position of the learner as an independent agent the *attribute* repertoire and the *action* repertoire were found. The discursive resources were related to different examples of nouns and verbs, metaphors (Potter, Wetherell, 1987), normalisation, extrematisation and minimisation techniques (Potter, 1996). The study was interesting in the sense that it examined students' study of all foreign languages in their repertoires, without being restricted to only English, the most popular foreign language in the academic community.

Yet another Finnish scholar, Paula Kalaja (2016), explored student teachers' beliefs about Finnish and English (their L1 and L2) as discursively constructed. In addition to 4 interpretative repertoires and 4 subject positions, she also identified 4 ideological dilemmas (cf. Edley, 2003). The

students who are users of Finnish as a mother tongue and English as a foreign language employ the *affection* repertoire, with feelings of closeness or distance to the respective languages, or the *aesthetics* repertoire, which involves their perceptions of the beauty or ugliness of Finnish and English. Those who consider themselves users of English as lingua franca or a world language, and users of Finnish in Finland as their mother tongue, tended to opt for the *vitality* repertoire and the concepts of globality and locality as dilemmatic issues. Finally, the students whose subject positions could be presented as learners of English as a foreign language (including Finns), acquirers of Finnish as a first language, and learners of Finnish as a foreign language (excluding Finns), tended to use the *challenge* repertoire in which the ease or difficulty of the language to be learned or acquired is an issue (Kalaja, 2016: 112). Among the discursive resources, the focus in the study was placed on the students' use of possessive pronouns, suffixes, gradation of adjectives, and metaphors.

In the Polish context, a study on in-service teachers' interpretative repertoires during their professional promotion interviews was conducted by Werbińska (2017) who identified the emerging repertoires from the teachers' spoken examination discourses. These included the *exam-based* repertoire, the *self-positioning* repertoire, the *caring-for-other* repertoire, the *shift* repertoire, and the *making-a-difference* repertoire. The teachers' focus in the exam-based repertoire was on methods preparing learners for external examinations, whereas they positioned themselves either higher or lower than their examiners in the self-positioning repertoire, concentrated on their students' needs in the caring-for-other repertoire, and revealed a positive change once they started teaching and wanted to have a positive impact on their learners and make a difference in the two last repertoires.

To summarize, studying and identifying interpretative repertoires undoubtedly provides useful frameworks that support our understanding of differences between individuals. The language that teachers teach has an important function in a language course where language is the subject matter itself, as well as the means by which the subject matter is taught, and sometimes a feature that it shares with other courses (e.g., similar content). Teachers' repertoires related to language may vary significantly from one individual to another, as they are influenced by the teachers' contacts with the language and its speakers, the theoretical claims acquired while studying the language at college, or the teachers' internalised assumptions on what language is, what it consists of and how it works (cf. Richards, Lockhart, 1999: 30-31). In order to find out what language teachers' 'individual relationships' with language are, I decided to conduct the present

study[3] with the following research question: *How do language teachers conceptualize 'language' in a formal workplace situation when they are being assessed?*

3. Methodology

3.1. Context of the study

The possibility of being promoted is an important element of any profession. Apart from moving up in the work hierarchy with the accompanying sense of pride that this entails, teacher promotion satisfies three important needs: economic, as it gives the teacher a higher income, psychological, as it generates a sense of job satisfaction, and sociological, as it provides the teacher with an opportunity to play a new social role (Szumiec, 2007: 7).

The system of professional promotion for teachers in Poland is based on legal regulations and the most important professional levels are those of appointed teacher (AT) and chartered teacher (CT). Becoming an AT is a significant stage in a Polish teacher's professional career in terms of job stability. Such a teacher can only be dismissed under strictly defined circumstances (e.g., school closure) and then has the right to generous severance pay. Becoming a CT means obtaining the highest level of professional promotion in the teaching profession – the status of chartered teacher. Promotion to both levels also involves an increase in the teacher's salary.

Teachers applying for both the status of AT and CT have to pass a formal examination consisting of a presentation from the candidate followed by questions from the commission (ATs), or a qualifying interview with the commission (CTs). The content of the examination or interview questions is the teacher's professional work with reference to the guidelines as specified in the official documents[4]. In both cases the commission consists of experts (2 in commissions for ATs, and 3 in commissions for CTs) from a ministerial list of experts, teachers' school principals, representatives of bodies which run the school and, in the case of applying for AT, supervisory bodies. Also, at the teacher's request, a representative of a teachers' union can be present.

[3] This study is an extensive excerpt of a larger study which focused on teachers' interpretative repertoires and positioning. The whole study is described in detail in Werbińska (2022).

[4] Although the promotion guidelines are subject to changes (the last modification was introduced in September 2022), the system of professional promotion for teachers in Poland is based on the 1998 Education Reform Act where more introductory information (including the differences between ATs and CTs) can be found, which is not explained here for the sake of limited space. More details are provided in Werbińska (2022).

