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Translingual Identity-as-Pedagogy: The Identity Construction and Practices of International  
Teaching Assistants (ITAs) of English in the College Composition Classroom

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2013

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

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**Abstract**

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Recently the number of international students in English-speaking universities has grown dramatically. In the College Composition class where literacy and language are the major focus of instruction, the issue of linguistic diversity has become particularly salient. By bringing “multidialectal competence” (Canagarajah, 2006) and “interculturality” (Kramsch, 2005) to their courses, international teaching assistants (ITAs) in College Composition could play a key role in applying a “translingual pedagogy” (Horner et al., 2011) to address the needs of the increasingly diverse classrooms. However, perceived as nonnative-speaker teachers (NNESTs), ITAs tend to face particular challenges from both students and colleagues that subscribe to a “native speaker fallacy.” While there has been substantial attention given to improving ITAs’ English proficiency, little is

known about how ITAs themselves conceptualize writing pedagogy and resolve conflicts that relate to their identity construction. Using the theoretical framework of Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice, Norton's adaptation of Imagined Communities, and Morgan's Identity as Pedagogy, the dissertation reports an ethnographic case study of three ITAs' professional identity construction as English professionals and College Composition teachers. It explores how they understood their "translingual identity" in participating in these two professional communities (disciplinary and Composition teaching) and to what extent they drew on their translingual, transnational identities as pedagogical resources in their Composition classrooms.

By triangulating data from multiple sources and drawing on multiple analytical techniques such as classroom discourse analysis, this study has found that despite a "native speaker fallacy" that constrained some ITAs from seeing their translingual identity as a resource, the three ITAs were all able to develop positive professional identities in the community of English scholars. However, not all of them were successful in becoming College Composition teachers. In learning to teach College Composition, the ITAs' biographical and schooling experiences, previous learning in their disciplinary communities (Science, Comparative Literature, and TESOL), the institutional structure, and future goals all played a role in shaping who they were as Composition teachers in this context. "Ming" and "Sara" were able to utilize their competence in the academic disciplinary communities (Science and TESOL) as an advantage when they joined the new community of Composition teachers, whereas "Bo" failed to reconcile the conflicts between his imagined community of literature scholars and the community of Composition teachers. Although all three ITAs' translingual identities proved to be pedagogical resources in their teaching, only Sara *intentionally* utilized

“identity-as-pedagogy,” which added authenticity to her teaching and transformed classroom talk. Implications for TA training programs, translingual teachers, and future researchers studying teacher identities are proposed.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I found this dissertation a living project: although the writing itself comes to an end, I am still keeping in touch with “the characters” in my stories, and continue to be enlightened by their reflections of their personal and professional lives. I am deeply thankful to the three wonderful English teachers and scholars who participated in this study, Ming, Bo, and Sara, for their remarkable generosity, patience and honesty in sharing their stories with me. I found them true role models for me and hopefully many other international graduate students on our journey to become scholars and teachers.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Sandra Silberstein, my advisor and chair of the dissertation committee, who has supported me professionally and personally throughout the graduate school years and especially in completing this project. Sandy has inspired me to the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL, encouraged me to stay, and has always provided timely help and care when I needed it. Even before I had met her, her publication *Reader's Choice* had provided me (and many other EFL students around the world) various means to read and appreciate English texts. Working with her in person at UW has been more pleasant. She has not only taught me the power of language, how to navigate a foreign culture, but also how to succeed in academia and life in general. In her I have not only found an intelligent and leading scholar, but also an interesting and trustworthy friend, and a patient and loving mother. She has led me through difficult times in graduate school and has helped me grow more independent, assertive and confident. Without her I would not have been the person I am today.

I have the most wonderful dissertation committee. I am thankful to Dr. Anis Bawarshi, whose

leadership at the Expository Writing Program has brought me to see the joy of writing pedagogy. I have learned in him the true passion and love for the work that we do, and belief in the changes academics bring to their communities. I am also thankful for his trust and confidence in me in piloting several writing courses for international students. Teaching in the program is one of the first and the most important chapters in my teaching career. I am thankful to Dr. Suhanthie Motha, who helped me find strength as a multilingual, multicultural student and teacher. I thank her “tea sessions” which conversation always put me at comfort. She has made me see my work with heart: and I gradually learned to appreciate the ordinary, the daily, the mundane in our field work, and to become a patient and sensitive qualitative researcher. I am thankful to Dr. Manka Varghese, whose work and teaching has made me interested in exploring teacher identity and teacher development.

I am also thankful for the wonderful professors in the English department that have provided me confidence and opportunity in teaching as a bilingual teacher: Professor John Webster, Elizabeth Simmons-O'Neill and Carrie Matthews. Teaching in the Early Fall Start Program helped me see my value in helping international students transit to the university in the U.S. I will not forget the enlightening classes I had with other professors in the English department and the English Language Program: Professor Candice Rai, George Dillon, Pricilla Allen and Patricia Brenner. I cannot thank enough Kathy Mork, who always helped me navigate graduate school and the department ever since I came to the U.S. Lastly, I appreciate the support from Dr. Paul Aoki when I worked as a Graduate Staff in the Language Learning Center, where I discovered the magic of technology in the classroom. I also miss the friendship I had there with colleagues from all over the world.

I would not have survived graduate school without support from friends. My colleagues in the

English department Norah Fahim, Avram Blum, Hee Seung Kang, Jennifer Zinchuk, Yu-Jung Chang, Traynor Hansen, Sunao Fukunaga, are the most patient and curious listeners for my work, whose words were always enlightening and encouraging. I also thank Ram Prasansak, Adele Zhang, Sasha Yanak, Sara Jones, Peter Gruen, the 2007-2009 MATESOL cohort, and Chinese friends I made in the house I lived on the 60<sup>th</sup> street, whose friendship made the gloomy days in Seattle shining and enjoyable.

I received a lot of support from back home in China too. I thank my Alma Mata, Central China Normal University, and the professors in the English Department there who had taught me what it meant to be an English teacher in the first place, and inspired me to travel this far. I thank my best friends in China, Fenfen and Peng, whose love and care for me was so selfless and timely, wherever they were. I thank my cousin Wei, who has helped me greatly to re-adjust to life back in China, to learn to relax and enjoy life, and to grow stronger. I thank my cutest dog Yueyue, from whom I have learned to enjoy the simplest happiness of life.

Finally, I cannot thank enough to my dearest parents, Ms Beiling Geng and Mr Xiaobian Zheng, whose love for me is so generous and self-sacrificing, no matter who I am and become. As medical doctors and psychology professor, they have provided me the most professional care physically and mentally. Both of them are my role models: my father as a role model of a great teacher, scholar and communicator, and my mom a role model of a strong woman. Without their love and care I would not have learned to appreciate the ups and downs in life with hope and curiosity.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 A personal story

Traveling to the U.S. from China, I struggled to find my “self” culturally as a Chinese woman, and professionally as a legitimate English teacher. Studying in a Ph.D. program in English, I realized that the promising and modern profession “English teacher” as defined in China seems to be marginalized in the U.S., particularly for “nonnative-speaking teachers.” The first reaction from my students in the U.S. tends to be skepticism: “Isn’t she Chinese? Can she teach us English?” Despite majoring in English for eight years, as a “nonnative speaker” my legitimacy as an English teacher can be easily challenged. Nevertheless, unlike most of my friends who change immediately to other professions that are “more appropriate” for Chinese scholars, I learned about the nonnative English speaking teacher (NNEST) movement in the field of English teaching. I have read self-reflections by many outstanding nonnative scholars, on how they combat discriminatory hiring practices and find their identities in the profession. I have also met many supportive mentors who always encourage the unique strengths I bring as a bilingual researcher and teacher. Nevertheless, reimagining myself as a bilingual scholar in the profession of English has been a long process.

Being awarded a TA-ship in teaching College Composition was empowering because I felt I was acknowledged as a promising candidate for teaching English despite being a nonnative speaker. However, I had a deep anxiety that came from the unfamiliarity with this teaching context: College Composition. I heard from more than one fellow international graduate student that they postponed their TA-ship just because they didn’t feel they were ready to teach it. The idea of teaching English

to freshmen students, most of whom were Americans, was simply daunting. Although I had taught before, my previous teaching experience had to do with English language learners, or Americans who wanted to learn Chinese. In both contexts I was teaching languages and culture I was familiar with and was confident in my knowledge. But for an “English Composition class,” what could I, a foreigner, offer to the students who grew up in the U.S. and had spoken English all their lives? Furthermore, how could I teach a class that I had never taken before?

It was through real teaching practice in different types of College Composition classes that I was able to internalize a competent teacher identity. I felt more and more comfortable as I learned more as a graduate student in the discipline and as I learned more about my undergraduate students. The sense of belonging to the classroom was further strengthened by the increasing number of international students at the university, and the continuing efforts at the department to support them: I was able to teach several pilot courses for international students and organize workshops for teachers, where I could draw on my TESOL expertise and bilingual/bicultural knowledge. In doing so I was able to envision a career where teaching Composition became an important source of competence and confidence.

By talking to and observing the other international graduate students of English, I found my experience was not unique. We shared similar struggles initially in envisioning a Composition classroom where we could see beyond our “nonnative/foreign” identity and claim expertise. But we are also different. Our learning experiences in different subdisciplines of English, for instance, provided us with different imaginations of a Composition classroom. How do ITAs of English negotiate their linguistic membership in the profession of English? How do they learn to become

English professionals? How do they succeed in internalizing a professional identity as a Composition teacher? Is their multilingual, multicultural knowledge a pedagogical resource for them?

These burning questions were personal but also meaningful for all ITAs who are developing their professional identities. As Seidman points out, “research, like almost everything else in life, has autobiographical roots” (1998, p.26), this dissertation study devotes itself to understand the linguistic and professional selves of ITAs in College Composition, to explore the multiple, intertwined personal and contextual factors that shape their professional trajectories, and to examine whether and how they utilize their identities as pedagogical resources. My own growth as a scholar and teacher in the profession of English owes so much to these ITAs’ stories and practices, which I believe, will benefit many other ITAs.

## **1.2 Background**

Recently the number of international students in English-speaking universities has grown dramatically. According to the Institute of International Education (2010), among the total of 690,923 international students in the U.S., half are graduate students, many of whom serve as teaching assistants (TAs) in undergraduate classes. At the University of Washington, among all 1420 TAs, nearly 1/6 (220) are international TAs (ITAs), with around 140 new ITAs each year (Center for Instructional Development and Research, 2009). The influx of international students is welcomed by U.S. universities because they have greatly enriched the diversity of U.S. campuses and brought enormous economic capital (Matsuda, 2006); however, when they become ITAs, their multicultural and multilingual background is not often seen as an advantage. Starting in the mid-1980s till today,

students and their parents have complained continuously about ITAs' spoken English, pedagogical and classroom management problems, and even their "foreign appearance" (Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Kaufman & Brownworth, 2006).

In addressing the complaints of the "foreign TA problem," early studies on ITAs (1980s-1990s) predominantly focused on developing programs that could improve ITA's English proficiency and communicative competence (Bailey, 1984). Those programs, usually housed under ESL, tended to use "native-speaker" (NS) proficiency as the target (Hoekje & Williams, 1992). As English has increasingly been used globally and become pluricentric, studies that map varieties of world Englishes (Kachru, 1992) and research into language attitudes (Jenkins, 2006; Lippi-Green, 1997) have challenged the notion of "speech intelligibility" and "teaching effectiveness." Numerous studies have shown that what students believe to be "incomprehensible speech" is based on linguistic and racial prejudice (Rubin, 1991; Motha, 2006). Nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs) in particular, despite their professional training, are marginalized in the profession by the idealization of the "native speaker" as the best teacher of English (Phillipson, 1992; Braine, 2010).

Despite recent advances in ITA program development based on an understanding of linguistic reality and "mutual accommodation" (Nieto, 2004) in intercultural communication, the evolution of ITAs' professional identities remains unexplored. In the field of education, the recent turn to the sociocultural and sociopolitical dimensions of teaching (Kubota, 2001; Norton, 1997; Varghese et al., 2005) has highlighted the importance of understanding teachers' multiple identities in order to understand teaching and learning. Although within TESOL, the hegemonic relations between NS and NNS teachers are under scrutiny, little has been done on ITAs of English in College Composition

classes. College Composition, one of the only courses required for all students, is a site where linguistic diversity becomes particularly salient: it is where literacy and language are most explicitly addressed, it is where literacy is believed to make a difference, and it is where the student population is becoming increasingly diverse (Tardy and Hobmeier, 2010). Compared to other disciplines where the number of international students is particularly high (e.g., Engineering), ITAs in English departments may be much fewer, but the number is still on the rise: during the academic year 2009/10 at University of Washington, one third of new TAs teaching Freshmen Composition were ITAs. However, as novice teachers of College Composition, along with their linguistic and cultural differences, ITAs of English tend to face multiple challenges in positioning themselves as legitimate and competent teachers. On the other hand, their rich translingual, transcultural knowledge may play an important role in their reimagination of their professional selves and provide pedagogical resources.

This dissertation study is an ethnographic case study that seeks to develop a better understanding of the lived experiences of three ITAs working in English Composition classrooms in a public university: that is, their constructions of professional identities as English professionals and Composition teachers in the local context, and the role their translingual identities play in their professional identity construction and teaching practices. In exploring the meaning of “non-native-ness” in the composition ITAs’ professional identity construction, the study contributes to the NNEST movement originated in the research of second language learning and teaching. Since those ITAs’ needs and experiences may share similarities with many novice TAs and especially College Composition TAs, the findings will provide insights and suggestions on the development of

ITA training programs and Composition TA training programs. Furthermore, the study contributes to understanding whether and how ITAs utilize their translingual identities as resources in the increasingly diverse classrooms.

### 1.3 Chapter Overview

This dissertation consists of 7 chapters. This introductory chapter described the purpose and background of the study. In Chapter 2, I first review literature on identity and second language learning/teaching, especially teacher identities. Then I review three strands of literature— NNEST movement, ITA studies and Composition training—in order to identify the gap in studying the professional identity construction and practices of ITAs of College Composition. The research questions are then outlined, followed by the theoretical frameworks that guided the study: Lave and Wenger’s *Community of Practices* and *Imagined Communities*, Morgan’s *Identity as Pedagogy*, and Zimmerman’s *Three Dimensions of Identities in Talk*. I discuss why combining multiple theoretical lenses and methods was the most beneficial for this study. Chapter 3 discusses the methods of inquiry, research context, participants, and the process of data collection and analysis.

Since the professional identities of ITAs consist of at least two identities: that of an English professional and a Composition teacher, Chapters 4 and 5 discuss how they construct these two identities respectively. Chapter 4 responds to the research question: *How do the ITAs learn to become English professionals and what role does a “translingual identity” play in their construction or development of English professional identities?* In this Chapter, I describe case by case how the ITAs learned English, and how they understood and negotiated their linguistic identities after they

came to study in the English PhD program in the U.S. Chapter 5 addresses the research question: *How do they learn to become teachers for College Composition and what role does a “translingual identity” play in their construction or development of Composition teacher identities?* In this Chapter I examine more closely the multiple factors that contributed to the kind of Composition teacher the ITAs became.

Chapter 6 explores the relationship between the ITAs’ translingual identities and their pedagogy. It answers the question: *To what extent and how do the ITAs draw on their translingual identity as pedagogical resources (“identity-as-pedagogy”) in their Composition classrooms?* By using techniques of classroom discourse analysis, I examine the benefits of orienting to “transportable identities,” especially translingual identities for students’ learning and classroom discourse. Chapter 7 summarizes the study and provides implications for TA trainings, ITAs themselves, and future researchers studying translingual teacher identities.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter is an overview of studies on identity in second language learning and teaching. With a focus on teacher's professional identity construction, it stands on three strands of literature that categorize teachers/teacher trainees in different ways: the Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNEST) movement, ITA studies, and teacher training in College Composition. The literature review aims at creating dialogue between disciplines that look at teacher identity construction or teacher development in different ways. It identifies a gap in the current literature studying teacher identity, especially nonnative English speaking teacher identity, and argues for the urgency to study ITAs' professional identity construction and their identity-as-pedagogy. The chapter then introduces the central research questions for this dissertation and delineates a theoretical framework that guides data collection, analyses, and interpretation.

### **2.1 A Review of Research on Identity and Teacher Identity**

#### **2.1.1 Identity and Second Language Learning**

Firth and Wagner's article "On Discourse, Communication, and (Some) Fundamental Concepts in SLA Research" published in *The Modern Language Journal* in 1997 is often identified as the first effort in the social turn in the field of SLA research. At the time, when SLA researchers approached language learning as largely a cognitive and mental process, generally adopting psychological orientations to seek what they considered to be reliable data and replicable findings

(Davis, 1995), Firth and Wagner called for an enhanced awareness of the social and contextual dimensions of language learning (Firth & Wagner, 1997). After ten years, a Focus Issue in *The Modern Language Journal* in 2007 devoted itself to the review of the impact brought by Firth and Wagner's publication. Although the relationship between identity and L2 learning was not Firth and Wagner's primary focus, their publication problematized, for the first time, the narrow view of identity underlying most cognitive studies in SLA. They pointed out the limiting and oversimplified nature of concepts such as "native" and "non-native," arguing that despite of a multitude of social identities, L2 speakers' linguistic competence is often the only identity that really matters to SLA researchers.

This call in the 1990s to open up SLA beyond its roots in linguistics and cognitive psychology (e.g., Lantolf, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995) invited a boom of studies linking identity and SLA. Bonny Norton Peirce's early research (1995, 1997, 2000) among immigrant women in Canada is often seen as the foundation of the contemporary approach to identity and L2 learning. Norton Peirce (1995) criticized SLA research for not having "developed a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context" (p.12). Taking a poststructuralist orientation to identity (Bourdieu, 1977; Weedon, 1987), Norton defines "identity" (or, "subjectivity") as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person perceives a conception of identity that is understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable, social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction" and therefore is "multiple, changing and a site of struggle" (2000, p.5). She noted that when learners invest in learning a language, they do so because

they think knowing the language will offer them desirable identity options in the future.

