Chapter One

Confronting Issues in Language Teacher Education Research: A Re-Examination of Teacher Competency

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Within the field of language teacher education (LTE), much has been learned about language teacher competency from empirical research examining teacher knowledge and cognition. This field, however, “remains an emergent [one] of inquiry...not yet characterized by a well-defined research agenda and programmatic approach to research” (Barkhuizen & Borg, 2010, p. 237). The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to provide a critical analysis of the language teacher knowledge and cognition literature that illustrates these issues, and (2) to propose a re-examination of this literature that (a) clarifies key terminology utilized in the LTE field and (b) demonstrates the importance of specifying research agendas among LTE scholars.

Introduction

Language teacher competency as an essential component in facilitating language learning has become a prominent area of research in the field of language teacher education (LTE), as well as a point of interest in applied linguistics (B applied linguistics urns & Richards, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Numerous empirical studies have investigated what a teacher does, knows, and is expected to know with regards to the subject matter (i.e., the language being taught), language acquisition, teaching practices, and potential contextual demands on teaching (e.g., curricular mandates or state-level testing requirements). These, in combination with theoretical frameworks of teacher knowledge already developed in general education (Shulman, 1987; Turner-Bisset, 2001), have led to the development of teacher knowledge frameworks in LTE (Richards, 1998; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Roberts, 1998). Additionally, investigations into teachers’ thought processes during lesson planning, classroom interactions, and reflective practices have led to a wealth of insights into language teacher cognition (Borg, 2006). The plethora of studies within the language teacher education literature provide important insights for both teachers and teacher educators into what instructors bring, or should bring, into the classroom to help facilitate their own students’ language learning.

A review of the literature, however, shows ambiguous and at times confusing and misleading (1) operationalizations of terminology, and (2) uses of methodological tools for the
studies’ objectives. Additionally, many studies make assumptions about the language teaching process that do not entirely coincide with actual teaching practice. Such divergences in education research can lead to discord for teachers and teacher educators in selecting and analyzing findings to utilize in practice, as well as in making incomplete or incorrect interpretations of those findings (Thomas & Pring, 2004, p. 4). The aim of this paper is to discuss the two pertinent issues mentioned above when reviewing and analyzing the language teacher competency literature. Following Borg’s (2009) call to help language teachers and their teacher educators draw upon research findings to utilize in their practice, this paper addresses ways to provide a clearer, more consistent understanding of language teacher competency.

### General Issues in Language Teacher Knowledge and Teacher Cognition Literature

Barkhuizen and Borg (2010) summarize the field of language teacher education as having had “…significant advances in research [while] remain[ing] an emergent field of inquiry, one not yet characterized by a well-defined research agenda and programmatic approach to research” (p. 237). This encompassing observation can be applied to research on language teacher knowledge and cognition. The application of the term knowledge, while extensively found in various LTE studies, has caused problems in explaining teacher competency. The various knowledge domains that have been presented in teacher education (e.g., subject content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, etc.) have caused dissension; for example, some researchers claim that even though these domains are well-suited as distinct categories for ease of research purposes, in actual classroom practice, they are interwoven and blended together and cannot be viewed as distinct from one another.1 Additionally, the use of the term “knowledge” in teacher education literature is not consistent with the use of the term in other areas of ELT and. For example, Freeman (1989) explains how language teachers need to possess knowledge constituents of concepts (i.e., internal ideas), the skills to implement that knowledge (i.e., in classroom practice), and the ability to assess both of these (i.e., reflective practices). Freeman and Johnson (1998) discuss how a language teacher’s knowledge base is supported by “the activity of teaching itself” (p. 397), but the two cannot be seen as the same concept. This raises questions with how the term knowledge has been used in some recent empirical teacher education studies. Some studies present the use of the term knowledge as a conflation of teacher internal knowledge and external practice (Ellis, 2006; Lo, 2005). To clarify the terminology of language teacher competency

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1 Refer to Johnston & Goettsch (2000) for a review of this argument.

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competency, in the remainder of this paper I disambiguate the term knowledge by examining separately: (1) how the field views teachers' internal knowledge and influences on teaching, which is termed here as teacher understanding; and (2) how the field examines this understanding in action, which is termed here teacher practice.