3.2. Participants

The present study includes 48 language teachers, of whom 22 were applying for the position of AT, and 26 for CT status. Table 1 and Table 2 in Appendix A show demographic information concerning the two groups of the study participants, where the letter 'a' next to the word 'teacher' stands for those who aspire to become 'appointed' and the letter 'c' to those who intend to be 'chartered' teachers.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The present study covers the years from 2017 to 2020. The principal method of data collection was the creation and management of in-the-field notes "inextricably linked to participant observation in that they serve as the primary means of recording the detailed observations and insights gleaned through such experiences" (Harrison, 2021: 346). The data sources were detailed extracts from notes of interactions that took place during my participation in different examination (for teachers applying for AT status) and qualification (for teachers applying for CT status) commissions. In total, there were 48 extracts, of which 22 concerned those teachers who participated in a promotion interview to become ATs, and 26 transcribed interactions of teachers aspiring for the status of CTs.

Having prepared the transcripts I proceeded to the process of coding, which basically consisted of several stages, as suggested by Wilkins (2017): reading the data, describing the data, identifying the concepts potentially related to my research question, focusing on specific issues, collecting more instances to confirm a selected issue, and finally, the process of focusing and refining the analysis (see Appendix B for the overview of the whole process). I will now describe it in more detail.

Although reading and rereading the data may seem simple, I am certain that the more a researcher reads a text, the more outstanding certain features of the interaction become. I read all 48 extracts three times and then felt well familiar with their sequential nature.

The second stage was making initial notes on the transcripts. As all the discourse was action-oriented –all the teachers were interested in successfully passing the interview and being promoted– I was more concerned about what 'was actually going on', rather than on what I assumed was going on. I made notes for each line of the transcript with the comment function for this. I did this because I was afraid that by failing to read in sequential order I might overlook some potentially interesting data. Although some

of these first notes were later modified, this stage helped me better notice things happening in the interactions.

The next stage –identifying the concepts potentially related to my research questions–was the stage at which I went through the data to look for any 'signals' of possible interpretative repertoires referring to language. The concept of language, which is fundamental to any language teacher's understandings of their job, almost always emerges in the teachers' promotion narratives, and therefore I was confident that it would provide a good starting point for my final identification of the teachers' interpretative repertoires. After the identification of the provisional renderings of the concept of language, I focused on small sections of the data (three of four lines) at a time to better explain what was going on.

The stage of focusing on the specific issues involved my deeper reflection on the data. I considered this stage useful for careful reconsiderations of the issues raised and making more informed decisions about my understandings of the data so far.

Collecting more instances to confirm specific issues can be viewed as a second stage of coding. It was at this point that I compiled a new word document containing the data concerning the teachers' conceptualizations of 'language' in the transcripts.

The final stage of analysis was the process of refining. In a way, I repeated the stage of identifying the concepts related to my research question, but now as someone who makes sure that the description is coherent and that examples follow the selected categories. I referred to the original transcripts, but now thinking of them as possible 'candidates' for being included as examples in the present article. Although my perseverance was time-and-energy-consuming, I was satisfied with the process of doing this and found it personally enriching. For the sake of making the data comprehensible to international audiences, the text excerpts have been loosely translated into English.

3.4. Researcher positionality

In line with the recent trend on the placement of reflexivity statements in qualitative studies (Gilgun, 2020: 997–998), it must be acknowledged that for the participants I acted as one of the commission experts. Although my commission expert's role is never included in the excerpts quoted, this function provided me with an emic perspective, which is critical to studies of this kind.

4. Findings

Although teachers' beliefs about language and, subsequently, their interpretative repertoires may appear to be stereotypical, they do nevertheless embody the realities of a teacher's practice. Below, I present qualitative data from ATs and CTs separately.

4.1. Appointed teachers (ATs)

During the interviews, teachers hardly ever explicitly defined what language meant to them. The answers were to be found in their indirect utterances that revealed how 'language' is understood by them. The repertoires which the particular ATs used in their talk about language were categorized into four groups: *language as a system, language as communication, language as culture*, and *language as translanguaging* (Table 3). The communication, and culture repertoires were more common than the other two, though each of the repertoires included two variations.

Table 3: ATs' interpretative repertoires on language.

Participant	System	Communication	Culture	Translanguaging
Teacher1a		*		
Teacher2a		*		
Teacher3a	*		*	
Teacher4a				
Teacher5a				
Teacher6a				
Teacher7a				*
Teacher8a		*		
Teacher9a	*		*	*
Teacher10a				
Teacher11a				
Teacher12a			*	
Teacher13a		*		
Teacher14a		*		
Teacher15a				
Teacher16a				
Teacher17a			*	
Teacher18a			*	

Table 3 – cont.

Participant	System	Communication	Culture	Translanguaging
Teacher19a				*
Teacher20a				
Teacher21a			*	
Teacher22a		*		

The language as a system repertoire

An analysis of the excerpts in which the teachers' attention was drawn to language revealed that two repertoires were present: language as teaching grammar and language as teaching vocabulary. T2a provides an example of such an account in the young learner primary classroom:

> T2a: The girl that I mentioned became a finalist in the competition. I got involved in helping her individually. I used to meet her after the lessons. We practised more difficult grammar together. I tried to help her get to know as much English as possible.