The general move away from identity in terms of psychological processes towards contextualized social processes (McNamara, 1997) has provided a more complex and nuanced understanding of language learners' lives beyond a "nonnative speaker" identity. Contemporary studies on identity have explored an array of identity categories such as heritage language learner (e.g., Valdes, 2001), multilingual identities (e.g., Rampton, 1995), gendered or sexual identities (e.g., Nelson, 2006; Pavlenko, 2004) and racialized identities (e.g., Michael-Luna, 2008; Motha, 2006) in different contexts: ESL (McKay & Wong, 1996), EFL (e.g., Gao et al., 2002), and study-abroad programs (Jackson, 2008). The complex array of identity positions (age, nationality, ethnicity, class and sexuality) often intersect with one another. These studies have often found that assigned, disempowered identities can lead to learners' isolation from a community and are therefore underproductive to their learning, whereas an empowered and enhanced identity can facilitate learning. They have also repetitively documented that identities are negotiated between individual agency and social structures that constrain identity options available to individuals. They argue that when individuals move across borders of communities (geographic, cultural, linguistic, or social), the individual develops a "third place" (Bhabha, 1994), which foregrounds the positive, productive effects of power (Cummins, 1996; Foucault, 1980, 1982). That is, the instability of discourses and identities gives space for learners to enact their agency in constructing desirable identity options for themselves (Miller, E. R. & Kubota, R., 2012).

Although studies on identity have provided complex understandings of the L2 learning process, one of the common criticisms is that their findings are often too theoretical to be applied to

classroom teaching. This criticism does not do justice to recent identity studies. In Norton's milestone study on immigrant women, she raised pedagogical implications for teachers (2000). Norton used the example of Mai, who didn't find any investment in her ESL class and found it useless, to argue that it's the teacher who didn't care for the complexities of their identities. The teacher should have asked students to examine previous experience critically in light of more recent experiences in Canada, which would be more relevant to the immigrants' negotiated identities and thus more helpful for students' learning.

The teacher's role has been highlighted in recent identity studies: it was found that a teacher's positioning and pedagogy can influence learners' identity construction and investment in learning, and thus it is equally important, if not more, to look at teacher's identity construction (Michael-Luna, 2008, 2009). In both McKay and Wong's study (1996) and Katz and DaSilvalddings' research (2009), when a teacher did not value the minority students' cultural and bilingual ability, this negatively influenced students' investment in developing their bilingual and bicultural identity. Interestingly, in these studies the perceived racial identities of these teachers (being white or an ethnic minority) do not determine whether they valued their students' diverse backgrounds. How to prepare all teachers to value students' multiple identities when the student body is becoming increasingly diverse (Varghese, 2008) is an important question for many schools. This new exigency has led to a new trend of research on teachers' professional identities.

### **2.1.2 Teacher's Professional Identity**

*"You can't put students first if you put teachers last."*

Researchers have pointed out the lack of attention on studying teachers: “[being] concern[ed with] what students are learning tends to assume that the teacher is already self-actualized, already emotionally and affectively prepared, with few personal challenges left to face” (Alsup, 2006, p.xv.) In reality, teachers often find themselves ill-prepared for the job even after training programs and struggling on their own. Research on how teachers learn, teacher’s mental lives, and the social context of schooling has received increasing attention in the field of language teacher education in North America since the 1990s (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). These studies address the lack of research on teacher education in language education, in contrast with excessive discussions regarding classroom teaching methods and techniques (Richards & Nunan, 1990,p. xi). Most of these newer studies put teachers at the center of the process of understanding language teaching, and emphasize the importance of “teacher learning” (Kennedy 1991), “teacher cognition” (Johnson, 1992; Woods, 1998; cited in Varghese 2008) and “teacher knowledge” (Shulman 1986; Tsui, 2003). Researchers that have dealt with “teacher cognition” or “teacher knowledge” rarely mention the concept of “teacher identity.” However, others have pointed out that what teachers know and do is part of their identity work (Miller, 2009). Initial explorations of teacher beliefs and knowledge made it clear that these attributes could not be seen separately but “it was the teacher’s whole identity that was at play in the classroom” (Varghese et al., 2005, p.22).

Language teacher identity is an emerging area of interest in studying teacher education and teacher development. This area of research develops at the same time as the concept of “identity” is gaining increasing acceptance in sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, education and language teaching, and therefore, has shared the same shift to view identity as multiple, situated, and in

conflict. Although there is no coherent definition of a teacher's "professional identity," in general it can be understood as "how teachers learn to teach, how they teach, and who they are as individuals and professionals" (Varghese, 2008,p.287). Central to this concept is how a teacher transitions from a student to *become* a teacher; that is, how they "come to identify themselves as professional teachers" (Kanno&Stuart, 2011, p.236). Developing an "identity" is different from taking a role (Danielewicz, 2001) in that a role is just a public function assigned externally whereas identity "involves inner commitment"(Britzman, 1994) and is more "metacognitive and holistic" (Alsup, 2006) . That is to say, a person can be doing the job of a teacher for a long time but never internalize a professional identity as a teacher (e.g.,Tsui, 2003).

Researchers in this area forefront the importance of facilitating teacher's identity development, because studies have found that the success as a teacher is not determined by how much knowledge she/he has gained from a training program, but "is attached to a sense of professional identity that integrates the intellectual, the emotional, and the physical aspects of the teacher's life as well as taking on the subjectivities of teacher" (Alsup, 2006: 36). Many teachers have quit the profession because they cannot reconcile the conflicts between their perceptions of the culturally accepted professional identity and their personal beliefs. Studies have shown repeatedly that short-term acquisition of teaching methods within a teacher education program has a limited long-term impact; instead, teachers' biographical and schooling experiences, previous apprenticeship of observation (Borg, 2004; Grossman, 1991; Lortie, 1975; cited in Motha, Jain and Tecele, 2011 p.3), national and local discourses, and institutional structures (Clarke, 2008)play a greater role in shaping who they are as teachers.

## **Personal identity, professional identity, claimed identity and assigned identity**

Similar to identity studies on L2 learners, language teacher identity research has also dealt with both teachers' multiple personal identity categories such as race, gender, nationality and etc., as well as how their personal identities intersect with the development of their professional identities (e.g., Alsup, 2006). What has made teacher identity research unique is that a teacher's identity is often a combination, or a mixture, of the personal and the professional (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1991; Danielewicz, 2001). For some teacher candidates, such a merging of identities may be relatively simple because their sense of self is more parallel to what are found to be common expectations of a school teacher: a white, heterosexual, native speaker, and etc. However, for teachers whose personal lives and sense of self is different from a culturally defined professional role, their integration of the personal self with the professional can be a struggle. This conflict, in other studies, is sometimes documented as the conflict between a "claimed identity" (i.e., how teachers self-identify themselves) and an "assigned identity" (i.e., how teachers are structurally positioned).

## **Identity and discourse**

A large number of these studies have highlighted the importance of discourse in identity formation, or using the term of Varghese et al: "identity-in-discourse" (2005). Despite numerous definitions of "discourse," there is not a consensus of what a discourse is. Discourse here is roughly understood as "a pattern of thinking, speaking, behaving and interacting that is socially, cultural and historically constructed and sanctioned by a specific group" (Marsh, 2003, p.9, cited in Clarke, 2008).

Specifically, “identity-in-discourse” studies have looked at what discourses teachers or teacher trainees draw on or take up to construct identities as teachers within an evolving community of practice (e.g., Clarke, 2008). Researchers have often found that teachers’ identity constructions are inscribed by gendered and sociocultural inequities, for instance, “a white native speakerism” (e.g., Simon-Maeda, 2004, p.430): that is, both the ideology in the larger society and the traditional research discourse of linguistic competence associates a competent teacher with a white, native speaker status (Johnson, 1997; Pavlenko, 2003). However, rather than being totally determined by social structures and discourses, these studies also documented the discursive strategies teachers employ to resist undesirable identities, which shows promisingly that “individuals are agentive beings who are constantly in search of new social and linguistics resources” (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004a, p.27).

For instance, Simon-Maeda’s narrative study (2004) of nine female EFL teachers in Japanese higher education found that although the teachers struggled with their gendered, raced, classed, disabled subjectivities, they were also “dialectically engaged in redefining constraining discourses” (p. 428). In practice, these teachers tried to change the ideological status quo by providing their students with alternative perspectives on global and social concerns: for example, Julia actively resisted the racist hiring practices by recruiting non-white, nonnative EFL teachers. Similarly, in a different context, Alsup’s study (2006) of 6 secondary education English student teachers found the most successful teacher candidates were able to employ a transformative “borderland discourse” (from Gee, 1999) in which “there is evidence of contact between disparate personal and professional subjectivities and in which this contact appears to be leading toward the ideological integration of

multiple senses of self.” Alsop suggests that teacher training programs model such “borderland discourse” and encourage teacher candidates to use it. Many other teacher trainers have also identified the use of training programs to cultivate enabling discourses for teacher candidates. For example, by incorporating Cook’s (1992, 1999) concept of multi-competence, Pavlenko found that a new curriculum opened up an alternative imagined community where some teachers are able to see themselves as multicompetent, bilingual speakers instead of as failed native speakers.

These were positive findings of how these teacher participants are able to strategically exercise their agency to combat social inequalities; however, most of these studies were based on interviews or other narrative data that were written by student teachers to their trainers or mentors. The power relation between the researcher and their students may have inevitably led to these positive discursive constructions in the narratives as the students wanted to be seen as succeeding in the program. What these teacher candidates do in their classroom after they exit the program and how their identity development interacts with their teaching practices needs further and more careful exploration.

### **Identity and classroom discourse**

A number of studies have looked at the construction of identities in the classroom. They suggest that identities in classrooms are co-constructed during moment-to-moment interactions with teachers, texts, and classmates (Hawkins, 2005; Norton, 2000; Toohey, 2000). Some have also argued that compared with interview data, where participants are usually performing identity work to academics and are somewhat contrived, classroom discourse is a relatively more natural display of

the ITAs' identity construction in relation to the curriculum and the students and a richer data source for identity work (Hyland, 2012). Work on classroom discourse has looked at particular patterns in classroom talk, such as the Initiation-Response-Feedback/Evaluation (IRF/IRE) pattern (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979), and have discussed how exploitation of such patterns, especially the Feedback/Evaluation part, can create more varieties of interactional types that can improve the quality of language learning.

In these studies, however, "teacher identity" and an "NNEST identity" has mostly been characterized as a given category and remains static. For instance, in Lazaraton's study of the incidental displays of cultural knowledge in NNESTs' discourse in their ESL classrooms (2003), she has found that the NNESTs did not admit "I don't know" and missed opportunities for students to become cultural informants. Although she acknowledged in the end that we should not see a NNEST construct as unitary and unproblematic, the analysis did not consider when an NNEST identity was made relevant and whether the students and teacher had oriented to that identity. Later studies using conversation analysis (CA) techniques, such as Richards (2006), proposed approaches to analysis which take account of the dynamic nature of identity construction and its relationship to the development of ongoing talk. Drawing on Zimmerman's (1998) three aspects of identity (see Theoretical Framework), Richards' analysis of four extracts from ESL/EFL classrooms showed that when an asymmetry of knowledge is involved between the teacher and the student and students know more than the teacher, by orienting to aspects of a transportable identity has the potential of reversing the default teacher-student relationship, thus making classroom conversation possible. The analysis supported a case for teacher self-revelation in language teaching by introducing

transportable identities into the classroom; at the same time, he also acknowledged some teachers' practical objections to this kind of personal involvement. Analyses of classroom discourse have provided powerful means to explore the moment-to-moment emergence of a teacher identity, and especially when orienting to relevant linguistic and cultural identities benefit students' learning.

## **Identity and teaching practice**

Compared to the emerging group of studies dealing with teachers' identity-in-discourse in different contexts, research studies that look at the relationship between teacher's identity development and their teaching practices are relatively fewer. Studies on identity and teaching practices usually draw on sociocultural theory of learning and present teacher identity as "constituted by the practices in relation to a group and the process of individual identification or non-identification with the group" (Varghese et al., 2005, p.39). For instance, through the lens of Situated Learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Kanno and Stuart (2011) followed two novice ESL teachers for a year in order to look at how they became language teachers over time. They found that the teachers' identity development and their changing classroom practice were mutually constitutive; that is, in their own words, "classroom practice helped nurture teacher identities, and emerging identities in turn shaped their practice" (p237). Specifically, the teachers' one-year teaching in different courses helped them identify what aspects of teaching practices were constitutive of their teacher identities and they continued to improve on these areas. At the same time, as they grew more comfortable with their teacher identity, they acted more confidently in class and held students more accountable for their learning.

Researchers drawing on poststructural notions of discourse and identities have pursued the issue a step further. Other than simply looking at how identity and practices are mutually influencing each other, they have explored the transformative potential of a teacher's identity in classroom pedagogy. In acknowledging that teacher's teaching practices are informed by their life histories more than short-term teacher education programs, Morgan (2004) proposed a shift away from "identity and pedagogy" to "identity-as-pedagogy:" that is, a "fully autonomous, self-aware subject is able to choose which aspects of his or her identity are of pedagogical value or to know how his or her identity matched up with a group of students"(2004, p. 173). That is to say, by drawing on identities as pedagogical resources, teachers can perform identity in ways that counteract "image-texts" (Simon, 1995, p. 99), that is, stereotypes of faculty constructed and held by students. This concept opens up ways for teachers who struggle to integrate their personal self with culturally defined professional roles (Alsup, 2006) to transform their marginalized personal identities (e.g. "non-native speakers") into pedagogical resources. Later research has applied Morgan's concept in exploring the potential of the translingual identities of language teachers. Motha, Jain and Tecele (2011), who have looked at the pedagogical potential of "translingual/translinguistic identities," have argued that identity is always pedagogy: if teachers leave identity conflicts unresolved, they may take pedagogical steps to reinforce stereotypes about themselves, but if they use the identities consciously and as a strength, they can strategically construct positive professional identities. Motha et al. have also discussed how to create a space of support for translinguistic teachers to develop their pedagogical practices.

To most researchers that study teacher identity, it seems that they have taken for granted that a

fully developed, internalized teacher identity and its practice will always benefit students' learning. This may not always be the case. Kanno and Stuart's study (2011) showed that a more internalized teacher identity often results in identifying less with the students, and therefore may not always bring changing teaching practices that benefit students (p.246). Another assumption has been that multilingual, multicultural teachers know better how to support students from the same backgrounds. For instance, there is a general call for a more linguistic and culturally diverse faculty population to match the increasingly diverse student body (Tardy & Hobmeier, 2010); the assumption behind it is that these teachers may be more easily seen by their students as role models, and they are more likely to adopt an "identity affirmation" practice, that is, "practices that help students to experience positive and affirming interactions with members of the new culture and language" (Cummins, 1996, 2000). This may not always be the case, either. McKay and Wong's (1996) study shows that a minority teacher can also express a colonialist/racist view and adopt practices that do not support their minority students, as the larger discourses in society shape how they perceive the world despite individual intentions. Therefore, in this dissertation study, I am careful not to draw on these assumptions about teacher identities.

### **2.1.3 Studies on Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs)**

Within the literature on teacher identity, the identities of nonnative English speaking teachers are especially important to explore, because even though the majority of English teachers worldwide are NNESTs (Braine, 2010), they often find themselves faced with discriminatory attitudes and hiring practices that are rooted in a "native speaker fallacy," that is the assumption that "the ideal

teacher of English is a native speaker” (Phillipson, 1992).

The “NS fallacy,” as reinforced by Chomskyan linguistics (1965), is a widely held assumption in SLA that there is a single Anglo-based standard of English held by the so-called “native speakers” (e.g., Quirk, 1985, 1995). Under this fallacy, many SLA scholars used to view a second language (L2) speakers’ competence as lying on an “interlanguage” continuum between their L1 and L2; any differences between their output and standard British or American English were treated as errors caused mainly by L1 interference (Selinker, 1972, 1992). Since the 1980s, an increasing literature that recognizes geographical varieties of English throughout the world, as in the plural “World Englishes” (WE), has challenged the monolingual myth. By describing the diversified use of English in various regions, Kachru and others have pointed out that English is no longer owned just by the so-called “native speakers” of British or American English; English belongs to anyone who uses it (Kachru & Smith, 1985, p.210). They also proved that language variation is a natural phenomenon not only in multilingual communities, but also within monolingual English-speaking contexts (e.g., dialect variations). In many parts of the world where English is seen as one of their own local languages (e.g., India, Singapore) for historical reasons, English has been indigenized with the local norms of use, and with a WE perspective, should be treated as equally legitimate.

The NNEST movement builds on this understanding of English and its users, and has challenged the monolingual bias that views NNESTs as life-long language learners. In addressing the discriminatory hiring practices that favor NSs, early NNEST studies largely drew on surveys in order to gain perceptions of NNESTs from various populations, e.g., NNEST themselves, ESL/EFL students, administrators, MATESOL students, as well as host teachers of NNEST trainees (Braine,

1999; Llurda, 2005; Moussu, 2006; Nemtchinova, 2005). Many teachers' self-reflections seem to show a correlation between one's *perceived* language proficiency and his/her legitimacy as an English teacher. Despite the fact that many NNESTs around the world do need constant improvement on their part, the term *language proficiency* has been problematized. Studies on language attitudes have repetitively shown that what "native speakers" think of as "proficient English" is based on linguistic and racial prejudice (e.g., Lindemann, 2002). Language proficiency is a social construct that may be a reflection of deep cultural, social, and pedagogical differences and biases. It is in fact a mutual responsibility between a speaker and a listener to achieve an effective communication (Kubota, 2001), and one's English proficiency is dependent on the context.

Depending on the teaching contexts, some studies of students' perspectives of English variations (especially accent) and their English teachers did show an attachment to a NS model (British Received Pronunciation or General American), although their preference tends to move towards other varieties of English after exposure to World Englishes (Jin, 2005; Shim, 2002, cited in Jenkins, 2007, p.101; Tang et al., 2010). While students complain about nonnative teachers, they sometimes fail to accurately distinguish nonnative teachers from native speaking teachers (Tweed & Tang, 2008). Many have pointed out that the distinction students draw between NSs and NNSs is based on linguistic and racial prejudice (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Motha, 2006; Rubin, 1992). Students' preference of a NS model shows that the "Standard English" ideology is prevalent worldwide, which may be related to the positive construct of a "native speaker" in EFL/ESL textbooks, popular media, and international conferences, where the keynote speakers are usually white "native speakers" that are from the inner-circle countries (Li & Beckett, 2006; Lippi-Green, 1999).