Language teacher competency has also been investigated by examining teacher cognition through the different components of the teaching process. It has been traditionally held that teachers first utilize a period of planning for their lessons, where they evaluate the appropriateness and eventual construction and/or selection of materials to be used in the classroom (Jackson, 1968). This work prepares teachers for in-class teaching and classroom interaction. A period of reflection on planning and implementation of the lesson allows teachers to examine their own methods of instruction. These three segments of teaching (planning, teaching, and reflection) have been used as focal points in many empirical studies to examine the cognitive strategies that distinguish novice from expert teachers in the language field (Gatbonton, 1999, 2008; Tsui, 2003). Although these three components of teaching have more often than not been discussed individually for the ease of research purposes (Clark & Peterson, 1986), more recently Johnson (2009) contends that they are not strictly linear and that investigations into teacher competence need to accept a degree of overlap and circularity among the teaching components.²

These two strands of teacher education literature, teacher knowledge and teacher cognition, have provided much insight into what teachers possess and need to possess in order to assist with language learning in their classrooms. However, the difficulties in clearly explaining language teacher competency can be daunting for both teacher and teacher educator alike due to the issues presented above. Following recent research directions that bring the two strands together (Tsui, 2003), the subsequent sections of this paper present the language teacher knowledge and teacher cognition literature in a manner that (1) avoids ambiguous understandings of what teacher knowledge entails, and (2) presents the various teaching components as working in tandem with each other as opposed to being a linear process. The reanalysis of literature in this fashion aims to provide a more succinct understanding of what language teacher competency entails, while providing future researchers with a clearer and more direct research agenda to expand knowledge in the field.

² So as not to perpetuate the concept of teaching as a linear process, I use the term “teaching components” when describing lesson planning, classroom teaching, and reflection, as opposed to the more commonly used term “teaching stages.”
Lesson Planning

Teacher Understanding

Prior to classroom interaction, most teachers are instructed to focus on the lesson planning and activity/task development process (Brown, 2007; Tsui, 2005). Shulman (1987) emphasized that before any lesson planning can commence, teachers must have a complete understanding of the subject and content that they are to teach, including the concepts and theories behind it. In the field of ELT, knowledge of applied linguistics has become a focal point in most teacher education programs (Richards, 2008). In order to develop activities and prepare for classroom interaction, it is expected that language teachers possess an understanding of the various subfields of language analysis and learning. These facets can be divided into different domains of understanding: (1) an understanding of language analysis, and (2) an understanding of language learning. Language analysis requires being conscious of the intricacies of the language to be taught. Specifically, this could follow Canale and Swain’s (1980) now-famed notion of communicative competence, where one needs to be aware of both the grammatical and sociolinguistic intricacies of a language. Since teachers are expected to develop and assess students’ linguistic knowledge of a language (Rea-Dickens, 2008), having this explicit language awareness (Hawkins, 1999; James, 1999; Thomas, 1987) of the English linguistic system is important for any teacher to possess prior to lesson planning and classroom instruction.

Having an understanding of language learning focuses on grasping how language develops. Generally speaking, a teacher in any discipline of study needs to have an understanding or belief of how development of the subject occurs prior to commencing lesson planning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In the case of ELT, this focus is on the development of the English language. For some teachers, this understanding comes from explicit theories of second language acquisition (SLA) commonly taught in ELT preparation programs (Bartels, 2005; Ellis, 2009; Richards, 2008). For other teachers, though, their understanding of language development stems from their own years of experience learning a second or foreign language (Ellis, 2006). Having multiple years of observing one’s own teachers in practice, termed “apprenticeship of observation” by Lortie (1975), can influence how teachers in turn structure their own courses; this may or may not contradict current theories from SLA research. However, Freeman (2002) asserts that teaching the way the teacher was taught usually co-occurs with the teacher’s reflection of the specific teaching context. Therefore, prior to any lesson planning, as a teacher

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3 Following Johnston & Goetzsch’s (2000) assertion that the currently used knowledge domains in teacher research (i.e., subject content knowledge vs. pedagogical content knowledge) are not as easily separated in actual instruction as they are for research purposes, I will not use those terms in this paper.