A teacher of German to older primary students constructs a similar discourse:

> T9a: There's a lot of grammar because it's very important, for example for passing the end-of-school exam. I focus on the grammar, I devote two, three hours to it. I draw diagrams, show how it works, and we try to organize supplementary materials so that the children will understand it.
> Expert: Why is grammar so important for German teachers?
> T9a: If I use a wrong tense, I won't be understood. It's easier in English, because you can waffle, can't you?. For example, I didn't know English when I went to Ireland because I'd never learnt English. But I managed. I said something wrong once, the second time, the third time. Someone corrected me. I tried to use some words and they knew what I meant. It's worse with German, isn't it? One word changes the tense.

The same teacher (T9a) also regarded vocabulary as important in her German language teaching, which seemed to confirm her understanding of language as a system:

> T9a: I give some lexis to learn from a new unit. We always start a unit with a quiz in lexis … We divide the words, for example, into those that will be necessary and less important, or those they know and don't know …

Expert: They learn lists of words, do they?

T9a: Well, not lists of words. It's just easier for them to remember, because there are words which have determiners. I always do a unit quiz because at the end of each unit in our books there is vocabulary related to the unit and at the beginning of this unit we always choose, before we start, the most important words. We discuss them, they learn to read them because some words are really difficult. So we first discuss the lexis, then we choose the most important things that are to be learnt ….

The language as a communication repertoire

The language as a communication repertoire focused on a representation of language where communication is paramount. This understanding of language was common among the study participants, as it is in line with the contemporary discourse on learning languages for communication. Within the discourse, the teachers emphasized the use of English in the classroom, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

T1a: Children receive different work cards and they have to communicate according to what's on the card. In the first grade they only spoke with one word, and now in the second grade they can beautifully build sentences consisting of three or four words and, above all, they are not afraid to speak. They respond sometimes in groups, at other times in pairs, sometimes all together when all of us sit and work together. They're not afraid to speak, even though they make mistakes. After the holidays when they return from abroad they say, 'Miss, I was able to order ice cream!'.
T1a: In all my lessons I use active methods. I can't imagine conducting lessons without such methods in which communication is so important (…) starting with many different games, such as memory, 'moving sentences' (…) performances, drama, projects.
T1a: The most important effect [of Polish-German cooperation] was increasing my students' linguistic ability and now the girls are no longer afraid to speak. They were good students but had a communication block. They wanted to say everything without errors. But they've learnt that you can make minor mistakes and still succeed communicatively.

Expert: Do you speak English in the classroom? Really? What percentage is in English?
T2a: I try to as much as possible. There are lessons conducted 100% in English.

In addition to introducing tasks whose successful completion is based on students' communication, some of the teachers try to introduce a foreign language atmosphere into the classroom, which is achieved through decorations, posters or objects brought from the country whose language the students are learning:

> T2a: From the youngest classes, I try to introduce [the students] into a linguistic environment. We have a system with the youngsters that we get on a plane and all go on a flight. No one understands us, they can't or mustn't speak Polish, the puppets only understand English.

> T8a: The effects of my work can be seen in our classroom. Together with my students I have made this board with the flags visible in the pictures. They seem small but they are huge and it was lot of work for us. There is also a German flag. There are also motivational decorations on the board. In fact, the moment the children enter the classroom, they feel they'll be speaking in another language.

The communicative repertoire in language and the value of real communication were very much stressed by those teachers who had a chance to take part in international school exchanges. The following examples testify to the importance of this personal contact with language:

> T8a: I got them to take part in the project 'Fun in the Town', which was organized for the first time by the local authorities. For the first time our students had contact with German students. They were very much afraid of that but it turned out that I had never seen so many young people in tears. And they have kept in touch since then, so it worked with native users.

> T14a: Together with my mentor we organized classes with some guests from Spain and France who talked about their countries, cultures, cooking traditions, of course in English, and at the end, the students had a chance to ask questions in English, which we had discussed earlier, and so they had the opportunity to encounter living speech, so to say.

By noticing associations between learning a language and using it, the language as communication repertoire turned out to be particularly well represented. The teachers seem to be convinced of the usefulness of this repertoire in a globalized world, as well as its motivating and informative value for students. Language was presented here as essentially instrumental, a view which is mostly influenced by contemporary discourse.

The language as a culture repertoire

Another repertoire identified in the participating teachers' discourses was that of culture. This was the second most common repertoire of all language repertoires, which was to be expected, as learning culture, or learning about the culture of the country whose language is being studied, is a popular feature of language courses. In the teachers' repertoires there are two strands of this repertoire: language as *learning cultural information* and language as *experiencing* the *culture* of people during trips to foreign countries. The last two examples that follow relate to this second aspect, whereas all the others to the former.

> T12a: During my internship there was an English week. These were classes for students to get to know the culture, to get to know the country, to get to know something about historical figures, about actors, and generally about well-known people. We divided the whole event into five days, each day was about a different country … During the first day Queen of England walked along the hall, on the second day it was The Statue of Liberty, on the third day Charlie Chaplin, on the fourth day Marilyn Monroe. We tried to engage students and arouse their curiosity.