Numerous studies comparing NESTs and NNESTs have shown that being a native speaker does not guarantee a good English teacher. Faced with initial doubts from students, NNESTs prove to be effective teachers as a result of their professional skills, the multilingual and multicultural resources that they bring, their understanding of their students' learning problems and concerns, and their ability to serve as role models for ESL students (Amin, 2004; Mahboob, 2010; Moussu, 2006; Nemtchinova, 2005; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). As multicompetent teachers (Cook, 1992, 1999), NNESTs have complex cultural identities and can compete effectively in diverse professional settings with NSs (Holliday, 2009): NNESTs can bring to their classroom the asset of “interculturality” — “an awareness and a respect of difference, as well as the socio-affective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others” (Kramsch, 2005, p.553). In the increasingly globalizing world, such intercultural awareness and an openness to negotiate communication strategies (“multidialectal competence”) is an essential skill to have for all teachers, in order to facilitate a diverse classroom (Canagarajah, 2006).

Although the NNEST movements have highlighted the unique advantages NNESTs bring to their classrooms, these studies tend to draw on a static, essentialist approach to identity and a binary opposition between a NNEST and a NEST. This linguistic dichotomy continues to reinforce the stereotype that linguistic membership is the only determining factor of a teacher's professional development. How race, gender, age, class co-construct a teacher's identity remain under-theorized. Huang's year-long dissertation study (2009) on nonnative ESL teachers in secondary schools is one of the first that seeks to provide an alternative to the NEST/NNEST dichotomy. Drawing on a practice theory of identity, Huang's multiple-case qualitative study has found that for the four ESL

teachers studied, the non/native dichotomy is not embodied in how they personalize their teaching roles. Race, gender, familial cultures, and socioeconomic status simultaneously constitute how the teachers construct professional identities. Here race is clearly another frame by which students define who is an NNEST, as she has discovered, “being white allows some teachers to escape their nonnative status, while U.S. racial dynamics can position Asian, native speakers as foreigners.”

### **Literature on women of color in academia**

In fact, the NNEST movement is not the first that addresses the personal and professional lives of marginalized teachers and how they strategically cope with multiple challenges. Not only nonnative professionals in the English teaching field, but many women faculty of color in different disciplines also face similar challenges. In the collection of narratives written by Asian, foreign-born, female scholars in the Western academy “Strangers of the Academy” (Li & Beckett, 2006), authors repeatedly documented these shared difficulties in their teaching career, including “systematic gender and racial discrimination and marginalization within the hierarchy of higher education,” “challenges in constructing positive cultural and professional identities,” “challenges in developing coping strategies to overcome linguistic, cultural, and academic differences and thrive in the academy”(p.3), to name just a few.

Knowing these difficulties and especially students’ biases has contributed to the teachers’ self-perceptions of their professional insecurity, which in turn, may seem to influence their classroom performance negatively. For instance, Amin’s (1997) study of “visible minority” female teachers in an ESL context in Canada points to the influential role of student attitudes on teachers’

self-perceptions. The non-Caucasian teachers in Amin's study believed that their ESL students thought only White people could be native speakers of English, and they were, therefore, "less able teachers," comparing to their White colleagues. Amin (1997,p.581) points out that when students send such messages to their teachers, implicitly or explicitly, "minority teachers are unable to effectively negotiate a teacher identity" and "no matter how qualified they are, [they often] become less effective in facilitating their students' language learning than, perhaps, White teachers." Here it is important to note that the challenges women faculty of color face is not "a personal technical deficiency but a socio-political problem" (Vargas, 2002, p. i; cited Li and Beckett, 2006, p.91). As many self-reflective narratives have powerfully shown, it is "the gendered, racialized and sexualized spaces of academe" that have contributed to the female Asian minority faculty's "marginalization and devaluation and restrict their advancement in every sector" (Li & Beckett, 2006, p.4).

Promisingly, however, these studies have also documented the strategies these teachers develop in dealing with credibility and authority issues while constructing a positive nonnative-speaking faculty identity. For example, in Liang's collective narratives of three Chinese (in Li & Beckett, 2006), nonnative English speaking faculty, these scholars are able to transform their "non-native-ness" from a deficiency to an asset: they drew on their "second language speaking as a privilege" (p.99) and were more empathetic to students' learning difficulties, especially students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Similar to NNEST literature, these scholars' self-narratives have also indicated an asset of "interculturality" (Kramsch, 2005, p.553) that facilitates a diverse classroom.

Almost all of these self-reflective narratives have supported the idea that the teachers are

“more effective in the classroom when building their pedagogy on their nonnative identities rather than following the native speaker norm” (Amin, 2004). Nevertheless, although these authors, who tend to be experienced and reflective teachers, could build on their linguistic identities as pedagogy, novice teachers who are trained in different disciplines may struggle to construct a desirable professional identity by orienting to an NNEST identity.

The NNEST movement as well as literature on women faculty of color has greatly empowered these teachers themselves, and recent years have witnessed many triumphs and greater visibility of these “strangers in the academy.” Nevertheless, discriminatory practices towards them are still prevalent in many parts of the world (Braine, 2010). How to support teachers, especially NNESTs to construct desirable identities and strategically draw on their identity as resource remains theoretical rather than empirical (e.g., Pavlenko, 2003; Sammimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999). Furthermore, despite a few efforts in supporting these teachers in teacher training programs, longitudinal and ethnographic studies that delve into NNESTs’ day-to-day teaching practices and identity formation after they exit the programs are sparse. This dissertation study seeks to address these gaps.

### **Debate over the term “NNEST”**

Lastly, there has long been a debate over the term “NNEST”: supporters of keeping the term suggest that keeping it highlights the discrimination based on the dichotomy, and have concerns that the literature under the umbrella of “NNEST” will be lost if we totally do away with it; opponents, on the other hand, argue that the difference between NS/NNS is a social construct (Braine, 2010; Inbar-Lourie 2001), and to label the teachers by a NS/NNS dichotomy perpetuates the dominance of

the native speaker in the profession. Therefore, in this study, similar to many scholars in World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca, I use the term “translingual/translinguistic teachers” proposed by Motha, Jain, and Teclé (2011) to include teachers “that have undergone the cognitively complex process of developing proficiency in an additional language” (p.4). The term “translingual” reflects more closely the diverse linguistic reality by acknowledging “language as a functional entity where successful use of language in context determines the proficiency of a speaker” (Mahboob, 2010). Drawing on this understanding of context-dependent language use, we view speaking multiple languages as an asset rather than a deficiency and therefore can start to point out the unique contributions NNESTs make to their classes and their profession. The term *translingual* also includes all teachers that speak multiple languages/dialects, no matter what first language they speak, as they all need to construct positive professional identities. Having said that, I also acknowledge the unique challenges foreign-born, minority teachers face. Using the term is a continuing effort to challenge the traditional academic discourse that categorizes teachers by their linguistic membership; but without support from scholars, institutions, and the society, the term may gain negative connotations.

#### **2.1.4 Studies on International Teaching Assistants (ITAs)**

The positive changes brought by the NNEST movement have not been seen, by and large, in ITA training programs. Since the mid-1980s, the increasing number of ITAs in U.S. universities has encountered escalating dissatisfaction for their “spoken English and pedagogical problems” (Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Kaufman & Brownworth, 2006). In addressing the “foreign TA problem” as constructed in undergraduates’ complaints, the early studies (1980s-1990s) on ITAs mostly focused

on developing programs that helped improve ITAs' spoken English proficiency and adaptation to the U.S. academic culture (Bailey, 1984). The early ITA programs were usually housed under ESL, which tends to use "native-speaker" proficiency as the target (Williams, 1992). This native-speaker model, however, often turned out to be an unachievable goal for short-term ITA programs.

Later studies have challenged this model by showing that since ITAs' oral skills cannot be separated from the context in which they are practiced (i.e., the TA role), the "communicative competence" model that takes into account social relationships, language appropriateness, and context, is more appropriate to examine ITAs' teaching effectiveness (Briggs, S. et al, 1997). For example, Hoekje and Williams (1992) have found that it's the lack of planned discourse markers (e.g., *Now, let's look at...; There are three points I want to make*) that has led to in-comprehensibility of ITAs' teaching. Many of those studies on the contextual aspects of ITA training drew on Hymes' ethnography of speaking (1972) and traditions in intercultural communication (Tannen, 2006), and have shifted the focus of ITA training from improving language proficiency to effective teaching practices. This has led to the question of whether ESL educators are capable or responsible to prepare ITAs in a wide range of disciplines, and whether TA training programs should include both ITAs and native-speaker TAs who lack teaching experience (Hoekje & Williams, 1992).

Meanwhile, students' complaints about their ITAs have been examined critically. In language attitude studies, many have found that stereotypes affect listener's behaviors in an intercultural communication (Lindemann, 2002, 2003; Rubin, 1992, 2002, 2009). Rubin and colleagues have found that when listeners mistakenly *believe* they are listening to a nonnative speaker of English

(NNS), they report *hearing* highly accented speech, and their listening comprehension significantly declines. Furthermore, their beliefs in speech intelligibility are associated with race: their comprehension declines when they see an Asian woman instructor compared to a Caucasian, even when both speak the same standard American English (Rubin, 1992). Other studies have shown there is a correlation between what's easiest to understand and the accent that participants prefer, even when some participants fail to identify different accents (Scales et al., 2006). Since complaints about ITAs' English proficiency may be a reflection of deep cultural, social, and pedagogical differences and biases, both the students and the ITAs are equally important to resolving these issues. Although some ITA programs have recently included undergraduates as participants (e.g., Kang, 2012) and have embraced the argument that the "classroom is a dynamic place where quality instruction is largely dependent on mutual interaction between TAs and undergraduates" (Pae, 2001, p.72), whether and how ITAs' identity development are shaped by their students' biases needs further investigation.

In fact, most ITA studies, as they are usually directed under the traditional SLA approach, have not yet been influenced by the positive changes in the field of teacher education. Studies that have explicitly dealt with the ITAs' identity development as teachers and professionals in their fields are sparse. Some NNEST studies that look at teacher trainee's experiences have included participants who are graduate student teachers, and they are thus technically "ITAs"; but these two strands of literature belong to different academic camps and had not been nurturing each other. A few MA thesis and dissertation studies that have explicitly dealt with the population of "ITAs" have documented the challenges ITAs face due to language discrimination from their students and/or the

institution as well as their triumphs in coping with the challenges. In Yamazaki's study (2006), one of her participants, Paula, who worked as a TA teaching her native language – Spanish - had received complaints from undergraduate that her English was “difficult to understand.” Apart from the fact that Paula never used English in teaching Spanish, it turned out that the student did not seem to take responsibility for his own academic success and merely blamed Paula for her non-native-ness. Such a phenomenon has been documented elsewhere, and other scholars (e.g., Plakans, 1997, cited in Yamazki, 2006) have commented that the "foreign TA becomes the easy scapegoat for the unsatisfactory academic performance of an undergraduate student who has not yet reached a level of maturity at which he or she is capable of taking personal responsibility for his or her own failings” (Yamazki, 2006, p.50).

Most ITA studies have made the assumption that undergraduate participants were “native speakers.” With the changing demographics of U.S. universities, this is far from the reality. According to a 2009 U.S. Census, approximately one in five people five years of age and older reported speaking a language other than English at home, compared to one in six in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This increasingly diverse student population may change the ITAs' teaching experience: a recent study at University of Washington shows that in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), where 30% of the students speak English as their second language, ITAs were actually credited for their clarity in verbal communication, compared to domestic TAs (Chang, 2010). In comparing ITAs with American TAs on their personal epistemologies and instructional practices, Seo's dissertation study (2009) has also shown that ITAs are as qualified and competent as US TAs are, and the ITAs' “teacher-centered approaches are well

received by the students who expect explanation, guidance, direction, and reinforcement on the part of their instructors.” How this growing heterogeneity in student population contributes to ITAs’ identity construction and teaching practices is interesting to explore.

### **2.1.5 College Composition and Teacher Training**

Being one of the only required courses for all undergraduates, College Composition is very likely to be the place where students and teacher first encounter and negotiate diversity at the University. College Composition is a particularly interesting site to observe how teachers and students negotiate linguistic diversity as it is where literacy and language are most explicitly addressed and believed to make a difference (Tardy & Hobmeier, 2010). Compared to other disciplines where the number of ITAs is particularly high (e.g., Engineering), ITAs teaching College Composition may be much fewer, but the number is still on the rise: during the academic year 2009-2010, about one third of new TAs teaching First-year Composition at the research site were ITAs (6 out of 20). Another reason why College Composition is an interesting site is because writing seems to be an area where NNESTs are seen as more competent and legitimate compared to other areas (e.g., speaking and pronunciation). In many self-reflective essays written by NNESTs, it is observed that most of these scholars were first granted a TA position in teaching writing when they were graduate students (e.g., You, 2002).

The growing heterogeneity at U.S. universities calls for the need for openness to negotiate divergent discourses and cultural differences. A growing number of studies, therefore, have been devoted to looking at how the College Composition class supports multilingual students, especially

international students (e.g., Canagarajah, 2002, 2006). Nevertheless, very little attention has been paid to their international teaching assistants of English, who may face the most daunting challenge in constructing legitimate teacher identities due to students' biases rooted in a native speaker fallacy. At the same time, if the ITAs of College Composition are enabled to draw on their translingual identity as pedagogy, they may play a key role in addressing the needs of their linguistically diverse students. In fact, scholars in Composition Studies have advocated hiring linguistically diverse faculty when possible to reflect the linguistic diversity of the students (Tardy & Hobmeier, 2010). However, whether and how the ITAs of College Composition draw on their multiple identities and intercultural experience as pedagogical resources remains unexplored. How to support Composition ITAs and value the unique cultural and linguistic differences they bring has only recently received attention in the field of Composition Studies (e.g., Al-Saleh, 2012).

Despite the diverse research areas in the field of College Composition, studies ranging from digital pedagogy to second language writing, only a handful of studies have looked at, if only anecdotally, teachers' self-reflections on their identity negotiation in relation to their students (e.g., Gale, 1997). For instance, Gale, a Chinese-born English Composition instructor in the U.S., has described how her ethnicity became an issue when she started to teach a remedial course for basic writers, mostly African American students. Although such resistance may be due to the students' bias, immaturity, and reluctance to make efforts in learning, Gale's thorough reflection discussed how the race and class of herself and her students could play a role in causing the conflict and confrontation in her class, as well as what to do in responding to such resistance. Similar to the NNEST literature, Gale described herself as a "stranger" and suggested that when we don't share

group membership with others, we use stereotypes to predict others' behavior, which will lead to ineffective communication. In her case, she identified herself as an "immigrant from a different culture but belong[ing] to the middle class because of her education and academic literacy" and her students as "working class young African Americans whose language and identity has long been alienated in the white-dominated society because of their history." Acknowledging her identity could be an issue in her class, Gale changed her communication style and ways of teaching: for example she began to, teach writing conventions in a descriptive way in order to empower students' home languages, build trust between white and black students in group work, and etc. These changes received some positive feedback from her students.

In the field of teacher training in secondary education, there are a handful of influential studies that delved into the teacher trainees' professional identity construction in the context of a mainstream English writing class. Danielewicz (2001) in her book *Teaching selves: Identity, pedagogy, and teacher education* documented the identity development of her six student teachers of English in a secondary education program. She identified the frustration that the student teachers were struggling with in becoming truly teachers instead of simply playing a role, and argued powerfully that the teacher training program that provides techniques that enable students to pass as teachers was not enough to lessen their anxieties about who they were at the moment and how long it would be before they felt they were truly teachers. Another teacher educator, Alsup (2006), has also followed the growth of her six student teachers of English with a focus on "teacher identity discourses," that is, "the kinds of discourse that facilitate professional identity development." Borrowing James Gee's term "borderland" (1999), Alsup identified a kind of "borderland discourse" that facilitated teachers'

identity growth; that is, “discourse in which there is evidence of contact between disparate personal and professional subjectivities and in which this contact appears to be leading toward the ideological integration of multiple senses of self” (p.36). She argued that the more borderland discourse her student teachers use, the greater their likelihood of becoming teachers.

## **2.1.6 Addressing the Research Gap**

Above I have summarized research on teacher identity, NNEST movement, ITA programs and Composition teacher training. Quite a few studies have examined how teacher identities are constructed discursively, followed by relatively fewer studies that have explored the relationship between identity construction and teaching practices. Research on teacher identities, especially minority teachers has highlighted the importance of understanding how teachers themselves learn to become professionals. Nevertheless, the literature has limitations in the following aspects:

1) Theoretically, researchers use competing theoretical frameworks to look at teacher identities, each of which standing by itself has advantages and limitations. As Varghese et al. have pointed out (2005), poststructuralist theories of language teacher identity present identity as constructed through discourse, whereas social theories of language approach language teacher identity as constituted by practices in relation to a group and the process of identification (p.39). Communities of practice and situated learning views learning as a process of identification and becoming, and are extremely useful to look at ITAs’ identity construction as they are still learning to become professionals in their academic program as well as the Composition teacher training program. However, they seem to be lacking in addressing power relations and underlying ideologies within groups, which are important

issues in studying NNESTs. Poststructuralist approaches, on the other hand, help us understand identities as constructed through discourse. However, focusing more on language and the discursive construction of reality only goes so far. To achieve a more nuanced and complex understanding of teacher identity, it is important to combine multiple theoretical framework.

2) As there is a need to incorporate a focus on “identity-in-discourse”- identity that is discursively constructed and “identity-in-practice” - identity that is enacted in practice (Varghese et al., 2005), methodologically, we need approaches that incorporate self-report data about what teachers think and the use of observation records of what teachers do in class. Studies that focus either on interview data or classroom observation alone have not realized “the contradictions that sometimes arose between what the teachers proclaimed about their identities and practices in the interviews, on the one hand, and what actually transpired in class, on the other” (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p.472). Researchers that have combined both data sources have documented this contradiction: for instance, in Duff and Uchida’s (1997) study on teacher’s sociocultural identities and practices, Danny, who claimed himself an avowed feminist, assumed a dominant role in class by telling women what they should aspire to; Carol, who said she was committed to egalitarian relations, resisted the roles of friend to students and taught subjects that were perhaps more of interest to her than to them. In Kanno and Stuart’s (2011) study of novice ESL teachers, Amy appeared to be more confident and in command in her second quarter teaching; however, during interviews she admitted that she did not feel that way, “rather, the authoritative self was an act she put on deliberately for the sake of better classroom management” (p.243). As in teacher education it’s important to incorporate both shared practices in communities as well as the teachers’ “meta-awareness” (Ramanathan, 2001, cited in

Varghese et al, 2005, p.39) of their practices, this dissertation combines both data sources by incorporating how teachers understood themselves and their profession in the interviews as well as what they do in classroom practices. By combining both we can start to prepare teachers towards becoming critical, reflective educators.