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one needs to also have an understanding of how to reflect and utilize that understanding in order to assert one's own belief of language acquisition within one's teaching. Regardless of where teachers' fundamental understandings of language development come from, these ideas need to be considered in relation to understanding individual students' needs and learning styles in a classroom. In order to prepare for each class, teachers must reflect on the connections between the developmental needs, wishes, and responses of the individual learners and the teacher's own theories of learning (Wette, 2009). In this respect, the focus of the lesson planning is on individual students and contexts rather than the use of decontextualized concepts and practices (Gatbonton, 2008; Tsui, 2003, 2005).

Language teacher education has focused greatly on ensuring that teachers understand language analysis and language development (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1997; Van Patten, 2002). Although researchers and student teachers alike confirm that these are necessary components in preparing for language lessons (LaFond & Dogancay-Aktuna, 2009), numerous researchers have come to criticize the overall importance they have been given (Bartels, 2002, 2005; Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Lesson planning entails also having a third domain of understanding, one of language teaching. This includes (a) understanding methodologies of the field and their connections to language analysis and language learning, (b) understanding curricular mandates where one teaches, and (c) understanding the resources that are available for teacher use. Having a complete understanding of the various teaching methodologies that have been utilized in language education would greatly help teachers make connections between language analysis, language development, and their actual teaching and teaching contexts. This, in conjunction with having an understanding of the school's language teaching curriculum, would aid teachers in deciphering how to set up their activities, organize their lessons, and prepare for classroom interaction. Additionally, this would also help in the understanding of the various resources that are at teachers' disposal for classroom use (such as textbooks, technology, and even other teachers' expertise). The more familiar teachers are with teaching resources, the more fluid they can be in making changes to already established lesson plans during class as necessary. As Tsui (2005) explains, an expert teacher is one who can take a vast repertoire of materials and adapt them to meet on-the-spot changes as needed in specific teaching contexts.

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4 This list consolidates research adapted from Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005), Johnston & Goetsch (2000), and Shulman (1987).

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Teacher Practice

In empirical studies that have analyzed language teacher lesson planning, two distinct methods of implementation have surfaced. One focuses on how teachers turn subject knowledge (such as language analysis and language learning) into pedagogically-salient materials for the classroom. The second takes already acquired pedagogical competence (i.e., general teaching strategies) and imprints subject knowledge onto it.

To illustrate the first lesson planning perspective, Lo (2005) describes an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructor who had returned to Asia for a teaching post. Having recently finished her MA in North America, she was well-versed in current language learning theory. However, upon her arrival to her English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching position, she deduced that this knowledge was not so pertinent to her immediate teaching context. For example, the teacher believed that knowledge about various hypotheses of learning in SLA was not going to help her students learn English to pass their college entrance examinations. In addition, a more teacher-fronted, individual-work classroom setting was emphasized by the school’s language teaching curriculum, and was a classroom structure well-known by the students. The teacher chose to prepare for more teacher-fronted interactions where (a) content questions about grammar would be asked, (b) responses from students would be given, and (c) feedback/correction on those responses would be provided. The planning of her class around these traditional teacher initiation, student response, and teacher feedback (IRF) discursive sequences (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) would allow her to evaluate students’ English language knowledge in a timely manner. Additionally, she developed activities that were repetitive in nature and focused more on certain grammatical concepts commonly found in high-stakes examinations than on English communication. On the surface, Lo’s study shows how the influence of the immediate students’ needs, learning styles, and school curriculum prevails over directly using her understanding of language learning theories in her lesson preparation. It is important to note that the teacher still did possess an understanding of language learning, but decided that it was not necessary to incorporate that into her immediate EFL teaching context. This interconnection between understanding language learning and language teaching demonstrates the influential nature that one has on the other in planning a lesson.