> T18a: Foreign Languages Day. Every year we organize a science week related to different disciplines. In 2017/18 I was the coordinator of foreign languages during the Science Festival. I prepared door decorations … related to the topic and tasks for students. We had different ideas in our team of language teachers, but somehow my idea was chosen. … The students drew lots for a place of interest from a country, either English or German-speaking (we teach two languages at school) and their task was to draw a picture of it. If they couldn't reconstruct it from memory, they could refer to the given building in the picture we had on the projector. For example, here is the Sydney Opera, the Television Tower in Berlin. The aim of this type of task was to bring English and German culture closer to students. Here we can see the London Eye and London Bridge.

> T2a: Throughout the whole period of my internship I wanted to get my students interested in British culture and in English itself. I created many programmes and innovations, such as 'English in songs', 'I love you Poland'. Thanks to these the kids got deeper into the culture.

> T21a: During the trip the students obviously had tasks to accomplish. It wasn't a trip where they just listened to the guide talking. There were language problems to solve, also cultural and historical tasks, outdoor tasks so that they could physically experience the culture, the language and see how everything functions.

> T17a: I took part in an international Polish-German youth exchange in W. We had a chance to take part in a national multi-knowledge meeting. At the same time, there was another European Erasmus exchange. It was a fantastic opportunity for children to integrate naturally, to benefit from the language, use it in contexts that were different from school or classroom contexts. What is important about exchanges of this type is that young people can always establish or change their wrong beliefs about the host country, about the prevailing stereotypes. It was very moving to see them leaving the concentration camps in D. with tears in their eyes. We had a chance to learn more about this catastrophe in the history of the whole world. And what was uplifting for me? It was uplifting for me that they understood that they should cooperate in such a way in the present group so as to prevent such conflicts, that differences should be eliminated, that there should be no stigmatisation, such as "You are German", "You are Polish", that they should learn to respect each other. They also learnt the history of Anna Frau who died in that camp.

The first strand of the culture-related interpretative repertoire –understanding language as learning about culture– is restricted to school and what can be done in the classroom. Teachers point to the main icons of culture: famous people, buildings, events. Although most English teachers still emphasize learning about traditional British and, less often, US culture, and German teachers about German culture, there are infrequent references to other cultures (Australian, Polish) thanks to which, by way of contrast, Anglo-Saxon tradition can be better understood, which is a feature of the intercultural approach. The second strand of the culture-related interpretative repertoire –experiencing culture in foreign trips and school exchanges– also emerges from the teachers' discourses. The trip to the concentration camp in particular, as T17a points out, brings out another aspect of learning about culture – confronting stereotypes, developing tolerance, and maintaining human values. Clearly, some teachers point to the transformative factor of culture when students, as T21a says, "physically experience the culture," whereas others still treat such trips as guide-led sight-seeing.

The language as a translanguaging repertoire

The *language as a translanguaging repertoire*, which is adopted by some of the study participants, is motivated by their teaching experience and their willingness to help their students understand the intricacies of grammar. The word 'translanguaging' was never used in interview discourses; yet, some teachers seemed to have trust in the effectiveness of comparing languages, or treating one language as an auxiliary, to be held in reserve for better elucidation of language meanings.

T7a: Last week we hosted volunteers from Nepal and China. It turned out that everyone could speak English, but not everyone could understand it. The Google Translate application came to the rescue. Of course, there were problems. The students had to write. They wanted to do this in Polish, but I kept saying: 'If you want to learn Chinese or any other language, start with learning the basics of English'.

T9a: In my work in the German lesson I often make use of the fact that my students are also learning English. I often refer to this language because by knowing the grammar and lexis of another language I can relate it to German. Many things are similar. If students understand how to construct English grammar, it is easier for them to grasp the grammar of German.

T19a: … learning a second foreign language is a little bit easier than the first, because you can find such relations that make learning a second and a third language easier. When it comes to Kashubian, people I know say that it resembles German. I personally don't know German but by learning, for example, case declensions, I found some similarities between Kashubian and Russian. So I think it is a little bit easier to learn, if there's a basis in the first foreign language.

As noted above, most of the teachers using this repertoire did not appear to have heard about translanguaging. It could be said, however, that T7a conveys to his students an important message when he says: „If you want to learn Chinese or any other language, start with learning the basics of English" to make them realize how a knowledge of English can help them communicate with people speaking other, sometimes exotic, languages. English was also treated as a point of reference in learning German grammar. Although treating English as an auxiliary language is to be expected in times when it is simultaneously regarded as a global language, it is interesting that another teacher of English (T19a), when talking about her own learning of a new language (Kashubian) from scratch, did not refer to English, but to German and Russian.

4.2. Chartered teachers (CTs)

While there were similar ways of expressing the interpretative repertoires relating to language in both groups, the teachers aspiring to CT status expressed their understanding of language in a slightly different way. Their repertoires can be categorized into *language as system* and *language as communication* repertoires, as in the case of ATs. In addition, two new categories emerged – the language as exam preparation repertoire and the language as

life preparation repertoire. The CTs' interpretative repertoires on language are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Chartered teachers' interpretative repertoires on language.