3) There hasn't been any research on the professional identity construction of ITAs, especially in the context of the College Composition class. The reason why there isn't much attention paid to teachers themselves in Composition studies may be due to the academic tradition of Composition studies that has focused more on analyzing texts and student writers instead of teachers. While we know quite a bit about language teacher's lives, it is yet remarkable that we know so little about what it means to develop a teacher identity within what is the heart of higher education literacy development: the College Composition class. Although most new teachers of College Composition, usually graduate students in the department of English, have undergone training and may continue to be offered support later on, we don't know yet how the programs facilitate their professional growth especially when the current student population is becoming more diverse. Having rich "translingual" experiences, learning whether and how the ITAs draw on their translingual identity as pedagogical resources will provide insights for TA training programs to enable ITAs to become transformative teachers. In exploring the meaning of "translingual" in the Composition ITAs' identity development, the study will contribute to the NNEST movement that is developing within research on second language learning and teaching. Besides potential contributions to ITA training programs, these ITAs' needs, teaching beliefs, and experiences will likely share similarities with many novice TAs and especially College Composition TAs, and therefore the study will contribute to

Composition programs as well.

## 2.2 Research questions

The study addresses a gap in current literature by studying ITAs' professional identity construction/development. Under the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 1998), developing a professional identity for ITAs entails learning to become a participant in the community of English professionals as well as learning to become a member of a professionalized Composition program. Different ITAs experience a range of participation in the community of Composition teachers: some became assistant directors of the program, some saw their role just as classroom teachers, others left this teaching position if possible. This study looks at the evolution of two professional identities (English professional, which may or may not involve Composition studies) and Composition teacher, and is guided by the following questions:

- 1) How do English department international teaching assistants of College Composition construct or develop their professional identities in this teaching context as well as over time and space?
  - a. How do they learn to become English professionals and what role does a “translingual identity” play in their construction or development of English professional identities?
  - b. How do they learn to become teachers of College Composition, and what role does a “translingual identity” play in their construction or development of Composition teacher identities?
- 2) To what extent and how do the ITAs draw on their translingual identity as pedagogical

resources (“identity-as-pedagogy”) in their Composition classrooms?

## **2.3 Theoretical framework**

Since the notion of learning to become a professional is central to this study, I found these theoretical frameworks particularly useful to look at identity construction and practices: Wenger’s (1998) *Community of Practices and Imagined Communities*, and Morgan’s *Identity as Pedagogy* (2004). I also found Zimmerman’s distinctions between discourse, situated, and transportable identities in talk (1998, 2006) useful as a technique to analyze classroom discourse. Combining multiple theoretical frameworks provides a more nuanced and complex approach to researching professional identities.

### **2.3.1 Communities of Practices and Imagined Communities**

Lave and Wenger’s *Communities of Practices* (1991, 1998) framework makes the link between identity and learning by viewing learning as an identification process, that is, of acquiring an identity. They have defined learning as “a socially situated process by which newcomers gradually move toward fuller participation in a given community's activities, by interacting with more experienced community members” (1991). That is to say, they view learning as belonging to a certain community of practice where participation can take the form of different levels and ways of engagement. The community of practice (COP) is “an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (1991, p. 98). It is defined by three characteristics: mutual engagement, negotiation by

participants, and a sharedness of repertoire.

COP is a useful framework as it considers inherent tensions between structure and agency. Under this framework, individuals do not simply position themselves in a community, there is a dialectic struggle between the learner and the community out of which emerges the learner's position and identity (Engenstrom, 1987). Newcomers move from “legitimate peripheral participation” to “full participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.137) in a COP, but in order to belong to a COP, newcomers must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members, because “only with legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion” (Wenger, 1998, p.101). As Lave and Wenger (1991) pointed out, “Hegemony over resources for learning and alienation from full participation are inherent in the shaping of the legitimacy and peripherality of participation in its historical realization” (p. 42). Different learners may be granted different legitimacy depending on how a given COP organizes social relations of power (see Leki, 2001). To see oneself as a competent member of a COP, one has to develop “situated abilities that a given COP values.” To explain learning through the lens of COP, learners may remain on the periphery for the following reasons: 1) their histories do not justify an investment in the subject, 2) they choose to participate only marginally in the target community, 3) their attempts to participate are rejected by the host community (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). This part of the framework is extremely useful to look at how ITAs are able/not able to exercise their agency to claim legitimacy despite of a “native speaker fallacy” discourse.

A key concept I found useful for this study is the understanding of identity as a “nexus of multi-membership.” As Wenger has pointed out, we do not just belong to one Community of

Practice; we belong to different Communities of Practice at the same time. As different communities define competence differently, multi-membership may involve constant tensions, and our identity emerges as reconciliation of different forms of membership (Wenger, 1998, p.158.) For those within or aspiring to membership in the community of English scholars, the meaning of the discipline “English” varies: ITAs within English are in fact in different subdisciplines: Composition and Rhetoric, Comparative Literature, and Applied Linguistics and TESOL. All these disciplinary communities require different kinds of competence, which may be in conflict with the competence defined in the “community of Composition teachers.” As Wenger pointed out, it is most challenging when the learners move from one community to another that defines conflicting forms of individuality and competence. Particularly useful for this study will be to examine the process through which the ITAs form their identity as a nexus of multi-membership.

Direct involvement with COP and investment in tangible and concrete relationships is not the only way we belong to a community, however. Another important source of community is “Imagination.” The term “Imagined Communities” was coined by Benedict Anderson (1991) to describe an “imagined political community” in his discussion of nationhood (p.6). These communities are “imagined” because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p.6). Later scholars have applied and expanded Anderson’s view of imagined communities in the studies of language teaching and learning (e.g., Norton, 2000; Silberstein, 2003; Wenger, 1998). For instance, through the lens of imagined communities and national fantasies Silberstein (2003) has argued for a critical approach to culture in language

classrooms, because unlike the typical positivist understanding of culture as nationally distinct entities, “the perspective of imagined communities suggests dynamic national identities, constantly in flux.” In order to examine how learner’s affiliation with imagined communities might affect their learning trajectories, Kanno and Norton (2003) extended Wenger’s immediately accessible COP to “groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination.” For instance, Norton’s work on L2 learners’ nonparticipation (2000, 2001) in classrooms has shown that L2 learners tend to be most uncomfortable when they are speaking to people they see as members, or gatekeepers, of the community they are trying to enter. Therefore, she argues that if teachers do not acknowledge the imagined communities of the learners, we may impact their learning trajectories in negative ways. In teacher education, the education function of imagined communities underscores the need to offer desirable identity options that would allow teachers to imagine themselves as legitimate and competent members of professional communities (e.g., in Pavlenko, 2003).

Viewing learning as a process of identification, COP has proved to be a useful framework for studying teacher’s situated identities, for it highlights the way teachers learn to become a member of their profession. This also speaks to the recent attempts to reinvigorate the knowledge base in teacher education from knowledge generated by university researchers (in the form of distinct modules such as methodology, SLA, etc.), to teachers’ own ways of theorizing about their practice (Johnson & Goettsch, 2000, cited in Morgan, 2002). The proposed study will be one of the first to explore the usefulness of this framework in the context of ITA professional development in college composition classes. Because English ITAs reside concurrently in parts of different communities and their

imagined communities may change over time, the theoretical constructs of COP and imagined communities can provide insights into the complex, nonlinear process of the English ITAs' professional growth and identification. It is also hoped that the framework will provide insights in designing TA training programs as evolving COP.

### **2.3.2 Identity as pedagogy (IaP)**

Different from previous NNEST studies that draw largely on self-perceptions, the proposed study will be one of the first to look at how the ITAs' life stories and beliefs have shaped their actual teaching practices. Morgan's *Identity as Pedagogy* (2004) is particularly useful in exploring this relationship between self-perceptions and teaching practices. Morgan has pointed out the pedagogical potential of a teacher's personal identity, that is, a "fully autonomous, self-aware subject, is able to choose which aspects of his or her identity are of pedagogical value or to know how his or her identity matched up with a group of students." In acknowledging that teacher's teaching practices are informed by their life histories more than short-term teacher education programs, Morgan calls for a move from "teacher identity and pedagogy" to a notion of "teacher identity as pedagogy" (p.178). That is to say, by drawing on identities as pedagogical resources, teachers can perform identity in ways that counteract "image-texts" (Simon, 1995, p. 99), that is, stereotypes of faculty constructed and held by students. For instance, in his own ESL class, Morgan performs his identity in ways that challenged his Chinese students' stereotypes of what role "a white American husband" plays in a family. He argues that his "identity as pedagogy" brings about gradual changes in the identity options students imagine for themselves, which benefits their learning (p.182).

TESOL teacher educators (Motha et al., 2011) have recently applied Morgan's IaP in studying translingual teachers. It is proposed that if teacher candidates, especially language teachers with "translinguistic experiences" (Motha et al., 2011), are supported to deliberately think about how identities are constructed through discourse, they can deploy their multi-competence (Cook, 2001) intentionally to enhance teaching and learning experience. To Motha et al (2011), identity is always pedagogy, and what matters is how to create a space of support for translinguistic teachers to draw on their linguistic identities as a resource to develop their pedagogical practices.

Although the literature in teacher education has reported repeatedly that "teachers' lives, prior beliefs, identities beyond the classroom (Varghese et al., 2005), experiences as students (Crow, 1987, Johnson, 1994), and previous apprenticeships of observation (Borg, 2004; Grossman, 1991; Lortie, 1975) play a greater role in shaping who we are as teachers" (cited in Motha et al, 2011), TA programs, due to their short-term nature, have only recently started to address the issues of identities and stereotypes between teachers and students (e.g., Yamazaki, 2006). In a linguistic and culturally diverse classroom as in College Composition, where language issues are explicitly addressed, ITAs of English are well-positioned to challenge the "image-texts" their students hold towards them. Since the "foreign TA problem" was constructed firstly and largely in students' complaints, Morgan's framework provides insights into how the ITAs can negotiate their "image-texts" and how their teaching practices counteract stereotypes. Nevertheless, I am aware that the participants in the current study encounter different challenges in using their "identity as pedagogy" than Morgan did. As Morgan himself noted, his privilege as a white Anglo Male, who speaks a dominant variety of English, has given him more authenticity and expertise, which the ITAs

in this study who are young, international students of color, may never enjoy.

### **2.3.3 Situated and transportable identities in talk**

Morgan was not the first to propose that teachers draw on their personal identities as pedagogical resources. A different line of research on classroom discourse drawing on conversational analysis techniques has also documented the positive effects teacher's personal involvement brings to the class. Richards (2006) has argued: "introducing transportable identity in the language classroom--engaging as 'nature lover' or 'supporter of the English cricket team,' for example--and encouraging students to do the same may have the power to transform the sort of interaction that takes place in the classroom" (p.71). He drew on Zimmerman's three dimensions of identity in talk, which I also found useful and adapted the framework here to analyze classroom discourse for this study.

Instead of treating the categories of "teacher" and "student" as analytically given, Zimmerman proposes three aspects of identity that are relevant to the analysis of interaction. Richards summarized them nicely (2006, p.60):

“1 *Discourse identity*. This is 'integral to the moment-by-moment organization of the interaction' (Zimmerman 1998: 90) and relates to the sequential development of the talk as participants engage as 'current speaker', 'listener', 'questioner', 'challenger', 'repair initiator', etc.

2 *Situated identity*. This is relevant to particular situations and refers to the contribution of participants 'engaging in activities and respecting agendas that display an orientation to, and an alignment of, particular identity sets' (Zimmerman 1998: 90). In the classroom, relevant situated identities would be teacher and student.

3 *Transportable identity*. This is perhaps the least predictable of the categories, referring as it does to 'identities that are usually visible, that is, assignable or claimable on the basis of physical or culturally based insignia which furnish the intersubjective basis for categorization'(Zimmerman 1998:91).”

The distinctions between discourse identity, situated identity and transportable identity deepen and enrich our understanding of classroom talk and the emergence of a teacher identity. For the ITAs whose translingual, transnational identities are potential resources, this framework provides me an analytical lens to explore when and how they bring in these transportable identities into classroom talk as pedagogical resources (“IaP”), and how that orientation is received by their students.

To sum up, COP and Imagined Communities provide frameworks to view identity as *learning to become* participants in certain communities, whereas IaP compliments these by exploring how the ITAs transform their translingual identities into pedagogical resources. However, simply relying on the IaP framework, which builds upon self-reflections, lacks an analytical tool to look at how teachers’ multiple identities emerge in actual classroom discourse. Zimmerman’s “three dimensions of identities in talk” helps to address this gap.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHDOLOGY**

Despite numerous survey studies on the attitudes and perceptions of NNESTs, there has been a call for longitudinal ethnographic studies as they may “reveal the apprenticeship of NNESTs, the day-to-day challenges they face as users and teachers of English, their relationship with English beyond the classroom, their professional growth and their place in society” (Braine, 2010). In order to explore the nuances of ITAs’ day-to-day practices and experiences, therefore, this study employs an ethnographic case study approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Stake, 1995). By exploring multiple cases over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, this approach strives to provide a holistic understanding of ITAs’ teacher identity evolution. This chapter first provides a general overview of qualitative research methods, including ethnography and case study as I found them useful for this study; then it will illustrate the procedure by which I carried out the research and analyzed the collected data.

### **3.1 Qualitative research methods**

Fundamentally different from quantitative studies that tend to see reality as objective and measurable, qualitative researchers view reality as socially constructed (Davis, 1995). Because qualitative researchers believe human experience is mediated by interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), their essential concern is the meaning people make out of their lives rather than the experience by itself. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define it, qualitative research is a “situated activity...(where) researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or

interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” Because of their subjective view of reality, qualitative researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry, and stress “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Geertz, 2000; Glesne, 2006). Furthermore, in contrast to quantitative research, which separates phenomena into variables, qualitative research brings all the parts together to understand reality holistically (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative research methods have been brought into the study of language education under the social turn in SLA studies, by scholars trained in applied linguistics, anthropology, and education (Davis, 1995). Since language is viewed as “a dynamic set of resources used for the accomplishment and interpretation of social actions, which can be constantly negotiated and renegotiated through interaction” (Firth and Wagner, 1997), researchers have been interested in the ways qualitative research methods can explore the social, cultural aspects of language learning and use. In studying language teachers, there has also been a shift from mainly psychometric methods that look at teacher behaviors and student outcomes to an ethnographic approach that emphasizes more of a holistic understanding of teacher’s lives inside and outside of the classroom (Varghese, 2008). As Varghese has pointed out, this change in research methods addresses Freeman and Johnson’s (1998) call for a reconceptualization of the knowledge base of language teacher education that places teachers at the center of the process of understanding teaching (Varghese, 2008, p.289). Ethnographic methods in particular, have gained popularity in addressing this need to understand language teachers in natural, diverse settings.

### **3.1.1 Ethnography**

Ethnography for the study of human life grows out of a sociological and anthropological tradition. Its initial agenda was to study the “exotic other” by the white observer living in a foreign culture (Denzin& Lincoln, 2005), while later approaches tend to take an emic (insider) perspective and re-examine the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Ethnography is a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007). As an epistemological process (Street, 2010), ethnography involves extended observations of the group, mostly through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants.

In L2 teaching and learning, where culture is discussed widely, what ethnography provides is profound. Different from the positivist paradigm that sees culture as unified, cohesive, fixed, and static, ethnography treats culture as heterogeneous, conflictual, negotiated, and evolving; culture is produced in collectives of differing magnitude, whether educational institutions, student communities, classrooms, or activity groups. Furthermore, increasingly, ethnography sees descriptions of culture as shaped by the interests of the researcher, the sponsors of the project, the audience, and the dominant communities (Chapelle& Duff, 2003). For instance, instead of assuming L2 students’ silence as a result of their home culture (e.g., “Chinese culture is more reticent”), ethnographic study taps into the socially constructed nature of silence. In studying the academic discourse socialization experiences of 6 female Japanese graduate students, Morita’s ethnographic

case study found that the students' silence has different meanings in different courses. Gender, age, course content, language, institutional status and the role of the instructor all contributed to the feeling of alienation from the students' perspective, which lead to their silences (Morita, 2004, 2006). Similarly, in my study, I take a situated view to culture and identity. Instead of setting aside a priori notions of group membership and identity, I am more interested in how a particular person comes to claim a certain identity over the other multiple identities. Ethnography then helps me look beyond the ITA's pre-defined identities such as NNEST or "foreign TAs" with its potential in capturing the ITAs' multiple, contradictory, and dynamic identities, which are context-dependent.

### **3.1.2 Ethnographic case study**

Although anthropologists are trying to establish the epistemological framing of ethnography, ethnography has been taken up by many disciplines and in different ways. Green and Bloome (1997) developed a typology consisting of 3 principal categories of ethnography: "Doing ethnography," "Adopting an ethnographic perspective," and "Using ethnographic tools." Instead of "doing ethnography" that involves "the framing, conceptualizing, interpreting, writing and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group," in order to concentrate on "narrower fields of interest" (Parthasarathy, 2008), this study is "using ethnographic tools:" i.e., "methods and techniques usually associated with fieldwork but are not guided by cultural theories about the social life of group members" (Green & Bloome, 1997, p.183; cited in Street, 2010, p.204). Therefore, instead of a full-fledged "ethnography," this study is an ethnographic multiple-case-study where I understand everyday teaching and learning as complex social

happenings by observing the multiple meanings participants make of their lives in particular contexts. In employing an ethnographic multiple-case-study approach, I aimed to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the three ITAs' lived experiences and perspectives (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). In keeping with a tradition in qualitative research, I aimed to develop "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 2000) of the individual cases, while also seeking to identify general themes and significant patterns among them (Yin, 2009). Although the participants in my study may share commonalities in their teaching experience, the purpose of the study is not to make generalizations of all Composition ITAs. Instead, I strive to understand "the particularity and complexity of the single cases...within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995). Through triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and viewpoints, the study documented the participants' learning process in understanding themselves as competent writing teachers over an extended period of time.