Teachers who have moved into the language teaching field from other teaching disciplines would fall under the second planning perspective, imprinting applied linguistics knowledge onto already held beliefs of good teaching preparation based on prior teaching experiences (Freeman & Richards, 1996). To illustrate, Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2005)
describe K-12 content teachers preparing for their ESL certification. The already full-time
teachers were struggling with their White Apache Mountain students' less-than-standard use of
English in the classroom. The teachers noted in their teaching journals that through their
sociolinguistics course, they became more aware of looking at English through a more
descriptive lens rather than a prescriptive one. The teachers were able to take their already
developed activities and adapt them to show differences between Apache English and more
standard academic English. Additionally, the teachers would plan for extra time in their lessons
to allow for class discussions on the difficulties that students were having in relation to the
differences between the two types of English. For this, having an understanding of language
analysis through sociolinguistics influenced how they developed their lessons. As with Lo's
(2005) participant, the importance for examining these domains of understanding as a whole
rather than as separate units provides a better picture of how teachers do lesson planning.

Investigating teacher competence during lesson planning has shown that teachers have
many different domains of understanding working in tandem. However, these domains also
influence the other components of teaching.

The Implementation of Lesson Planning: Classroom Interaction

Teacher Understanding

Examining teacher practices in classroom interactions has been an essential research
focus in language teacher education. Studies have examined this connection in relation to
teachers implementing into their practices knowledge of morphosyntactic grammar (Bardovi-
Harlig & Hartford, 1997) and SLA (Angelova, 2005). While knowledge in these areas is
important, teachers must be able to recognize patterns in classroom interaction and know “how
to assign meaning to them very quickly” (Tsui, 2005, p. 174) so as to move the entire class
forward in the language learning process; this includes initiating opportunities for learners to
practice with the language and managing learners’ talk in ways that promote language learning
(Fagan, 2012a). As such, being able to know how to analyze classroom interactions is important
for teachers to assess problematic situations, determine more important issues in the class
compared to less incidental ones, provide various forms of oral feedback that are appropriate to
both the individual student and the flow of the class as a whole, and make spontaneous changes
to already established lesson plans as needed to help steer the class in a certain direction.6

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5 This can includes learners’ ill-formed language use, incorrect understanding of language usage, or lack of
knowledge.

6 Adapted from Gatbonton (1999, 2008).
Having an understanding of discourse analysis, in conjunction with other linguistic focuses and SLA theories, is therefore a necessity in exploring language teacher competency during classroom interaction. It has been found, though, that most novice teachers within language teaching programs do not have a full grasp of the importance of connecting their knowledge of discourse analysis with their classroom practices (Belz, 2005; Hellermann, 2008); those teachers who do claim that their understanding has an effect on how they view language learning within classroom interactions (Tang, 2008).

Most of the findings in the studies investigating teacher understanding of discourse analysis come from journal reflection or interview data; few have examined a teacher’s thought process during real-time interactions. One of the latter is Lazaraton and Ishihara (2005), who showed that through using the discursive analytic methodology of conversation analysis (CA), teachers more scrupulously reflect on their real-time classroom practices. From a different research perspective, Fagan (2012b) finds that the microanalytic use of CA shows the complements and discrepancies between the teacher’s declarative knowledge of what occurs in the classroom and actual classroom interactions.

As presented here, it is essential for teachers to have a basic understanding of how classroom interactions, and in particular the teacher’s discourse, affects the language learning process. Putting this into practice, though, is unique to the specific teaching context.

**Teacher Practice**

One main goal in facilitating language learning is managing opportunities for learning in classroom discourse (van Lier, 1988). Allwright (2005) and Allwright and Miller (2012) stress the importance for language teachers to provide a classroom atmosphere where students are able to interact with both the teacher and other students in order to work on their own language development. These language learning opportunities for students can occur by the manner in which teachers (a) introduce language items that are suitable to the individual language learners’ needs as well as being in line with the curriculum’s mandates, (b) manage teacher talk versus student talk in the classroom, (c) assess student knowledge and facilitate interaction through feedback, and (d) incorporate student contributions into the lesson (Ellis, 2007; Gatbonton, 1999; Hillocks, 1999).