Participant	System	Communication	Exam preparation	Life preparation
Teacher1c	*			
Teacher2c				
Teacher3c				
Teacher4c				
Teacher5c				
Teacher6c				
Teacher7c		*		
Teacher8c				
Teacher9c				
Teacher10c				
Teacher11c			*	
Teacher12c		*		
Teacher13c				
Teacher14c			*	
Teacher15c		*		
Teacher16c				
Teacher17c				
Teacher18c				*
Teacher19c			*	
Teacher20c				
Teacher21c	*		*	
Teacher22c				
Teacher23c				
Teacher24c		*	*	
Teacher25c	*		*	
Teacher26c				

The language as a system repertoire

In the *language as a system repertoire* the CTs also seem to have a high regard for the lexical system of language. They take it for granted that knowledge of a language implies above all a good knowledge of vocabulary and they refer to this in their accounts. The excerpt below is representative in this respect:

T1c: The aim of learning a language [innovation] was improving language skills … The content was obviously based on the core curriculum. What else? When it comes to the aims, this is extending students' vocabulary

Given a chance to run extra classes for linguistically gifted students, some teachers still tend to focus on English grammar and vocabulary:

T21c: I created an English language club for gifted students. Ten people attended each session so it was ideal for work in pairs. I was able to have individual contact with each student. The main aim was to prepare them for our regional English language competition organized by the secondary school in C. I must admit that the level of difficulty of the competition is high. It consists of two stages and, to my mind, it is worth preparing my students for them and conducting classes with the contest in mind. I used past tests and some self-made materials. What was the aim? The students, above all, extended their vocabulary and grammatical structures

The language as a communication repertoire

Some of the CTs seem to understand the concept of language as *communication*. This is usually associated with the term 'using' the language, as the example below shows:

T7c: yes, yes, everything depends on the unit but in my classes they must use what was in the course book. Then they understand that knowledge is not what they should write in the test but what they should use.

T24c: … we can see their engagement and interest in German, because German itself is pretty hard and difficult to learn. Since they only start this language in the seventh grade, it is not easy. This is a two-stage competition. The first stages were in individual schools […] The final stage took place in our school where the kids had to do a very practical test. We mainly focus on communication. We want the language to be useful, not only grammatical structures, though there are plenty of them in German. We want to focus on practice and communication […] We'll definitely be continuing with this to bring this language alive in our community, too.

The interviewees who talked about school exchanges seemed to highlight the practical value of learning English to be used for communication with students from an associated school:

T12c: … to see if I can manage in a new environment away from mum and dad, away from the family, to see if I can use the language in a non-school

> situation for life needs. For the school it could be seen as a way of enhancing the range of educational activities on offer, couldn't it? The kids not only learnt from books and notebooks but could use English or German in practice.

An interesting aspect that emerged within the language as communication repertoire was the treatment of English as a lingua franca among Polish students learning German in communication with their German peers. The example below testifies to this:

> Expert: Your role in organizing this exchange. We'll ask now about its benefits for the school.
> T15c: They come every year. They come to us, we go to them at the end of September, the beginning of October, whereas they always come to us towards the end of the year […].
> Expert: And the benefits for the school?
> 15Tc: Well, I think there are many benefits. An outstanding effect is the contact, using the language.
> Expert: And nobody tries to use German? They're learning German, too.
> T15c: It varies as far as this is concerned. There are students who feel better at German, but I hear 'You know, I thought I wasn't able to but I can manage in English' […] but I think that there was some evidence of German use.

The language as a culture repertoire

As in the case of the teachers who participated in a promotion interview to become ATs, *the language as a culture repertoire* appeared among the language repertoires of those who aspired to become CTs. This can be seen in the utterance below:

> T21c: And something else about the theatre society because I haven't mentioned this yet. With my colleague we organized three performances and tried to arouse students' interest in culture, customs, history. Once it was about USA, another time Great Britain, and even France appeared. And this was on the Day of Culture.

It is interesting that although culture was mostly understood as providing students with information about English-speaking countries, this was not the case with all the participants and some of them, as the excerpt above illustrates, also included other cultures ("and even France appeared").

The language as a preparation for examination repertoire

Looking at the language repertoires in this group, the dominant understanding of language was *the preparation of students for a language examination*. Interestingly, this discourse did not emerge among the previous group of teachers although most of the ATs in the study also prepare students for end-of-primary school examinations. The examples below indicate the concern about examinations very well:

> T2d: It was always a problem for me, something I wasn't able to cope with, that the exam results were continually very low, although we tried to do our best. But last year was the year when the average was higher than the country's average. It is even difficult to treat this as a success, but I'm trying to keep it up. It varies. The students achieved really spectacular results. A lot of them scored 100%, which required a lot of strenuous work from us.

In line with this repertoire, the teachers give priority to teacher training associated with preparing students for examinations. In the majority of examples teachers refer to the end-of-school examinations and the phenomenon of 'teaching to the test' which they regard as harmless.