### **3.2 The Research Site and the Freshmen Composition Class**

The study was taken in a public university in the Northwest U.S., which I name Evergreen University (EU) in the dissertation. The university promotes diversity as it states on its official website: "At the Evergreen University, diversity is integral to excellence. The University values and honors diverse experiences and perspectives, strives to create welcoming and respectful learning environments, and promotes access, opportunity, and justice for all."

The student population in Evergreen University has been one of the most diverse in the country, especially in terms of international student enrollment in recent years. In the fall of 2009, international students made up 7.7% of the total student population (Kang, 2011). In the fall of 2011,

international students comprised 18% of its incoming Freshman class (*New York Times*, 2012). The top source countries have been China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Korea, Taiwan, India, and Canada (International Student Services, 2008).

The diversity is also reflected in the appointment of Teaching Assistants. In Autumn Quarter 2008, 1569 graduate students were appointed TAs (Chang, 2010). Approximately 15% of the graduate student TAs are international Teaching Assistants, with around 140 new ITAs each year (Center for Instructional Development and Research, 2009). These TAs are assigned to a variety of roles including grading, holding office hours, tutoring, leading quiz sections, conducting labs, and lecturing. The TAs in College Composition in the English Department have full responsibility as instructors who play all the roles listed above.

Compared to other disciplines where the number of international students is particularly high (e.g., Engineering), ITAs in English departments may be much fewer, but the number is still on the rise: during the academic year 2009-2010, about one-third of new TAs teaching First-year Composition at EU were ITAs (6 out of 20). I have chosen to study the translingual identity and pedagogy of ITAs in College Composition, not only because I am a Composition ITA myself, but also because College Composition is a site where linguistic diversity becomes particularly salient: It is where literacy and language are most explicitly addressed and believed to make a difference (Tardy & Hobmeier, 2010). Being one of the only required courses for all undergraduates, College Composition is very likely to be the place where students and teacher first encounter and negotiate diversity at the University. Furthermore, how to support Composition ITAs and value the unique cultural and linguistic differences they bring has only recently received attention in the field of

Composition studies (Al-Saleh, 2012).

All 100-level writing courses in the Expository Writing Program (EWP) at Evergreen University are designed to help students meet a shared set of outcomes in preparing them for writing in a variety of academic contexts. More than 4,000 students each year take one of the EWP courses, each of which satisfies the University's "C" course or composition requirement. Most students take English 131, Composition: Exposition, where they read academic discourse from a variety of disciplines and develop a portfolio of writing that reflects an ability to write papers with complex claims that matter in academic contexts (EWP website). EWP courses are taught almost exclusively by Teaching Assistants in the English Department (and occasionally from the Comparative Literature Department) and faculty in the graduate program track in Language and Rhetoric. All instructors in the program have taken the graduate course English 567: Composition Pedagogy, as well as participated in two weeks of intensive orientation (EWP website).

Teaching assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis to outstanding graduate students either at the time they are admitted to the program or as they pursue their degrees. The TAs are appointed through a rigorous selection process: They are evaluated based on their academic potential and quality of an application package which includes a personal statement and a writing sample. In contrast to American TAs, ITAs need to satisfy a spoken English proficiency requirement. According to the EWP website, "Teaching Assistantship applicants who are not native speakers of English must submit as part of their application a score of 290 or better on the Test of Spoken English (TSE) or the Evergreen University-administered SPEAK Test" (EWP website, 2011). It's worth noting that the English Department has a higher requirement for ITAs' English proficiency

than any other department on campus: The Graduate School at the Evergreen University mandates that ITAs can be “cleared to teach” by taking English speaking tests (230 on the SPEAK test administered at the University, 26 on the TOEFL iBT Speaking, 7.0 on the IELTS Speaking, 70 on the Versant English Test, 55 on the TSE, or passing English 105, a course for ITAs offered by the International English Language Programs) (Memo 15, 2011). Although all three participants in my study (including a native bilingual speaker of English and Arabic) needed to take the Spoken English Test, the test seems to play different roles in the professional development of the ITAs of English in the study (see Chapter 5 and 6) and it seems to make the non-native identity particularly salient for them.

### **3.3 Participants**

I recruited four ITAs (including myself) who have full responsibility as instructors for teaching College Composition courses (English 131) in the Expository Writing Program at Evergreen University. Given the nature of ethnographic case study, four participants seem to be an ideal number of subjects for an in-depth analysis, and it has been a typical number for other ethnographic studies (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996). I used “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 2001) in selecting participants to include different perspectives: despite all being born and growing up outside of the U.S., the participants vary in age, gender, home departments, professional expertise, and teaching experience. To follow case study traditions, instead of looking for typical cases I was more interested in telling cases, since “particularization not generalization” is more important for a case study (Stake, 1995). After the IRB proposal was approved, I emailed four ITAs teaching Composition in Spring

quarter 2011 and three agreed to participate (see Appendix). I have given pseudonyms for all participants, and here is a chart of their background information.

*Table 1 Participants' Profiles*

	<b>Bo Li</b>	<b>Ming Wang</b>	<b>Sara</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	Female	Female
<b>Hometown</b>	P.R. China	P.R. China US Greencard holder	Born in England, grew up in Egypt since two, Dual citizen-ship
<b>Native languages</b>	Shanghainese, Mandarin Chinese	Kunming dialect Mandarin Chinese	Arabic, English
<b>Experience with English</b>	Studied English in school since 12 in China	Studied English in school since 12 in China	Born to a British mother; grew up bilingually
<b>Age</b>	28	40	26
<b>Length of stay in the U.S.</b>	7 years	14 years	3 years
<b>Academic Program at UW</b>	Comparative literature	English (Language and Rhetoric)	English (Language and Rhetoric with a concentration on TESOL)
<b>Year in the academic program</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> year	5 <sup>th</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
<b>Previous educational experience</b>	BA in English (a public university in China) MA in Comparative Literature (a public university in the U.S.)	BS in Chemistry, MS in Organic Chemistry (a public university in China) PhD in Bio-organic Chemistry (EU) MA in English (EU)	BA in English (a university in Egypt) MATESOL (EU)
<b>Previous teaching experience</b>	TA in linguistics, mythology, world literature, comparative literature (U.S.) Taught ENGL131 for three quarters.	Lecturer and Assistant professor in Chemistry (China) TA in Chemistry (U.S.) Taught ENGL131 for 6 quarters, ENGL281 for 2 quarters	Lecturer of English (Egypt) Student teacher and TA of ESL (U.S.) Taught ENGL 131 for one quarter

I initially included myself in the study not only because I myself fit the profile, but also because as an ITA myself struggling in establishing valid teacher identities, I hoped this study would provide me insights and strategies to become a better Composition teacher. However, as Palmer noted, “teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability” (1998: 29), and the same vulnerability applies to doing ethnographic research (Behar, 1996). As a young, female, non-native speaker and self-conscious TA who is still fairly new to the teaching profession, especially Composition teaching, I found myself became increasingly anxious when recording and analyzing my own classroom. I dropped myself out of the study the second week of the quarter, since the study made the NNEST identity overly salient for me, which confined my teaching performance and potentially my ability to carry out the research.

After I recruited the TAs, I came to their first day of classes and explained my study to the students. During the second week, I asked the students for consent, since their interactions with the teachers were part of the study. For Sara’s class, which I was unable to attend that week, I asked her to pass out the consent forms; this, however, may have influenced the number of students who agreed to participate. The number of the students who agreed to participate varied from class to class: in Bo’s class, 4 agreed to conference observations, 9 for sharing writing, 7 for filling out surveys; for Ming, 17 for conference observations, 18 for writing, 11 for surveys; and for Sara, only 3 agreed for all three activities.

### **3.4 The researcher and the researched**

As a Composition ITA and an English PhD student myself, I had easy access to the other TA colleagues. However, being this close to my participants I am also keenly aware of how my

familiarity with this context may bring bias that can affect how I interpret their experiences. I tried many ways to reduce my possible presuppositions: e.g., I recruited ITAs that I had met before but who were not close friends since “interviewers and participant need to have enough distance from each other that they take nothing for granted” (Seidman, 1991. p. 36). Having said this, my relationship with the participants grew day by day as I spent more time observing their classes and listening to their stories. It was challenging yet rewarding to see myself as researcher, colleague, friend, mentor and mentee with my participants in different contexts.

I met Bo Li during the new Writing Program TA orientation. Overwhelmed by the seemingly enormous responsibility and challenge of being a new English Composition TA, meeting another Chinese ITA certainly put me more at ease. At the first sight, Bo seemed to be very calm and an experienced graduate student. We briefly introduced ourselves in Chinese, and he wrote his Chinese name for me. His handwriting was very neat/handsome a sign of good literacy training in Chinese. There were six international TAs in our year, and we became good friends: we often sat together during trainings and the Composition Pedagogy class, we chatted about our struggles in teaching, many unique to ITAs, and we went out for *dim sum* at the end of the first quarter. Bo’s experience with teaching Composition seemed the most interesting to me, not only because we both share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but also because he seemed to struggle a lot in teaching this class for the first time. I asked Bo to join my study a year later, and he didn’t hesitate to participate. Having almost no teacher training experience, Bo seemed to see my study as an opportunity to look closely and reflect on his teaching beliefs and practices. Coming from the Comparative Literature Department, he also saw me as an insider of the English Department, whose

approach to writing pedagogy differs from his own.

Sara and I went through the MATESOL program together. I was introduced to her during the MATESOL student potluck party, and we found many similarities between us: international students, same age, taught English in EFL settings, and both interested in researching non-native English teacher identity. We were also different in that although she was an international student from Egypt, she is a native speaker of English and Arabic due to her British mother. But because of the commonalities, we collaborated for teaching, coursework, and academic conferences. As a graduate student a year after me, Sara sometimes asked me for advice regarding the PhD process. Specializing in TESOL in the English Department, we often compared composition teaching with teaching ESL/EFL. I invited her to join my study not only because her bilingual identity as half Egyptian-half British fits the profile of my study, but also because she was already an experienced, reflective English teacher before she taught the Composition class. It's the most comfortable talking with her for this study.

I heard about Ming not long after I entered the MATESOL Program. Her experience of getting an English PhD after finishing a PhD in Chemistry as a Chinese person interested me, because it seems to be against the pragmatic choice most Chinese international students tend to make in terms of their professional career in the U.S. (e.g., electing natural sciences and engineering). I often met Ming in the graduate lounge or the TA's printer room in the department. Dressed professionally, she was always in haste. Although we had only met several times in the department, I had heard Ming talking about receiving student threat after she caught him plagiarizing. I asked Ming to join my study at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year she was teaching Composition. She was happy to do so and was the

most helpful in providing me access to her class and materials. Because she has been at Evergreen University for many years, during our conversations she was more of a mentor than a participant, offering me her experience and advice in dealing with challenges in teaching and the PhD program.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

In order to understand and interpret holistically how the ITAs make sense of their teaching, I have used multiple data sources including interviews, video-recordings, and observations. While a full-fledged ethnography typically demands long-term engagement in the field, ethnographic case studies can be conducted over shorter spans of time to explore narrower fields of interest (Parthasarathy, 2008). Since a typical complete unit of a College Composition class is one quarter, I conducted all the main interviews and class observations during Spring Quarter, 2011. All my participants were teaching “English131- Composition: Expository Writing” that quarter. During Fall Quarter, 2012, I revisited these ITAs either by a follow-up interview meeting or by email, to clarify anything that seemed to be unclear in the data. In Fall Quarter, 2012, Sara taught English 109 - Introduction to Writing, Lin went back to his home department to teach Comparative Literature, and Ming received a scholarship.

#### Video-recording and Observations of the ITAs’ Composition classes:

During Spring Quarter 2011 when the ITAs were teaching English 131, I observed the ITAs’ classes once a week. I took a “peripheral membership role” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380) as a participant observer; that is, I established membership in the classroom by attending every week and

observing and interacting with the students, but I did not participate in class activities (also see Morita, 2004, p. 579). The primary goal of these observations was to capture the teaching practices of the ITAs, and how they constructed their teacher identities in their teaching and interaction with their students. During the class observations, the teaching practices of the ITAs were video-recorded. The purpose of video recording was to allow classroom discourse analysis and to understand how the teachers established their teacher identity physically and verbally. The camera was only focused on the teacher in order to protect the identities of the students. For Sara, since our teaching schedule conflicted with each other, I only observed her class in person twice: the first class and one during the quarter. For the rest of the classes Sara agreed to videotape her classes on her own once a week, and she picked the dates when she felt the most comfortable videotaping herself. I watched the recordings of her class right after she videotaped it, and I asked follow-up questions during our interviews.

#### Audio-recording and observation of conferences

During the quarter when they are teaching English 131, TAs are required to have two sets of 20-minute one-on-one conferences with the students about their papers. As Black pointed out, the conference is a different activity system from the classroom (Black, 1998). Teachers may position themselves differently, or draw on different strategies for constructing their identities during conferences than in the classroom. In order to look in detail at how the ITAs construct their identities during one-on-one interactions with their students, including both native-speaker students and non-native-speaker students, I observed and audio recorded conferences between the ITAs and

students who agreed to participate in the study.

### Interviews

To understand human behavior means to understand the use of language (Heron, 1981, cited in Seidman, 1998, p.2), since people have the ability to symbolize and understand their experience through language (Vygostky, 1987). Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior (Seidman, 1998). When people tell stories, they select details of their experience and make meaning through their experience (Connelly & Cladinin, 1990). In order to gain insights into ITAs' teaching experiences, the ITAs were interviewed multiple times throughout the quarter that they were teaching: at the beginning, middle, and end of the quarter, as well as after the weekly class observation and after the two rounds of conferences with students. The design of the interview questions generally follow Seidman's proposal of the three-interview series (1998:11): "focused life history," "details of experience" and "reflection of meaning." Specifically, the initial interview asked for the participants' life experience, experience with English learning and teaching, and their teaching philosophy in general. The second interview focused on the TAs' experience both in this specific teaching context and other contexts. The last interview asked for how the TAs understood what they do in class in relation to their identity construction. The last interview was developed from Choi's interview questions from his dissertation (2007) on NNESTs to cater for this research context. The purpose of the after-class and after-conference interviews was to see how TAs interpreted what they did in class and in their conferences. Although I had a set of prepared interview questions for

each interview (see Appendix A), most of them were open-ended questions, and I asked follow-up questions when interesting points emerged. Each of the three big interviews lasted for about one hour and a half to two hours, and the after-class interview varied from 20 minutes to one hour.

Although “interviewers and participants are never equal” (Seidman, 1998, p.92), I still strived for equity in the interview process. For instance, instead of in my office, we usually met in non-academic settings for interviews: coffee houses, the graduate student lounge, etc. Interview over lunch or coffee usually became the most interesting sites, where our talk transformed from a semi-guided interview into more of a naturally flowing conversation. These interviews became the most important data source when the participants shared the most intimate stories. Since some of the initial interviews were done before the TA’s first class in Spring, it was clear from the data that the TAs became more reflective of the concepts brought up by the interviews; in a way the interviews themselves have contributed to the ITAs’ identity formation (see Chapter Five).

All the interviews I had with the Chinese TAs were done in Chinese, except when we code-switched into English. I interviewed Sara in English since that is our common language. I chose to speak to the Chinese TAs in Chinese because speaking our native language as an insider of the Chinese communities would elicit the most reliable responses, as the TAs were more comfortable and could use the concepts that were encoded in their native language (Creswell, 2007). Also, it would have seemed artificial were we to speak English, something we would not have done in most other contexts. From my own experience and the findings of the study, speaking English compared to speaking the native language is more of a performing act. I did find that speaking Chinese greatly

contributed to our communication and understanding of our meaning-making process; however, how to translate these words for an English-speaking audience while maintaining the original meaning as held true to the participants turned out to be a struggle. Striving to maintain the original meaning in the data, I transcribed, coded, and analyzed all the interviews without translating them into English. Then I translated excerpts and key concepts which I needed to use in this report. In order to keep the original flavor of the ITAs' language, I maintained most of their sentence structures so that the translations captured how the participants actually spoke. Then I showed my translation to the participants, and asked them to correct any misinterpretations I had.

### Survey

In order to further explain the ITAs' self-perceptions in relation to their students, an end-of-quarter survey was given to the students in the ITAs' classes who agreed to participate, asking about their perceptions of the class and their ITAs. Since the surveys were emailed to the students while they were leaving for the summer break, only 3 students from each TA's class replied. Despite the limited number of surveys, the students' responses reflected how they took up the ITAs' construction of the class and themselves.

### Document collection

For a triangulation of data, the following documents were also collected: the ITAs' course syllabus and calendar, class handouts on days of observation, all writing assignment directions and prompts, emails between the ITAs and their students, and ITAs' teaching evaluations. Students who were interested in participating in this study were asked to include their written work with the ITAs'

feedback.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Following the practices of qualitative research, the data analysis was inductive; that is, rather than testing existing theory, the research built abstractions and concepts (Merriam, 1998). After the data collection process was over, video-recordings, documents, and interviews were transcribed and coded. When transcribing, I read transcriptions of interviews and did initial open coding to generate a list of topics. The related topics were then grouped into emergent categories that corresponded to my research questions. Since I had multiple cases, I first identified issues and wrote a profile within each case and then looked for common themes that transcended the cases (Yin, 2003). Writing up profiles for each case early has helped me greatly to understand the data and make connections among different sources. To increase validity, I employed “member check” (Creswell, 2007); that is, I asked my participants to comment on the accuracy and fairness of my interpretation.

Some have also argued that compared with interview data where participants are usually performing identity work to academics and are somewhat contrived, classroom discourse is a relatively more natural display of the ITAs’ identity construction in relation to the curriculum and the students and a richer data source for identity work (Hyland, 2012). To analyze classroom discourse, similar to some traditions of analysis such as conversational analysis (e.g., Kasper, 2004; Sacks, 1992; Sacks, et al., 1974; Silberstein, 2011; Tannen, 1984), instead of treating the identities of “teacher,” “student,” “NNEST” as analytically given, I looked at how identities are the products of the interactional work of participants. Drawing on Richards’ (2006) adaptation of Zimmerman’s

(1998) distinction between situated and transportable identities in talk, I analyze episodes from the three ITAs' classrooms where transportable identities were evoked. In doing so I strived to find if orienting to transportable identities, especially a translingual, transnational identity, provided pedagogical potential for the ITAs' classroom.