To exemplify how an expert teacher reconciles the information described in the previous paragraph, here I present Borg’s (1998) case study illustrating one EFL teacher contradicting the teaching methodology and classroom interaction style that was ingrained into him throughout his teacher education program, so as to meet the needs of his immediate teaching context. While
the teacher's graduate program focused heavily on communicative language teaching (CLT) and advocated student-centeredness, group-work interaction, and implicit grammar teaching, it became apparent over time that it was not suitable for his specific students' learning styles. During his interviews for the study, he described how his students struggled with initiating topics, responding to open-ended questions, and working with other students to implicitly learn grammar. He gradually moved to a more teacher-fronted explanation of grammar rules and patterns, where students more comfortably took notes and responded to the teacher's direct questions. To do so, he utilized more traditional IRF sequences in his interaction for two main purposes: to provide the students with immediate feedback regarding the correctness of their English knowledge, and to determine which concepts were understood and which needed to be reiterated. The teacher viewed students' answers and their degree of correctness as being an essential contributing factor in determining the flow of the class and the progression of materials for future classes. In this manner, the teacher (1) acted as manager of how much student talk occurred in relation to teacher talk, (2) managed the type of student talk that occurred in the classroom, and (3) could determine how best to proceed with the classroom discourse so as to promote learning opportunities to best meet the students' needs.

The discursive interactions described here provide students with learning opportunities to build up their language knowledge in the classroom. Investigating teacher competency during classroom interaction has shown that all domains of teacher understanding (language analysis, language learning, and language teaching) work together and influence the final outcome in lesson implementation.

**Teacher Reflection**

**Teacher Understanding**

While examinations of lesson planning and classroom interaction provide information about classroom teaching, it is equally important to understand how teachers determine whether what was planned and implemented was effective enough for future use. Teacher reflection as a necessary tool for professional development has been discussed in research and teacher practice literature alike.\(^7\) Shulman and Shulman (2004) state that teachers generally need to be conscious of the manner in which they teach if they are to help facilitate learning in their classrooms. This goes beyond having a superficial understanding of what is happening in the classroom, and

\(^7\) See Burton (2009) for a list of references.
includes being able to retrieve reasons behind the teaching through teacher self-monitoring and metacognitive reasoning (Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Tsui, 2005).

Having an understanding of reflection also connects the teacher back to the other domains of teacher understanding previously discussed. Numerous studies have shown that while reflecting on their teaching, teachers are able to explain their understanding of language analysis (Burns & Knox, 2005), language learning (Angelova, 2005), and language teaching (Borg, 1998). Having an understanding of reflection could therefore be seen as an explicit link for teachers to use with other teacher understanding domains that influence their instruction. To disambiguate how reflection is perceived by teachers and researchers alike in language teaching settings, the next section will explain various practices of reflection used among language teachers and how they make direct connections with not only the other domains of understanding (i.e., understandings of language analysis, language development, and language teaching), but also with lesson planning and classroom interaction.

**Teacher Practice**

In most teacher education programs, reflection has included student journals, autobiographies, and interviews that occur following lesson planning and instruction. These ways of reflecting on lesson planning and implementation allow teachers to become more proactive in their own understanding of teaching practice (Clark & Peterson, 1986). However, teacher reflection can take numerous forms. Much research examining teacher reflection has investigated reflection during post-observation sessions. Originally introduced as a new approach in assessing teachers during their observations, Freeman (1982) and Gebhard (1990) described a more non-directive approach to language teacher observation as opposed to the more supervisory approach that had previously dominated teacher assessment. Instead of having a checklist of certain methods and skills that teachers were expected to adhere to and discuss during the post-observation session, this newer approach allowed for teachers to become more responsible for their own recognition of teaching methods utilized and to have more of a conversation with the observer rather than be lectured to. The emphasis here is on why teachers prepare for their lessons and then conduct them in the manners that they do, as opposed to what they should or should not do. This form of observation allows teachers to utilize critical thinking in understanding their own teaching approaches. Most importantly, this post-observation approach can be utilized at all points of one’s career as opposed to only at the student teacher level (Brandt, 2008).
Recently, self-reflection throughout all segments of teaching (not only during post-observation) has been emphasized in language teacher education and professional development. The current reflective model of teacher education allows teachers to become more autonomous in their thought processes (Richards, 2008). More common methods of self-reflection such as journal writing have infiltrated research on teacher cognition. Riegelhaupt and Carrasco (2005) utilized extensive journal writing in their study of K-12 content teachers entering into the ESL field to learn about (and attempt to incorporate) newly found understandings of language analysis. Teachers were able to clearly verbalize specific difficulties that they had trying to utilize new sociolinguistic knowledge in their lesson planning and activity development. They also wrote about how sociolinguistics not only infiltrated their teaching, but also their personal views about what is and is not deemed acceptable English. These findings from the journal reflections exemplify not only the need for teachers to consider their daily teaching preparation and methods, but also show how reflecting can affect personal beliefs about language.