> T19c: I took part in various forms of teacher training. But, above all, it was a training to become an examiner in the German secondary school leaving exam, with the students who were to be taking the exam in mind. I think that the greatest benefit for me was that I can prepare a student for such an exam more professionally. Both for the oral and written exams. So I know what to put more focus on. I know where the weaknesses are, what to pay attention to, how they are assessed later on, so as to show them the right way.

> T25c: I know exactly what is expected from the examiner, and from the learner. I prepared classes for my school leavers on different writing genres for the written exam- both extended and basic. Where to put the reference and the development, what to do so as not to omit anything for the highest possible score. Precision of this kind, what exactly is expected of learners, was really very useful.
> Expert: Aren't you afraid that you could get into a rut and start preparing only for the exam?
> T25c: No, of course not. Absolutely not. But third grade students are really determined and they only want to be educated like this. I think it's good, because I can see myself, standing here, how stressful it is. I assume that their stress is greater. I think that preparing them for what is expected makes it much easier for them. Not even just the formal requirements, but it's also psychological preparation. I think it's a good thing.

It also happens that some teachers in this group appreciate their knowledge and ability to prepare students for commercial examinations, such as Cambridge Assessment. They may transfer this competence to the public school context and even introduce their teaching innovations based on exam preparation.

> T14c: As an examiner for the University of Cambridge once or twice a year I conduct international exams, that is KET, PET, FCE and CAE. During my work I also prepare students for these exams that extend their knowledge and also prepare them for competitions. This is my pedagogical innovation. I cooperate with Cambridge University all the time, with emphasis on the development of linguistic and cultural skills. I also have the opportunity to cooperate with a language school in England.

> T14c: For many years I have also worked as a teacher and introduced an innovation aimed at developing language skills. Two hours a week are devoted to this. It allows my students to extend their knowledge and prepare for competitions organized by Local Educational Boards.

The language as a preparation for life repertoire

The last language repertoire identified in this group is referred to as *preparation for life* and can be seen to stand in opposition to the previous repertoire. The language as preparation for life repertoire was not explicitly mentioned by the AT candidates. In the CT group, however, this repertoire emerged, as seen in the example provided in the conversation during which one teacher (T18c) expressed her understanding of language very well:

> Expert: What does teaching English mean for you?
> T18c*:* I don't know. Opening a window to the world, extending horizons.
> Expert: So it's not teaching to the test.
> T18c*:* No, it's not. It's giving students something that no one can take it away from them, something that will allow them to go into life and manage. Certainly it is about extending horizons with all the doors opening. They can freely travel, go sightseeing, make friends with whoever they want to, work where they want to.
> Expert: So this is the learning/teaching process.
> T18c: It is global. Exams are certainly important but they are only a stage on the way, a point at which we stop for a moment and continue going. It's about life skills.

As seen, the understandings of language expressed by the two groups during the promotion examination had much in common but, strikingly, the CTs pay more attention to enjoying the status of end-of-school examiners in the sense of better 'knowing' how to prepare their students for final examinations. They may intentionally incorporate examination techniques into their teaching and seem convinced that this is the right way of teaching a language. The accountability discourse in their practice and beliefs, and probably in the management of classes subordinated to student preparation for taking the examination, can be seen throughout. Another possible explanation is that the examination repertoire may have taken over from the language as system repertoire. The teaching of selected structures and vocabulary lists may have been superseded by teaching and practising specific examination techniques.

5. Discussion

The findings of the study clearly show that the teachers' reception of language is rather polyphonic; yet, encompassing a range of various positions. *Language as communication* is the most prevalent in both groups. Some teachers still talk about language as a system referring to teaching vocabulary and grammar, but the communicative discourse dominates. This repertoire may be a reflection of the broader communication-oriented language ideology.

Language as culture is still mostly understood in terms of presenting theoretical information about English-speaking countries. There are exceptions when culture is taught in parallel to practising a language skill (e.g. in the data, T3a described teaching writing through writing letters to members of the British Royal family), but such examples are sporadic.There is hardly any account of learners' participation in ESL culture while engaging in social media, playing games with international partners, or engaging in British popular youth culture (music, films, fashion, etc.). Information about high culture is considered valuable, which is reflected in the sightseeing trips organized to English and German speaking countries. On the other hand, school exchanges contribute to students' integration with their foreign counterparts and may provide experience for identity transformation, like the trip to the concentration camp.

In the *language as culture* repertoire one more discourse is visible: the discourse of globalization. This is especially well illustrated when learners of German use English while communicating with German friends. They treat it somewhat naturally ("I didn't realize I could manage in English"). Although German was also used ("there was some evidence of German", as T15c said),

and English may have served a complementary function, such incidents confirm the attraction and visibility of English in contexts that could otherwise have been expected to provide more German communication.

Language as preparation for life is also telling. Although rarely associated with the school context, where high-stake examinations still come to the fore, it emerged in the interview through the metaphors used by one of the teachers ("opening a window", "extending horizons"). Such a perception of language is completely different from other teachers' emphasis on the product (language as a system, language as exam preparation) as it is more pragmatically and future-oriented than the other repertoires.