## CHAPTER 4: “TRANSLINGUAL” ITAS: LEARNING TO BECOME PROFESSIONALS OF ENGLISH

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first research question: “How do English Department international teaching assistants of College Composition learn to become English professionals and what role does a ‘translingual identity’ play in their construction of professional identities?” Despite a shared “ITA” identity, what this label means to these three participants varies dramatically: Although they all speak more than one language fluently and can be labeled as “translingual” according to the literature (Motha et al., 2011, p.4), they have constructed different linguistic identities due to their biological, familial and educational experience, teaching experience, and contrasting language ideologies in their home country and the host university.

This chapter focuses on the role a “translingual identity” plays in the ITAs’ construction of professional identities in the field of English. The meaning of their linguistic identity is related to how they negotiate their professional identity and competence in their academic disciplinary communities of English scholars. While Sara, who was born to a British mom and grew up speaking English and Arabic, sees, her translingual identity as an advantage, the other two Chinese-born ITAs, who learned English in school, see an “ESL person identity” as more prominent in the local context. After a brief introduction of the ITAs’ profile, I discuss case by case how the ITAs negotiate their translingual identities in their academic disciplinary communities, and the strategies they developed to construct positive identities as professionals of English.

## 4.2 Introducing the Participants

As some scholars have pointed out (Chang & Kanno, 2011), “language dependent” disciplines such as English may affect nonnative-speaking students’ challenges in academia compare to “language independent” discipline such as Chemistry. In the discipline of English, where native or near-native English proficiency is often assumed, NNES students may have more difficulties claiming their legitimate membership in the field. A brief look at the current statistics of international students’ enrollment by field of study suggests where most of them reside. According to *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* (2012), during 2011-2012, only 2.1% of international students enroll in the study fields of Humanities in the U.S., versus 21.8% in Business and Management, and 45.1% in Engineering and Sciences. Different from the majority of international students, who choose “language-independent” fields, the English ITAs in my study are all brave to face the seemingly daunting challenge to become PhD students in English in this English-dominant country. To all of them, the study of English, be it rhetoric, literature, or pedagogy, is their true love and passion.

### 4.2.1 Ming Wang: An “Extraordinary” Woman

Ming was born and grew up in West China. Wearing a short bob haircut and dark-colored outfit, Ming always looked an energetic and experienced professional. In the eyes of many Chinese, however, Ming was a “strange” person. As she described in the interview, she was “more or less crazy in others’ eyes” or in a positive term, “extraordinary”(与众不同, Ming, 1st interview,

04/05/2011). In her early 40s, unlike many mainland Chinese who chose to marry and/or live with their families, Ming lives independently in her studio apartment in the city of Evergreen. Furthermore, Ming's old friends of her age in China now have all become successful and important members in the local community, such as vice mayor in a neighboring city of her hometown. Ming, on the other hand, is still a student. Ming thinks others would see her as strange mostly because she has been picking up degrees from the Sciences to Humanities for half of her life.

After Ming received her Bachelor's degree in Chemistry and Master's in Organic Chemistry from a public university in her hometown in the 1980s and 90s, she became a faculty member in the Chemistry Department there and came to the Evergreen University in 1997 as a visiting scholar. Later she stayed in the Chemistry program at Evergreen and received her doctorate in 2005. Then she made a "crazy" change in her academic career: She applied for the PhD program in Language and Rhetoric Track in the English Department. This change seemed to most people a waste of time and a difficult investment. Ming had to explain why she did it to many people, and she said to me "I was just very curious." Ming had always loved language and literature. She liked to read novels and literary critics, and had taken several Chinese literature classes in college, but she just had never thought of making a living out of this interest. Interestingly, she found a career in English when she was preparing to become a faculty member in Chemistry in the U.S. At that time, her PhD advisor told her that she had to improve her writing in English in order to survive in the field: "your future career is dependent on writing." After taking English classes one after another, Ming realized she could pursue a career here by her beloved academic activity: teaching, as she said in the interview: "In the field of Chemistry, you can't survive by just teaching. You have to do research. But in

English, you can have a career just by teaching.”

By the time I conducted this study, Ming had been in the PhD program of English for 5 years and had certainly been successful academically: she was nominated for teaching awards and was the only recipient of an interdisciplinary dissertation writing fellowship at the Evergreen University. She had taught English 131 for 6 quarters and English 281 for 2 quarters at Evergreen. She was confident in herself as a composition teacher and evaluated herself as “an effective teacher.” From my observation, her class was always very engaging, full of student-teacher interaction, and joyful laughter. Students also saw her as competent, as their descriptions of her in the end-of-quarter survey were generous:

“excellent,” “superb,” “amazing,” “wonderful,” “helpful,” “approachable,” “confident,” “effective,” and “knowledgeable” (Student survey). For future plans, she said she wanted to find a faculty position in a research university in the U.S., where she could teach and research at the same time. She didn’t plan to go back to China because there isn’t an academic community where she could further develop her research area on the rhetoric of science, as she put it, “there lacks such an intellectual conversation.”

#### **4.2.2 Bo Li: A “Modern Recluse” (隱者)**

Bo Li was born and grew up in the cosmopolitan city Shanghai in the early 1980s, to a family that has a self-employed business. As a young child, Bo was thirsty for knowledge, and had always been a good student. He succeeded through the competitive College Entrance Exam and got into one of the top universities in China. Since English had always been his strong subject, Bo majored in

English in college and had developed his passion for English poetry since then. He was also attracted by the beauty of Chinese literature through its English translation. In order to further his passion for literature, right after college Bo came to a PhD program in Comparative Literature in a major state university on the West Coast of the U.S., but decided to change to Evergreen University after he earned a Master's. He said he was not ready to start writing his dissertation by then, and starting another PhD program gave him more time (Bo, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 03/25/2011).

By the time I conducted this study, Bo had been in the Comparative Literature program for 5 years and in the U.S. for 7 years. He had been a grader and led class discussions for various literature courses in the Comparative Literature Department, and had taught English 131 for 3 quarters and Comparative Literature 240 (Writing about Literature) for 2 quarters. From our conversations, interviews, and observations, it strikes me that Bo was cynical towards many issues: the education system, the field of English in the U.S., the decline of the Chinese language, and especially the social approach to writing pedagogy promoted in the Writing program he was teaching in. I was first intimidated and almost felt offended by his seemingly high self-esteem; however, gradually I learned to see the wisdom in his sarcasm. His young students thought he was sometimes “condescending” (End-of-quarter survey). This may be due to the fact that neither I nor his students are in his field, or at the same level of his sophisticated understanding of life and literature. Bo reads extensively and writes in English exceptionally well, as seen from his designed assignments and other written documents. While Bo's literature class was very well received by his students, his Composition class, on the other hand, had not been evaluated highly. Students mostly complained about the level of difficulty they had to deal with, and Bo, on the other hand, still seemed to be uncomfortable playing

the role of a Composition teacher.

Bo's original plan was to return to China and introduce what he had learned about Western culture to the Chinese people. However, the longer he stayed in the U.S., the more he felt that he had drifted away from his home country. In fall quarter 2010 his wife got admitted to Evergreen and joined him from China. By the time of writing they had just had a baby daughter. Bo was writing up his dissertation and preparing to go on the job market in the U.S. When asked how he would position himself in the profession when looking for jobs, he said half-jokingly that he wanted to be a "modern recluse." As a scholar and critic of Romantic literature, he explained what he meant by citing the ancient Chinese poet (as he always did in our interviews) Li Bai's (李白 701-762 AD, China) *Bring in the Wine* (Jiang Jin Jiu 将进酒) from Tang Dynasty: "All sages in history were solitary, except those drinkers who left their glory" (古来圣贤皆寂寞，惟有饮者留其名). Explained in modern terms, he said he was just "trying to be an academic and earn a living."

### **4.2.3 Sara: A Translingual TESOL Professional**

Born to a British mother and an Egyptian father in England, and had grown up in Egypt through an English-medium education, Sara was seen by many as a bilingual speaker of English and Arabic. Because English was her strong pursuit, she majored in English in the Foreign Language Department in a University in Cairo. After graduating from college and working as an English teacher for 2 years, Sara came to the States with her Egyptian husband, who had gotten a job offer at a major technical company in Evergreen city. At the same time, she also got admitted to the MATESOL Program at Evergreen University. I met Sara not long after she entered the MATESOL Program, where I was a

year ahead of her. At the time of this research, Sara had graduated from the program and was at the end of her first year in the PhD program.

As international students and among the few PhD students graduated from the MATESOL Program, Sara and I got along really well. I enjoyed the interviews with her the most, and most of the time it felt like an after-class support session, where both of us were sharing our struggles and successes in teaching. The interviews, therefore, sometimes went on for hours since both of us were reflective and had similar concerns, such as how to support multilingual writers. Her class was the most interesting for me to observe, as it also centered on the theme of multilingualism and identity. Before teaching English 131, Sara was already an experienced EFL/ESL teacher. She had taught academic English skills at a private university in Egypt for two years after she graduated from college, and when she was in the MATESOL, she had taught ESL to international students in the (ESL) English Language Program. Having a strong passion and commitment to teaching, Sara always seemed comfortable in her class and less formal than the other ITAs. In fact, her young appearance sometimes made her mingle with her college-age students. By the time of the study it was only her second quarter teaching English 131, and Sara was still trying to find ways to improve her teaching. Having high expectations of herself as a teacher, she didn't want to be "just any English 131 TA." She felt she could be more creative and made the class more worthwhile. At that stage, she thought "something is missing" in her teaching of Composition.

Sara's goal in life was to establish a non-government organization which could help train public school teachers in Egypt. She acknowledged that it was hard to work with government employees, but she was pursuing a PhD in studying teacher education, especially local Egyptian teachers, in

order to gain more knowledge and credibility to be taken seriously. At the time of writing, Sara had become the newly-created ELL Consultant for the Writing Program, as part of the efforts the department was bringing together to support the increasing number of international students. Although her new-born baby daughter had slowed down her work, she was still doing an impressive job as an ESL specialist in the department while working towards her life goal of becoming a teacher educator.

### **4.3 Linguistic Identity: “ESL Person,” Chinese, or Translingual?**

Linguistic identity will vary depending on the national and disciplinary context. Like many have observed before me (e.g., Kang, 2011), an “ESL” identity is often stigmatized and marginalized in English-speaking countries (Harklau 2007; Kanno, 2003; Mackay and Wong, 1996), whereas in a country where English is not the dominant language and the proficiency of using English is seen as a strength, students who are still learning English often see their ESL status positively, as being a novice with potential (Gao, Ying, Yuan and Yan, 2005; Kanno, 2003). Besides national contexts, others have also found that language competence as cultural capital does not have the same value across different disciplines and may not always be critical to students’ academic success (Chang & Kanno, 2011). In my study, I have found both the changing of national contexts and disciplinary contexts influenced how the ITAs define their linguistic identity and how they approach the issue of language and literacy as English teachers. This section discusses the academic background and English learning experience of the ITAs, followed by how they make sense of their linguistic and cultural identities in becoming a professional in their respective subfields of English.

## **4.3.1 Ming Wang: I am an “ESL Person” but a Competent English Professional**

### **4.3.1.1 Learning English as a Second Language**

Like many Chinese people who speak both their hometown dialect and the official Chinese language, Mandarin, Ming grew up speaking the Kun Ming dialect and Mandarin as her native languages. After the Cultural Revolution which had interrupted the education and economy of the country, Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door Policy in the late 1970s reopened China to foreign investment and advanced Western science and technology. Since then, English has become a vital medium for those Chinese who desire to participate in global affairs, and has been a mandatory subject from elementary school (You, 2010). In this historical context, where English was gaining more importance in China, Ming started learning English in school at age 12 and then just “followed the educational path.” Ming saw English being her “second language” as a biological fact. She carried with her a sense of English’s possibilities.

Ming acknowledged that her English, especially spoken English, needed improvement when she first came to the U.S., and she invested a lot in improving it. She told me that several classes in the English Department helped her the most. Before being granted a TA-ship because she hadn’t passed the SPEAK test, she took English 105: English for International TAs. Ming also took two quarters of a spoken English workshop offered by the Speech and Hearing Science Department. She used the term *ESL* the very first time when she described the class: “the workshop is a kind of research project for those graduate students who are studying like ESL [students]” (Ming, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 4/5/2011,

p.3).At this time, Ming still saw her “ESL” status as a novice with potential, and she volunteered to take the workshop twice. Ming found the workshop especially useful as they met one-on-one, twice a week, to work on pronunciation, intonation, and grammar.

A brief look at the website of the Speech and Hearing Science Department gave me the impression of a hospital: The researchers trained as “pathologists” treat failure in communications as “disorders” in their “clinics.” Below is a description of their service from the departmental website:

Our research and our courses address the fundamental aspects of communication—hearing, speech, and language—as well as the causes and treatment of disorders such as childhood speech sound disorders, aphasia, stuttering, voice disorders, and hearing loss. We operate the UW Speech and Hearing Clinic, a clinical training facility that is integral to our department and serves those affected by communication disorders within our community.

Although the website doesn’t explicitly address ESL students as having speech disorders, from Ming’s description I could imagine a workshop that targeted a “native-like” English pronunciation for second language speakers. It treated variations as problems, as Ming said “they corrected you any time” (Ming, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 4/5/2011, p.3). Although it is now difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop, taking these English courses made Ming aware at the beginning of her career that what is defined as good oral English proficiency entails a native-like pronunciation. Even today, after several years studying in the English Department, Ming was still not satisfied with her spoken English. However she also realized that although she may speak more fluently after much practice, she could not get rid of her “accent.” Workshops Ming took in her early days in the U.S. did not consider the deep social, political, and cultural factors that play into cross-cultural communication

(Kang, O., 2012; Pae, 2001), and didn't teach Ming how to deal with students' complaints towards her "accent" when she became a teacher.

Besides spoken English, Ming improved her academic English writing skills in the English Department. In fact, the very reason that Ming transferred from Chemistry to English was because her advisor reminded her that academic English writing skills would be essential to her future success. After many good efforts in taking English classes from 100 level to 800 level, today Ming excels in her academic English writing ability, and she is very confident in it. Culturally, Ming also seemed knowledgeable about American history and literature: she was comfortable making references to important political events in American history, movies and TV shows in the Composition class she taught. Ming said she learned about American culture mostly by watching TV. She was being modest; having a strong passion and rigorous training in the English graduate program, she probably knew more about American history and literature than many young Americans today.

Ming uses English mostly for academic purposes; it is the language she was trained in in the U.S. and the language she practiced teaching with here in the U.S. This became apparent during our interviews conducted in Chinese. Although we found it more comfortable to communicate in Chinese, we code-switched to English when we were making references to the classes we teach (e.g., "drop a class," "register," "class website," "seminar," "argument"). Based on the publication list on her CV, Ming is a good writer in both Chinese and English and can write academically in both languages. Yet, Ming did not identify herself as bilingual or bicultural. Being in the U.S. for 14 years now and having already become a permanent resident in the U.S., she identified herself as a

“Chinese” in the interviews with me. She misses home in China and goes back to visit her family in China every summer. At Evergreen city she hung out mostly with Chinese friends, most of whom she knew through her PhD life in the Chemistry Department. She now had fewer Chinese friends after she had become an English PhD student, for there weren’t many Chinese in the department, and she didn’t want to join Chinese churches for networking like most overseas Chinese do.

#### **4.3.1.2 “ESL Person” Identity in Learning in the Department of English**

When Ming transferred departments from Chemistry to English, she started to find a limiting “ESL person” identity. Ming had a sense of being an outsider when entering the English program: not only was she seen as a non-English major (i.e., “scientist”), but also an “ESL person.” This “ESL person” label was deeply rooted in how Ming identified herself in the profession of English and had a limiting effect on her construction of a valid English teacher identity later. In fact, even before I asked Ming about her linguistic identities, Ming brought up the term “ESL person” and used it frequently in our interviews.

Ming pointed out the different demographics in Chemistry versus English and how that influenced her identity. In the Chemistry Department, the demographics were very diverse: there were German, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese students and faculty, whereas in English, most of the students are Americans or native English speakers. She found that she was “apparently a Chinese” (last interview, p10.) and a minority in the English Department. Ming sensed a “subtle prejudice” in the English program: often her knowledge about English language and literature was not considered as legitimate because she was not seen as from an English-speaking culture. She contrasted this to her experience in the Chemistry Department: “In Chemistry, no one will say ‘How do you know?

You are a Chinese!’ Everyone is treated the same; Chinese students are in fact doing better because they are more diligent with their research” (last interview, p.11). Ming also found that she was often seen as an “ESL student” in her graduate courses in the English program, especially when “you have used a wrong word in class, or had some problem with a certain pronunciation, you will hear giggles or see others exchange their looks”(last interview, p.11).

Ming’s assigned identity as an “ESL person” in the department of English has had a major influence on her professional trajectory. She has dropped her proposed dissertation focus from English Irony to the Rhetoric of Science. She believed found that as a nonnative English speaker in an English-speaking country, no one would buy her argument on English use of irony. It was her PhD advisor who helped her decide on the current dissertation focus. He told her because of her background in Chemistry, she would have a say in the rhetoric of science: “you are from that field and you know it well.” Ming was grateful to her advisor because this decision has anchored her in the field; in this way her academic credentials and expertise in science would stand out more than her “nonnative” identity and give her more legitimacy. The focus on science has also become a source of confidence for Ming when she designed her Composition class. As she said, no matter what topic her students choose to write about, she would know more or less about the topic itself. This is perhaps why her students saw her as “knowledgeable,” and some identified her as a “scientist” (Student Survey). Having passed all benchmark steps towards her PhD degree in English (“all but dissertation”), at the time of the interviews, Ming had become an old-timer in the community, yet because of her other disciplinary expertise Ming saw herself as different from the other graduate students and faculty in the department who study English literature, rhetoric, or pedagogy. She felt

she was outside of these “loops” formed by these shared interests.