More contemporary approaches to reflection have attempted to examine teacher beliefs about teaching a second language. Farrell (2009) introduces concept mapping as a way for student teachers in a pre-service program to see where exactly their beliefs about teaching come from (e.g., from their apprenticeship of observation) and how those beliefs change over the course of a teacher education program. The maps allow student teachers to explicitly view changes in their thinking over time with regard to perceived notions of instruction in the field of second language teaching.

Other reflection methods have come from more qualitative methodological tools that are commonly utilized in education research. Stimulated recall has often been used to assess student and teacher cognition. Participants talk about their thought processes while watching their own taped performances on tasks they previously conducted (Brice Heath & Street, 2008). Studies such as those by Gatbonton (1999, 2008) have utilized stimulated recall to compare the thinking processes in both novice and expert teachers as they watch their own teaching on videos. However, this can also be an outlet for teacher reflection in the form of teachers' retrospection of their own teaching methods. Kwo's (1996) EFL teaching participants were told to videotape their own teaching throughout the semester and to do a stimulated recall/retrospection to reflect on what changes they saw. At first, the participants commented on how influential their understanding of language analysis was in their teaching methods. As time went on, the teachers commented how they saw a change in their teaching from strictly adhering to the preplanned lesson plans to allowing more fluidity in their teaching based on their students' needs and

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learning styles. Both the teachers and the researchers emphasized that this form of reflection was very beneficial in that it allowed the teachers to make more salient connections among the different domains of understanding. Nevertheless, from a research perspective it is difficult to determine whether the descriptions from the teachers during their retrospections actually aligned with their classroom practice since, like the majority of empirical studies in teacher competence research, classroom interaction data was not described.8

The implementation of different reflection methods has made teachers explicitly aware of their own comprehension of the other domains of teacher understanding mentioned earlier in this paper, both for lesson planning and classroom interaction. However, it is necessary to note that the previously discussed modes of reflection are done subsequent to lesson planning and classroom interaction, which Schón (1983) terms “reflection-on-action.” Although reflection-on-action is the more commonly practiced form of reflection, there is room for error based on human agency. Recollections of what exactly happened in the classroom, what teachers were precisely feeling at that moment, and the specific reasoning behind those may not be completely accurate. Research in ethnography (Bernard, 2006; LeCompte & Preissle, 2003) has consistently argued that the use of data based on participant recollection needs to be taken with caution and should be triangulated with other, more concrete evidence such as detailed observations notes or transcriptions of activities, to show complete understanding of a concept. Schón’s (1983) second classification of reflection, “reflection-in-practice,” provides for this necessary triangulation of data. This type of reflection occurs simultaneous to instruction. It has often been noted how difficult it is for both student teachers and teacher educators alike to investigate reflection-in-action due to the lack of clear, robust techniques for this form of analysis (Rodger, 2002). To address this dilemma, evidence from teachers performing online reflection while teaching would be beneficial in examining their reactions to the immediate needs in the classroom.
Understanding how to perform microanalytic analyses of interactions by using tools such as CA would provide teachers and teacher educators an intricate view into what other teachers do with their classroom communicative practice (Fagan, 2012b). More studies such as these would provide further insight into teachers’ reflections in their immediate teaching contexts.