Despite the polyphony, a close look at the findings brings forth three main language teaching tendencies visible in the repertoires: a traditional version of language teaching, a person-focused version of language teaching and, albeit subtle, the negotiation of educational 'latest trends', or the so called present repertoire.

The traditional version of teaching is usually understood as language-focused. It is basically a study of language systems and subsystems. Several teachers pointed to their ways of teaching grammar, checking lexical items, form-based lesson topics, which was well reflected in the *language as a system* repertoire, and even more, in the *language as a preparation for exams* repertoire. In line with this, the repertoire of learner as an executor of teachers' decisions or the repertoire of teacher as a mentor, and the language teaching profession as fulfilment of obligations could be expected. This traditional repertoire underscores the asymmetry between the actors (teachers, learners, mentees, parents), the existence of one truth, the conviction that it is the teacher who is right and from whom others can learn. It seems well supported by the prevalent accountability discourse in contemporary schools and the proliferation of contests, competitions and, to cap it all, high-stake examinations. Having said this, it must be acknowledged that this stance was not the most common among all the teachers and seems to be giving way to the person-focused trend.

The person-focused stance can be regarded as the most common among teachers from both groups. It derives from the global nature of the contemporary world, and the focus is now placed upon the communicative purpose of language. Within this tendency, language is primarily understood as communication which is context-dependent (the *language as communication* repertoire and partly the *language as culture* repertoire, if culture is understood as experience). The teachers appreciate school exchange programmes as important additional contact with the language being learnt, as well as having foreign guests, organizing foreign school trips, or participating in international projects, as they all offer significant affordances for language

learning. An interesting aspect was the cost of global communication for particular languages, which was well reflected in students of German resorting to English in communicative situations with their German counterparts in Germany. This said, it needs to be noted that, despite its obvious benefits, the popularity of person-centered pedagogy always fades when what counts is the product, such as examination scores, meeting the formal requirements, transparency or objectivity. In a nutshell, the traditional focus on language and the focus on person can be seen as two opposing options that represent rather contested understandings of the concept of language investigated here.

Finally, following various social issues that need to be addressed in the present times, alternative understandings of the language and person stances discussed above also surfaced in the repertoires. As some of these are making headway in TOEFL, they can hardly be rejected by those who embrace only language or person stances towards their professionalism. This is the idea of developing the transferable skills which students need to have in the fast-changing world today, in which English may act as a mediator. The *language as* translanguaging repertoire or the *language as a life preparation* repertoire are both related to this concept of language. Although these views emerged from individual teachers, they can provide valuable food for thought, or be a useful point of departure for educational policymakers and teacher educators to address teacher education projects.

Conclusions, limitations, implications

The purpose of this article has been to investigate interpretative repertoires in promotion interviews, which emerged from 48 in-service language teachers and were focused on language. I discussed six such repertoires: language as a system, language as communication, language as culture, language as translanguaging, language as exam preparation, and language as life preparation. These were then reduced to three discourse options on language: traditional, person-focused and present-day. From the various ways in which the participants constructed their discourses, it can be seen that the discourses about language communicated in promotion situations by teachers in both groups can be informative in a number of ways. The most significant findings are:

1. The traditional concept of language as a system is giving way to language as communication.
2. Teachers, especially in secondary schools, tend to perceive language in terms of preparation for the school leaving examination.

3. New perceptions of language, such as language as translanguaging or language as preparation for the global world are only acknowledged by a small number of teachers.

Unexceptionally, the study has several limitations. The greatest potential objection is that the data were only drawn from hand-written notes, however copious and meticulous these may have been. Nevertheless, the goal of the whole study was not to generalize, but to better understand language teachers and shed more light on one aspect of the process of teacher promotion in Poland – teachers' discourses on language expressed during a promotion situation. The impracticality of recording discourses during the interviews makes it well-nigh impossible to obtain ethnographic emic data from this context of language teachers' work. The fact that the study came to fruition thanks to scrupulous notes means that the perceived limitation may also be regarded as one of the strengths of the study.

Still another reservation that might be levelled against the study is a potentially perceived lack of triangulation. Conducting follow-up interviews with the teachers or members of the commission, enriching the data with investigations of the teachers' classrooms, or obtaining information about the teachers from their students would certainly have made the study more reliable. On the other hand, it also seems justifiable to argue that the study was supported with empirical evidence gathered over several recent years and the participants came from different schools, different places and represented different foreign languages. These variables significantly minimise the shortcomings related to triangulation issues.

Apart from the insights into the discourses of language teachers in promotion situations, the study looked into the practical implications of the findings. Although it is not clear how the acknowledgement of their significance could be translated into specific actions, activities or teacher programmes, there is at least one aspect that can be considered important: openness to the new.

Although some Polish foreign language teachers may not realize this, the findings from the study seem to intimate that in times of globalization the role played by a foreign language, especially English as a global language, may be different from its traditional examination-based understanding of language reduced to a set of systems and skills. Unfortunately, this is how many teachers in the study still perceive language teaching, a view that is often supported by school principals. While one of the outcomes of my study on interpretative repertoires was the appearance of the current rhetoric on the basic concepts of language teaching (e.g. language as translanguaging, learning English through experience, etc.), teachers still take pride

in being high-stakes examiners, teaching grammar and vocabulary 'to the test', or treating students as executors of teacher-made decisions. In this respect, the practical and policy implication and question that arises is: What can be done to reorient the system of school language teaching and address current world concerns, including the globalization of English and all that this involves?