#### **4.3.1.2 “ESL Person” Identity in Teaching: Accent, Nationality, and Race**

Although Ming had already been a successful teacher of Chemistry in China, Ming’s teaching experience in the U.S. was also shadowed by this “ESL person” identity. Ming associated her “ESL identity” with a perceived “accent.” She was made aware that her “accent” was an issue based on the teaching evaluations for a Chemistry class she taught at Evergreen University. She told me a comment made by a student that she “would remember for her whole life”: “Chemistry is hard enough, and Ming’s accent makes it even harder” (Ming, last interview, 06/04/2011, p16.). Ming admitted that it was a difficult class, but what upset her was that this was from a student who was absent for many classes. Ming thought this was “honestly her problem.” Another open challenge was when Ming started teaching in the English Department; she came across a comment on the Rate-my-Professor website: “Watch out, she is from Chemistry Department, and couldn’t even speak English, don’t take her class”(Ming, last interview, 06/04/2011, p17.) Ming thought this was a personal attack and unfair comment, so she sent this link to students and asked them to write their own evaluations. Interestingly, she found the comment disappeared not long after, maybe deleted by the student who wrote it.

As a frequent visitor to Ming’s class, I never found her having problems explaining herself or that her accent got in the way of getting her meaning across. In fact, I found her quite eloquent and an effective communicator, as she used clear “discourse markers” (see Hoekje & Williams, 1992)

and rhetorical questions to check in with her students. Later in the interview, Ming told me she has developed many remedial strategies to make up for her “accent,” such as using PowerPoint that has key concepts written out. She said this would help with “mutual adjustment,” meaning that while she was making efforts, the students would also learn to understand her. Nevertheless, her young undergraduates sometimes didn’t take this responsibility and wrote their complaints at the only opportunity they had to provide direct criticism: the teaching evaluations. This construct of the “foreign TA’s accent problem” in students’ narratives has been found repeatedly in studies of ITAs who teach a young student body (e.g., Yamazaki, 2006; Fitch & Morgan, 2003). Scholars have commented that the “foreign TA becomes the easy scapegoat for the unsatisfactory academic performance of an undergraduate student who has not yet reached a level of maturity at which he or she is capable of taking personal responsibility for his or her own failings” (Yamazki, p.50). And in this case, an “accent” became the source of blame.

Not only from American undergraduates, Ming’s NNEST identity was also made salient to her by hearing why international students, especially Chinese, chose her class. Ming’s Chinese name seemed to have attracted a lot of international students, especially Chinese students to her class. One quarter in 2010 almost half of her class were second language speakers. Unlike most NNEST literature that praised NNEST’s “role model effect” that benefits their language students (e.g., Nemtchinova, 2005; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999), Ming had been uncomfortable with why the ESL students liked to pick her class: they assumed a NNEST’s class would be easier. One time a Chinese student who took her English 281 told her that he had taken

English 131 from a native-speaker American teacher because he thought he could learn more about “authentic English.” But he only got 2.9 in that class. He told Ming that was why he had taken her class this time, implying a NNEST would have a lower standard and thus would give him a higher grade. Ming was offended but thought it was understandable because the student was immature.

Ming also understood that her perceived NNEST identity is associated with race, especially to “yellow-skinned teachers” (黄种人 *huangzhong ren*) who speak with an “accent.” Studies in Language Attitudes have found repeatedly that students’ perception of ITA’s accented-ness is related to ITA’s perceived ethnicity (Rubin, 1992). In the field of TESOL, studies on teacher education and racial identities also document that professionals of color are unjustifiably often perceived as less legitimate teachers (e.g., Motha, 2006). Compared with the other two ITAs, Ming told me the most number of narratives out of her teaching lives, many of which she understood as stories of racism. Having taught English 131 many times, Ming still had “5-10% resistant students” in every class, and some expressed their prejudice more directly than the others. The worst time, Ming had a student calling her an “ugly fat oriental feminist bitch” through emails and even threatened to rape her if she reported his act of plagiarism to the department.

Ming acknowledged the diversity and open-minded attitudes of the Evergreen city and said that the situation might be a lot worse in other cities where the demographics are more “white.” However these experiences encountering resistance and complaints from students affects the ITAs’ emotions and made them self-conscious of a “nonnative identity.” These verbal or written complaints about ITAs from students are not the teachers’ personal problems as they reflect the prejudice and inequities that already exist in the society. As NNEST literature reveals, teachers’ identity

constructions are inscribed by gendered and sociocultural inequities (e.g., in Simon-Maeda, 2004), and in this case for Ming, “a white native speakerism”(p.430).

#### **4.3.1.3. Negotiating NNEST Identity**

Compared to the other two ITAs, this “ESL person” identity seems to be most salient in Ming’s professional life in the U.S. However, as studies on teacher identities have shown, rather than being totally determined by social structures and discourses, teachers are “agentive beings who are constantly in search of new social and linguistic resources” to resist undesirable identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004a, p.27). Ming has found many ways to negotiate the NNEST label and see herself as a competent English teacher despite of it.

Although Ming said most of those experiences were “painful,” she told me these stories in a humorous tone. It seems to me that even though an NNEST identity has been limiting in terms of her professional choices and establishing a valid teacher identity, Ming has developed a positive mentality in negotiating this label and developing strategies to deal with it. Ming’s positive outlook in times of adversity may have come from her experience practicing sports. Ming was part of her schools’ athlete teams from elementary school to college. As Ming said, sports had taught her that “everyone has their limitations; no matter how hard you try, there will be people who are blessed with more talents.” Therefore she learned to see failure as common in life, and to treat victory as a bonus (Ming, last interview, 06/04/2011).

Based on her experience studying with native speakers in both undergraduate and graduate-level English classes in the U.S., Ming acknowledged that native English speakers have advantages in this

field because of their intuitions in the use of English. She also found that as a nonnative English speaker, she had to work harder; for instance, it took a lot more time and energy for her to read and comment on students' papers. Besides, she said she could improve her spoken English, but she would never be able to get rid of her accent (Ming, last interview, 06/04/2011, p18). Despite these issues related to accent and nonnativeness, she strongly believed she was a competent writing teacher, and her competence had nothing to do with whether she was a native or nonnative speaker.

Her confidence in her teaching competence came from several sources. First, she designed the course theme around the social effects of science, and her PhD in Chemistry had granted her "extra confidence" in teaching this topic. Second, she said she was not teaching spoken English, but English academic writing which she was strong at. Third, she said 90% of her teaching evaluations were very positive and that's what she should focus on: students said the class was intellectually stimulating and she could see an improvement in students' confidence in teacher's knowledge as she taught more. Fourth, Ming's PhD advisor had been a great mentor and support for her. She was once telling her advisor that she was concerned about her accent, and he said, "Don't worry about it. If you are a real intelligent scholar, it's not that you need to understand others, it's the others who should try to understand you." Ming first found it would be "kind of arrogant" for her to say this; but on second thought she found it "provided another perspective." Ming explained how she understood his comment now: "If you are a native speaker, so what? You still have to have valuable things to offer so that others will try to understand you. But at the same time, I think my advisor was also trying to tell me, you'd better be real knowledgeable first so that others would listen." (Ming, last interview, 06/04/2011, p19).

Ming thought students' "concerns" of ITAs were "reasonable." She used an analogy of imagining an American teacher teaching Chinese poetry in China: "of course the students would have concerns." Ming pointed out that the native speaker fallacy was a deeply rooted social phenomenon, not someone's personal fault (Ming, first interview, 04/05/2011, p.14). To deal with this "social prejudice," she learned "not to take discrimination personal," but to "talk professionally from the very beginning" (Ming, first interview, 04/05/2011, p.9). For instance, if she could not understand what the students were saying, she would not be shy to ask them to rephrase, because she thought "native speakers misunderstand each other as well."

At the time of writing, a year after the study was carried out, Ming was having difficulty finding a faculty position in the Rhetoric of Science. She realized that her NNEST identity could be an issue during the mock interview held by her own department to prepare graduate students for the job market. A professor of literature told her explicitly, even when there were many Chinese students in U.S. universities now, in an English department, people still want to think about whether they want to hire a Chinese to teach "*those* Chinese students." Ming realized at that time, that her future "was not very bright." Then she experienced the prejudice on her own in the real search: since Ming's hearing was not very good, if she couldn't respond immediately during phone interviews, she believed she was seen as an "ESL person." She was also disappointed that a school that needed someone that fit exactly her professional background didn't hire her and she thought that's because she was a NNEST. Although Ming saw clearly the disadvantage of nonnative speakers in competing with native speakers for jobs in the U.S., she was still hopeful that she would find her ideal job in the future because of her professionalism.

## **4.3.2 Bo Li: a Disillusioned Chinese Scholar in the West**

### **4.3.2.1 Learning English as an English Major in China**

Born in the early 1980s, Bo grew up speaking Shanghainese and Mandarin. Compared to the decade when Ming was in school, China has quickly moved from a controlled economy to a market economy and a series of educational reforms have taken place to serve its needs. English is no longer just a tool for acquiring science and technology, but “an indispensable means of flourishing in the various forms of transnational capitalism” (You, 2010, p.136). Educated in the center of this transnational capitalism – Shanghai, Bo was exposed to English when he was in grade five in school. However, he was not satisfied with the quality of his English teachers due to their low English proficiency, and said his improvement with English was delayed because of that.

Bo acknowledged that his English improved the most when he majored in English at college, where “every class was taught in English, although not by foreign teachers” (Bo, first interview, 3/25/2011). He said he learned English mostly through reading. Bo developed his passion for poetry in the university where he was attracted by the aesthetic effects of English poems. At that time, he started to use the faculty’s library to fulfill his thirst for reading, and loved to hunt for books whenever possible. He also became the chief editor for an English journal, *The 20s* (“Er Shi Nian Hua” - “二十年华”), in his department (Interview, 06/01/2011, p35-36). Because of his passion for reading literature, he considered his writing and reading ability in English stronger than listening and speaking. In fact, Bo also speaks well. He speaks very thoughtfully and rather formally, as he himself mentioned, people used to think he was trained in the U.K. because of his formal use of English.

Bo aligned himself with the subfield of English literature, and especially with 19<sup>th</sup>- century Romanticism. As a student studying romantic poets, he believes in the aesthetic effects of language. Two poems he read when he was a junior student in college made him fall in love with the beauty of poetry: *Li Sao* 离骚(*The Sorrow of Parting*) by the ancient Chinese poet Qu Yuan 屈原, and *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. He found it a pity that his department in his University has changed its tradition from studying English literature to linguistics, and there were only four professors of literature. His approach to text was influenced by the dean of the department, a famous professor of lexicology. The professor was not trained in the West, but as a Chinese-English dictionary maker he had an extraordinary knowledge of English vocabulary. Bo respected him because “he is a conscientious and responsible Chinese scholar.” He used two Chinese set-phrases to describe him: he “stays aloof from the material world (“chaoran wuwai 超然物外”),”and is “brave and responsible for his actions(“ganzuo ganwei 敢做敢为”)” (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011).

As a dictionary maker and editor, professor Lu was picky about the accuracy of language. As Bo described, Lu always looked for grammar details such as the use of the article *the* or the inflection *-s*. Bo was influenced by this language attitude. He holds a “conservative” view towards language variation and diversity; that is, he believes in traditional standards for American and British English, and sees other varieties and changes as language decline. He emphasizes preciseness in one’s language use, including second language speakers. He associated one’s language use with morality. For instance, during one interview we had a debate about the most famous talk show hostess, “China’s Oprah,” Yang Lan’s talk at Evergreen. Bo thought Yang’s English was pretty good, but she could have done a better job. As he said,

In Yang's speech, there were lots of mistakes, such as misuse of singular and plural nouns. It was just because she was in a hurry to show off...but after all she is not an English professor; it is not necessary to be so strict with her English...These issues do not interfere with communication. But in such a formal occasion, in front of these many people, you should be more careful with your language. To me, her speech was not refined. Chinese people tend to be like that when they do things. But I am a Chinese too, I hope I won't be like that. One who is careless with his language, is careless in doing other things.(After-class interview, 6/1, p33)

Bo's attitude towards language use is not atypical in many parts of the world. Having learned English as a second language does not prevent the speaker from subscribing to a standard language ideology; sometimes even more so. Several foundational survey studies on NNESTs indicate that students from Asia showed more negative attitudes towards NNESTs (e.g., Moussu 2002, 2006). In our survey study across five universities, "Asian University EFL Student Attitudes toward Non-native English Speaking Teachers" (Tang, Tweed, Kang, Fukunaga and Zheng, 2010), we found that EFL students in general hold negative attitudes towards NNESTs, and ESL students' prejudice towards their NNESTs in the U.S. may be formed through their EFL education in their home countries. Having little exposure to how English is really used internationally, many students in the surveyed universities believed in a myth of "standard, pure, original English" and favored a British or American English pronunciation. Such a myth is held even more firmly for English majors. In China, English majors are trained with a goal of acquiring "standard British English or American English" (Ministry of Education, *Curriculum for College English Majors in China*). Having gone through such training, Bo does not have a distinct and stigmatized "Chinese accent" (as exaggerated

in Hollywood movies). His high proficiency in English has also made him exempt from any ESL courses when he came to the U.S., including the ITA training course (see chapter 3) provided by the university. In fact, he came to the U.S. for the reason that he wanted to learn authentic English-speaking culture and literature (Bo, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 3/25/2011). Just as scholars in World Englishes have found, “NNEs are aware of the global hegemony of English; but rather than being inspired to resist it, this is the reason why they want to appropriate it for their own benefit” (Li, cited in Sharifian, 2009), Bo believed in a native-like standard when he became an English teacher and said that like other native-speaker teachers, he “suffered from his ESL students’ English.”

#### **4.3.2.2 Imagined Community: A Traditional Chinese Scholar Learning from the West**

Imagined communities, as tangible COPs, have important effects on our ongoing learning. Before Bo came to the U.S., he imagined himself to be part of the community of Chinese scholars who learn from the West and brought back its knowledge to benefit his own people.

While Bo is genuinely interested in Western culture and literature, he also loves Chinese literature and traditions. “Sadly,” as he said, he was introduced to his native literature through a Western education (Bo, Lunch interview, 5/17/2011). For example, it was after he came to the U.S. that he read novelist Lu Xun’s *Kuangren Riji* (*A Mad Man’s Diary* 鲁迅, 狂人日记) carefully, when he had to teach it to American undergraduate students. Bo was concerned about the future of Chinese culture and literature, especially after it has been “contaminated by the Communist Party” and by the popular culture (Bo, lunch interview, 5/17/2011, p.49). He was upset by the changes in modern

Chinese and the decline of Chinese people's literacy skills, as he said:

Most of the Chinese people I met in the U.S. always complained that their English was not good. I have never heard anyone that said, oh my Chinese sucks...I have never met one that was truly in awe by the beauty of Chinese...I had a keen sense of cultural loss...I didn't mean to revive ancient Chinese culture, but our weakness is obvious...the modern Chinese language is in a mess, mixed with written, oral, internet languages...our language has lost its vitality because most people do not know its basic structure and root..." (Bo, lunch interview, 5/17/2011, p.50)

His concern over the decline of Chinese language and culture on the world stage was the very reason he came to study in the U.S. He described himself similar to the "New youth of the May Fourth Movement" ("wusi qingnian 五四青年") in Chinese history (May 4, 1919), the student demonstrators who believed that traditional Chinese values were responsible for the political weakness of the nation, and therefore called for a selective adoption of Western ideals of science and democracy. The difference between him and them, is that Bo didn't see himself as supporting "everything West." Positioned as a responsible and traditional Chinese scholar, Bo was enthusiastic to find out "the real differences between the Chinese and the Western culture, whether U.S.'s national power is related with their culture, and why Chinese civilization and culture had declined so dramatically" (Bo, lunch interview, 5/17/2011,p.48). He mentioned that he was deeply influenced by a "traditional" Chinese historian Qian Mu (钱穆), who saw values in Chinese traditions and culture, even in the times when those values were questioned. Qian Mu's endeavor to maintain and develop Chinese culture and traditions provided Bo confidence in his own culture, as Bo described, "I no longer felt inferior when compared with Western cultures." During our interviews it was apparent

that Bo was proud of traditions in Chinese language and culture. For instance, he often criticized the theory-oriented Western academia, and believed that the Chinese language was more concise and vibrant than the English language. Bo also pointed out that it is by learning more about the West that he was able to compare Chinese culture with it, and that he had developed “a tolerance towards cultural difference” (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011, p14).

#### **4.3.2.3 Imagined Community collapsed: A Chinese in the Field of English in the U.S.**

Bo’s imagination of being a Chinese scholar learning from the West collapsed, and his Chinese identity gained negative connotations after he came to the U.S. Having been studying and living in the U.S. for 7 years,, he gradually found that he became, and was seen as a minority in mainstream society and an outsider to the Western culture he actually specialized in. He didn’t voluntarily associate this marginalized identity with language, though. During our interview, he identified his status as a nonnative English speaker as only a “biological fact”(see Huang, 2009, p. 163); that is, he thinks he is an NNS because English is not his language of birth, not because of some deficiency in his language. Bo’s feeling of marginalization is more related to a perceived and assumed cultural identity: his nonnative identity is intertwined with his perceived and assumed cultural identity as a Chinese person in the U.S.

Bo first found that his Chinese identity stood out and was “strange” in taking classes in his program: he was often the only Chinese international student in the classes he took in the Comparative Literature program, which heavily centered on Western culture and literature. As he

described,

When I was in the program in California, I had experience in classes where I had to face awkwardly a bunch of Americans, such as the class on Shakespeare. Who would be interested in such topics? Obviously those who are interested in their own language. Nine out of ten students were Americans. I was there, listening to them talking, even just general comments, since they all read Shakespeare in high school. All of a sudden, I felt, I was a very strange person, someone that did not fit in any aspect...I eventually felt more comfortable, when I came to the Evergreen city, where the student population is more diverse. (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011, p.24)

Although studying in a Western-culture centered program in the U.S. has brought his “foreignness” salient, this is not how Bo wanted to position himself. He wanted to be a scholar of English, but there seemed to be a tension between who Bo wanted to be and how he was perceived by the institution and the Western academy. Although specializing in Western literature, he was often asked to teach, or found himself choosing to teach Eastern culture and literature to American students, because he was seen as a more legitimate teacher of Chinese literature than Western literature. For instance, once he was asked by his program director whether he wanted to become a TA for a class on Chinese Film. Bo was worried whether he was competent for this position as he did not have academic training in studying Chinese film, so he talked about his concerns to the department secretary. However, he believed that the department thought he was complaining and told him not to mention this again (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011, p20.).