Conclusion
The purpose of the current chapter was to critically re-examine the language teacher competency research as it has been described in the language teaching and learning literature. To

8 For an example of how teacher reflections may differ from actual classroom practices, refer to Fagan (2012b).
do so, I first examined the concept of teacher competency as analyzed in two scholarly fields: (1) teacher knowledge, where a teacher's understanding of the subject matter and pedagogical practices have been directly linked to their actual classroom practices, and (2) teacher cognition, where a teacher's reasoning and thought processes for lesson planning, classroom instruction, and reflection have been studied at length. As key concepts were found to be inconsistently and/or ambiguously presented in the literature, here I disambiguated them in a manner more accessible for teachers and teacher educators to clearly utilize these essential concepts associated with language teacher preparation.

To begin, the term “knowledge” in many studies has been, either intentionally or not, conflated with both teachers' internal understandings of subject matter and pedagogical practice and actual implementation of these practices. Previous discussion in language teacher research, as well as in other research areas of language learning such as language testing (Bachman, 1990), has emphasized that “knowledge” focuses on internal understanding of concepts. External practices have been seen as a separate entity for investigation and may or may not demonstrate a teacher's complete understanding of concepts. As has been addressed in this paper, it is important for teachers and teacher educators to examine the language teacher literature with specific focuses in mind (i.e., what a teacher understands or how a teacher conducts classroom practices). When bridging the two, L2 researchers and classroom practitioners alike need to realize that a teacher's complete understanding of applied linguistics or pedagogical practices may not surface in their actual teaching. Thus, when reading already conducted research or planning one's own study, the methodological tools and analyses need should not assume direct correlations between understanding and classroom practice. Many studies described in the teacher practice sections of this paper follow general trends of gathering data on language teachers' perceived understandings of their teaching. The majority of this information comes from data sources such as interviews (either individually conducted or in focus groups) or written reflections (e.g., journals) and not from actual detailed analyses of classroom data. A triangulation of data that utilizes interviews, field notes, and reflective data (to name a few), as well as detailed transcripts of classroom discursive interactions, would provide more salient links between the different domains of teacher understanding and teacher practices in language classrooms.

To articulate language teacher competency, it is also necessary to understand teaching as a cyclical and overlapping process as opposed to traditionally held views of examining it in a linear fashion. Although teacher preparation materials never explicitly present the process of
teaching as linear, research often presents it as such. In many L2 teacher education textbooks (Brown, 2007), teaching is presented as follows: emphasizing lesson planning first, followed by sections describing how to do classroom instruction, and culminating with a discussion on teaching reflection. Similarly in research, putting different variables into distinct categories quite often makes for ease of data gathering, analysis, and explanation (Bernard, 2006; Duff, 2007), as well as satisfying certain publication restrictions (e.g., page-limit restrictions). Many researchers of teacher cognition and teacher knowledge have sought to investigate these different teaching components, and have presented them as separate and distinct of each other. As shown in this chapter, lesson planning, classroom interaction, and teacher reflection is cyclical and overlapping. Language teacher competency, therefore, entails an understanding that all components of teaching are interrelated in a multimodal process, and need to be presented as such during language teacher preparation.

Although a relatively young field of inquiry, language teacher education research has made great strides in investigating how teachers can factor into the language learning process based on their own understanding of various concepts, their thought processes, and their classroom practices. The importance of understanding language teacher competency is necessary in order to help prepare future teachers in providing their language students with optimal learning environments. This paper has brought to light numerous contributions that have been made so far in understanding language teacher competency while at the same time clarifying certain issues that still need to be addressed when investigating this area of inquiry. For teacher educators examining language teacher education literature, careful attention needs to be paid as to whether they want to query teachers’ understandings of language teaching methodology and the applied linguistics subfields or investigate teacher classroom practices. As in all fields of study, readers of teacher education literature need to go beyond what is written on the page and make direct connections with their own teaching experiences. In gathering a more complete understanding of language teacher competency, future studies that encapsulate research from across the different subfields within applied linguistics (e.g., discourse analysis, SLA) and from teacher education would be beneficial. A triangulation of methods that bridge teachers’ understandings of the various knowledge domains, their thought processes during the various teaching components, and their actual classroom teaching would provide for further insight into teacher competency as it factors into the language learning process.
References