Openness to the new seems to be crucial in underpinning current approaches to language teaching based on global communication, emphasis on how languages operate in the world today and international intelligibility. Students need languages to exchange information and engage in real-world international communication, experience many different cultures and communicate their identities, including those of their L1. Such a stance towards language learning makes it possible to incorporate vital present-time issues via the language taught (e.g., overcoming climatic changes, dealing with the pandemic, preventing wars, etc.) as well as teaching transversal skills considered indispensable in the twenty-first century (e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, creativity development, cognitive flexibility, service orientation, learner agency support, etc.) in the language classroom. Then, teaching a foreign language 'to the test' could be superseded by teaching a language for sustainable living. What is more, learners' non-formal language education could be more appreciated and recognized in the formal school system while teaching 'to the test' reconsidered. This said, I hope this paper gives some inspiration to those who are occupied with the professional language teacher and reinforces the importance of research on teachers' interpretative repertoires.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Demographic data of participants in the promotion examination to become appointed teachers.

Participant	Sex	Language taught	School	Place
T1a	F	English	Primary state school	Large town
T2a	F	English	Primary state school	Large town
T3a	F	English to young learners	Primary state school	Large town
T4a	F	English to pre-primary learners	Primary state school	Village
T5a	F	English to young learners	Primary state school	Village
T6a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T7a	M	English	Secondary vocational school	Small town
T8a	F	English, German	Primary state school	Village
T9a	F	German	Primary state school	Village
T10a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T11a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T12a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T13a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T14a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T15a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T16a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T17a	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T18a	F	English	Primary state school	Large town
T19a	M	English	Primary state school	Large town
T20a	F	English	Primary state school	Large town
T21a	M	English	Private lower secondary school	Large town
T22a	M	English to young learners	Primary state school	Village

Table 2.: Demographic data of participants in the promotion examination to become chartered teachers.

Participant	Sex	Language taught	School	Place
T1c	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T2c	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T3c	F	English	Primary state school, private third-age English courses	Small town

Table 2 – cont.

Participant	Sex	Language taught	School	Place
T4c	F	English	Vocational secondary school	Small town
T5c	F	English	Primary state school	Small town
T6c	F	English to young learners	Private vocational secondary school	Large town
T7c	M	English	Secondary vocational school	Large town
T8c	M	English	Secondary vocational school	Large town
T9c	F	English	Secondary vocational school	Large town
T10c	F	English	Lower secondary school	Suburb of a big town
T11c	F	English	Private secondary school	Large town
T12c	M	English	Primary state school	Suburb of a big town
T13c	F	English	Primary state school	Large town
T14c	F	English	Primary state school	Large town
T15c	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T16c	F	English	Primary state school	Small town
T17c	F	English	Primary state school	Village
T18c	F	English	Primary state school	Small town
T19c	F	German	Primary state school	Village
T20c	F	Spanish	Secondary school	Large town
T21c	F	English	Lower secondary school	Large town
T22c	F	English	Primary school	Village
T23c	F	English	Lower secondary school	Large town
T24c	F	German	Primary school	Village
T25c	F	English	Vocational Secondary school	Large city
T26c	F	English	Primary school	Large city

Appendix B

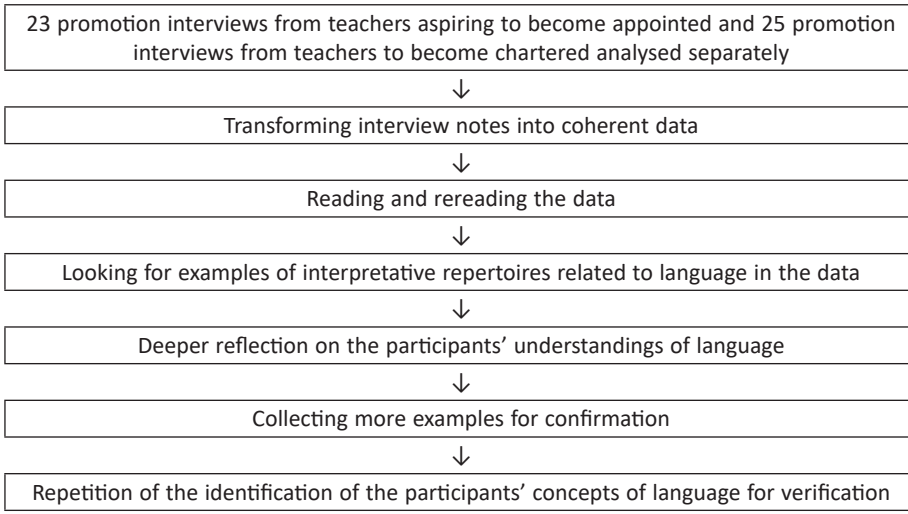

Figure 1. Overview of the analysis process.