During the interview Bo shared with me his criticism towards this problematic assumption of a

“native speaker fallacy” that overlooks one’s professional training.

Teaching Chinese culture and literature was neither my specialty nor my academic interests. That’s what the Asian Department should be doing. Being born into a culture and language does not mean one is an expert in it. I am not an authority in speaking about Chinese literature. ... It should not be that because I was a Chinese, I knew better about the Chinese language. Similarly, Westerners do not necessarily know better about Western culture than we do...They (the American undergraduates) do not know what’s the root of their own culture. They don’t feel like that’s them either. Only after I taught them they knew more about their own culture. (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011, p.22)

To Bo, integrating his personal self as a Chinese person and professional self as a competent English scholar became a constant struggle. Bo described to me his feeling of discomfort in positioning himself even when he had to teach Chinese literature:

I found it strange to position myself in such kind of a classroom, because suddenly, my role was relocated to ‘my own culture,’ and thus the ‘other’ culture from the students’. They think I am more like a Chinese, different from them. I wish I could be talking about Chinese culture from the same position as the Americans, that is, from a ‘third person perspective.’” (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011)

This conflict and feeling of marginalization was never resolved. Personally since Bo had been in the U.S. for a long time and had become somewhat accustomed to life here, he felt he had drifted away from his home country: “No one in my family wanted me to go back now. I had to stay here.” On the other hand, Bo had not found a best way to develop his professional identity:

I did not want to stay here, because U.S. is not where I can fully realize my own value. I want to write in Chinese, and introduce the Western culture to the Chinese people, instead of writing about Chinese culture to an English-speaking audience. (Bo, lunch interview, 5/17/2011, p47.)

Bo believed that he was at a disadvantage in his field, when looking for jobs in the U.S., because he was a “nonnative English speaker” and a “non-Westerner.” He said,

I am interested in a position in Comparative Literature department. But this department is still a subfield of English department, not the Asian department. As an English person, proficiency in English is a prerequisite...the prejudice against nonnative speaker does exist in our profession, especially when I need to discuss Western culture...indeed I do not belong to this culture completely...this prejudice made it difficult for me to find a position in the field...although I have not really started looking for a job, but I can foresee it, I mean, have you ever met an English professor here that is Chinese or Asian? (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011, p.19)

As Carroll, Motha, and Price (2008) said, “Imagined communities can become oppressive or, at least, sources of disappointment, disillusionment or alienation when our lived experiences do not correspond to the world and the identities we have imagined for ourselves” (p.174.). Bo experienced this disillusionment and was still struggling to re-imagine himself as a competent member of the new community.

#### **4.3.2.4 Negotiating NNEST Identity**

Bo's feeling of being a cultural other also surfaced in his teaching. He found it difficult to connect to students as they didn't share common interests: "It's unlikely that I will mention popular culture, or things like American culture in my class. What I care about was different from them" (Bo, first interview, 3/25/2011). Notice here that although he was stating challenges due to cultural differences, he constructed himself as a sophisticated scholar rather than a foreign TA in our interview. That is, it was not just because he self-identified as a Chinese that he felt culturally different from his students; what he meant more seemed to be that as an academic, his research interests were not on as popular or shallow a level as his students'. Bo believed that the challenge posed by cultural differences, remained unsolved and "will never be solved." What he thought had changed gradually was that he had become "more confident about [his] language, more confident about his knowledge, and know more about the subject than the students do." (Bo, interview). He commented that it was not easy to develop the empathy for students having started as a foreigner to the culture: "I need to learn to know more and self-identify with the mainstream culture, and the students' life experience. If I always approach the class from a marginalized position, I won't care about the students." (Last interview, p15.)

Despite his feeling that he would have a dim future as a Chinese in the profession of English in the U.S., Bo didn't believe being a nonnative speaker of English undermined his ability to teach it. He reported that it was only when he first started teaching composition that he was very conscious that he was a nonnative English speaker. For instance, if he couldn't explain a concept well in class,

he would think “that’s because English is not my native language. If it were, I could elaborate more.” He thought being a NNEST was just a psychological burden he put on himself rather than a fact that actually influenced his teaching. He was not aware of any actual explicit challenge from his students because he was a nonnative speaker, and “if there were any, that’s due to self-doubt or lack of confidence, which I could overcome mentally” (Bo, last interview, 6/13/2011, p.16). He thought as long as one can achieve “effective communication” in English, it does not matter whether one is native or nonnative. Bo didn’t think a native-speaker English teacher would necessarily teach differently from a nonnative speaker; he saw his teaching as having more to do with “[his] academic specialty, his teaching content and methodology.”

### **4.3.3 Sara: A Translingual English “Teacher”, Not a Modaresa**

#### **4.3.3.1 Translingual Identity in Egypt and in the U.S.**

As opponents of a “Bloomfieldian duplicative model of bilingualism” argued, the assumption that “an ideal bilingual has a native-like command of both languages each complete in itself” is naïve. In reality, a bilingual “acquires as much competence in the two or more languages as needed and all of them serve together the full range of communicative needs” (Selinker, 1992, pp. 801-802). This is the case with Sara. Although Sara is seen by many as having native-like proficiency in both Arabic and English, she in fact had different feelings and skills in each language. Sara was born in England, lived there until she was only two. Then she moved with her family to Egypt, grew up there until the age of 23. At home, it was her parents’ policy that they spoke English, and her British mom tried as

much as she could to get her used to British culture. At the same time, Sara still spoke Arabic with her grandparents, who lived downstairs in the same apartment. It was common that Sara mixed English with Arabic in her daily conversation with her relatives and friends. Different from mainland China, where mixing English words with Chinese was often seen as pretentious and stigmatized, Sara found mixing English with Arabic was also common in work places in Egypt. Sara went to private schools in Egypt, where some of the subjects were taught in English. Because of this English-medium education, Sara didn't really write in Arabic, and could only read Arabic newspapers as opposed to academic articles. For professional and personal purposes, she usually wrote in English. Sara also found that she could express herself more freely in English when she was angry, or trying to be serious. She speaks to her husband mostly in Arabic but code switches to English when she talks about a serious topic. She uses Arabic with her baby as much as she can, though sometimes she uses a few words of English. Culturally speaking, Sara felt she was "missing stuff" on both sides; even though she read a lot about British culture, if she visited her mom in London, sometimes she would still not be able to understand what people were referencing. Despite her bilingual, bicultural upbringing, Sara likes to say that "[her] heart is Egyptian" (1<sup>st</sup> interview, pg.9) because she grew up in Egypt. Even after Sara came to the U.S., she got to use Arabic at home with her aunt who lives here, and to her father on the phone every few days. At the same time, growing up speaking English doesn't mean Sara has stopping learning English. She said that being in the U.S. she had started to use a lot of expressions she never knew before.

Sara started to problematize the term *NNS* when she took classes in the MATESOL Program in the U.S. She was heavily influenced by the readings and the professors in the program, which made

her aware of the political nature of the NS-NNS dichotomy. Although she still believes that NSs have a level of instinct about their language, she thought the prefix *non-* takes a lot away from a person, and the term *multilingual* would be more appropriate. When I asked her what languages she spoke, she said “I am a native Arabic speaker and *I believe I have the right to call myself* a native English speaker ’cause I function pretty well with it...” (Sara, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 3/30/2011, p.9). Notice that Sara used the hedge “I believe I have the right” as if she had to claim the right of a “native speaker of English.” She explained to me that when she was teaching English in Egypt, she saw herself a native speaker of English, as her Egyptian colleagues knew she was half British and would come ask her questions about the English language. However, when she came to the U.S., she started to think that perhaps she was not a native speaker, especially during her TA-ship in the English Language Program. She had to take the SPEAK test to prove her English proficiency to teach at the Evergreen University because of her foreign citizenship. She had doubts about her native-speaker status also because since she had grown up in Egypt, she was missing cultural references in English. What she meant was that sometimes she did not know the person or events her American friends or students referred to. She also found herself using idioms in British English which may sound archaic to Americans. For instance, when she was young she learned from her mom “to make a sound and dance out of something” meaning to “make a big fuss,” but when she used it in America she would ask “do people still say that”? (Sara, 1<sup>st</sup> interview,3/30/2011, p.9). But other than that she said this doesn’t lessen her ability to use English. After several professors in the program affirmed that she should call herself a native speaker, she now thought of herself as a native speaker.

Sara’s doubt about her linguistic identity in the U.S. had more to do with her religion. It was not

so much her language but rather her Muslim identity that made her feel like a “foreigner,” or in her words, it was “the elephant in the classroom.” She said when she first came to the U.S., she was not wearing a head scarf. But after a while she decided at Ramadan that she was going to wear it. That’s when she started to reveal her Egyptian identity because wearing a veil made it obvious that “there was something related to being Arab.”(1<sup>st</sup> interview, p5). Although Sara had not encountered any discrimination because of her Muslim identity and she attributed it to the diverse demographics and open attitudes in the city, wearing the veil made her more sensitive to criticism. As she said:

I am always, SLIGHTLY concerned, that, although a student may not show it, but, do they have attitudes against me because I am a Muslim? I wonder. I really do wonder. But, it hasn’t shown, in a way. But sometimes like a student isn’t, on a certain day, really nice, or somehow I sensed there is some sort of attitudes, I wonder because it’s because they are having a bad day, is it because today I am not a good teacher, or is it because, on some level, they just don’t like the person I am. And it is a little hum...what’s the word...paranoid. It is. It happens to me when I am on the bus. Like if the bus driver isn’t...they are usually friendly, so if I get an unfriendly bus driver I wonder if it’s because he is having a bad day or is it ME. That happens a lot.(Sara, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 3/30/2011, p4)

When Sara taught English131 for the first time, she had used a poem about Arabs after 9/11. She was not comfortable using it at the beginning of the class, because she felt like the students would think she chose the poem for personal reasons: “oh she is trying to show us that poor she, she is struggling, but I am not.” (1<sup>st</sup> interview, 3/30/2011, p14) She found later that the students actually did really well with that poem and “nothing inappropriate surfaced.” She realized after this that these

“kids” have interacted with different cultures and they are open minded enough to handle the poem.

Interestingly, she found that the Egyptian side of her identity started to become more positive after the Egyptian Revolution started on January 25, 2011, and she was more willing to reveal it. As she described:

With the revolution, people ARE talking about Egypt...um like when we went to new Orleans people would ask where we were from and we said we are from Egypt, they say ‘Ah yes! EXCELLENT revolution! ’ and so on, so I feel like right now also being an Egyptian is not just about the Pyramids any more you know, it’s beyond that, you CAN be more proud about it.  
(1<sup>st</sup> interview, p5)

In general, Sara thought coming to the U.S. was a positive experience for her. First of all, speaking two languages has always been an advantage to her especially in the U.S., where “knowing two languages is a big deal” (last interview, p4). As she said, “...especially Chinese or Arabic. They are not easy. Like Wow. Like Chinese. I don’t even know where to start.” Secondly, she felt that having gone through an education in Egypt, she could appreciate more of the resources in the U.S., such as the library. She also felt that being aware of differences made her more positive than other people, although she was an optimistic person to start with.

#### **4.3.3.2: Tranlingual Identity in Teaching: Teacher versus Modaresa**

Like the common ideal of a teacher in many parts of the world, the concept of a teacher in Egypt, Sara told me, is someone who promotes the future by spreading knowledge and helping the next generation. Teacher is a very respected profession in Egypt and one of the best jobs to have.

However, to Sara there is a difference between private school teachers and public school teachers. The “good teachers” that influenced Sara when she was young were English-speaking private school teachers in Egypt. Going through private schools in Egypt, she was not satisfied with the government-run public education there. Before I knew Sara personally, I had heard from other students that they were inspired by Sara’s dream of “reforming the Egyptian educational system.” During our interview, it was most interesting, and even shocking, to Sara herself to discover that she ascribed different images to the word *teacher* in English and in Arabic. When asked what kind of images came to mind with the English word, Sara described her high school English teacher who was like a “mother hen,” caring, nice, clear, creative, and always smiling. When asked what kind of images came to mind when we say the word *teacher* in colloquial Egyptian, she described a “Modaresa” (female form) this way:

A teacher standing in front of a room with a blackboard behind him or her, with students in rows, for some reason, a ruler in her hand, a really bad image, it’s not a good image. And rote memorization...Audio-lingual methods, grammar-translation...And “only talk when you raise your hand.”(Sara, 6/2/2011, Last interview, p8.)

Sara immediately realized her negative attitudes towards Egyptian Modaresa and felt bad about it: “Oh It’s SO TERRIBLE!” Sara explained to me why she had such impressions: she had a good educational experience in private schools and had many good teachers. However through reading and talking to people who had received a public education in Egypt, Sara couldn’t help seeing the limitations they had because of the way they were educated. Her understanding was that there are usually lots of students in the classrooms, and because of the large classes it is not surprising that the

teacher adopts a traditional teacher-centered teaching style. Sara said honestly to me that she calls herself a “Teacher,” not a “Modaresa,” because she associates *teacher* with being educated through English, and she did not enjoy her Arabic classes<sup>1</sup>.

Sara realized that she had an “unfair advantage” being educated through English and having a British nationality. In Egypt where, as Sara said, the native-speaker construct is very strongly believed, sometimes she was marked as an international teacher rather than a local Egyptian teacher. She was slightly guilty about it, especially after reading many articles that examine the native-speaker construct in the MATESOL Program. However Sara never hid her British identity and used it to her advantage.

#### **4.3.3.3 Teaching as Positioning**

Although growing up bilingually, Sara did not always position herself as a translingual teacher. In fact, in the interviews, Sara described a change of her positioning as the teaching contexts change. The way she positioned herself as a teacher had also to do with age and credential. When she first started teaching in Egypt right after college, she never told her students she was half British, or anything else personal. She thought this was firstly due to cultural reasons: in Egypt teachers do not tell their students much about themselves. Secondly, since she was just out of undergraduate school, she was worried that people would think she was a student. So for self-introduction she would “put

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<sup>1</sup>It’s worth noting here that Sara’s impression of private schools is first-hand – she’s been in private schools and her impression of her teachers is arrived at through personal experience; however, her impression of public school teachers, which is a very negative impression, is derived from anecdotes from other people.

on the teacher hat” by just saying she was their English teacher and this was her email. She would always speak English, and never speak Arabic, as speaking English provided her a feeling of legitimacy: “I felt like a specialist of something, that students will trust me more, or they assume I am more of an expert.” (Sara, 6/2/2011, Last interview)

It was after she came to the U.S. and observed the culture here that she started to become more personal in her teaching. Through observation in the department, she noticed that people in her program seemed to be less formal: professors are addressed by their first names and they don’t mind telling students personal things about their activities. So when she was teaching in the English language program at the Evergreen University, she would tell her students more about herself. She found that her British identity made her legitimate as an English teacher, and her Egyptian part made her interesting. Again, how she positioned herself depended on her teaching contexts. As she said,

When I was teaching in the US, in ELP, it’s interesting because I establish my authority by saying that I am also an international student, I am half British, half Egyptian, I have learned languages, I don't know if I have explicitly said that I have gone the process of learning languages, but by pointing out that I speak two languages, it gives me some legitimacy that way. (Sara, 6/2/2011, Last interview)

Sara said she revealed her Egyptian side also because there were many Saudi students who would benefit from her Arabic. These students did appreciate having an English teacher who knew their language and shared their cultural practice such as fasting during Ramadan. One time a female Saudi student was really excited about this connection with the teacher, and even talked to Sara about her kids in Arabic, which had never happened to Sara before. Furthermore, being able to speak

Arabic had real pedagogical advantage for Sara's class, as she described:

In class they (the Saudi students) will be discussing something and you know they will be speaking in Arabic, you can't stop it, I mean you can try but...so I can hear what they were talking and I can see CLEARLY they misunderstood the topic, so I will be like, focus, guys, this is what I need you to do, in Arabic we do like this, but in English we do like this, and they were like smile and thank you, and after class they will ask me very specific questions about grammar. (Sara, 6/2/2011, Last interview)

Despite revealing her cultural and linguistic identity, however, Sara rarely mentioned she was a master's student, especially in the beginning. She sensed that her students, who are predominantly Asians and Saudis, usually expected a professional that "has been teaching forever." Therefore, a master's student identity did not put her at an advantage. It was only after she got more comfortable with the students as the quarter went along that she started to bring in her student identity, but only when she was illustrating a concept for which her student identity would benefit her teaching, such as why they need to cite. Sara was more comfortable orienting to a student identity when she became a PhD student, because that is "quite a few steps ahead" of her students. (Sara, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, p4-5)

#### **4.4. Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the biographical and contextual factors that had contributed to how the ITAs constructed their translingual identities in the profession of English. It has also discussed how their professional identities in the community of English scholars were intertwined with their cultural and linguistic positioning. Before the three ITAs entered their Composition classrooms for the first

time, they were already made aware of what it meant to come from a different culture and speak more than one language in the U.S., and especially in the English PhD program. Although, by definition, the three ITAs were all “translingual” speakers and teachers, their linguistic identities differed depending on the contexts in which they acquired languages, received education, and practiced teaching. Their linguistic positioning influences how they negotiate membership in the academic disciplinary community of English.

As a sociocultural approach to identity has pointed out, individuals do not simply position themselves in a community, there is a dialectic struggle between the learner and the community out of which emerges the learner's position and identity (Engenstrom, 1987). Newcomers must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members, because “only with legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion” (Wenger, 1998, p.101). Narrative analysis can only tell us how speakers experience and construct their worlds. Analysis of interviews alone cannot tell us how these teachers are seen by others, nor the structural constraints they may or may not face. We know that language speaker status alone cannot account for positioning. Bo is not the only (comparative) literature student to find the discipline of Composition Studies daunting or alienating. Nor is Ming the only older female TA to cling to another disciplinary identity to gain legitimacy in a Composition classroom. Nonetheless the consistent concerns with legitimacy, “otherness” and race are important to note if we are to understand how these international participants construct professional identities.

Besides language status and nationality, race, age, religion, and disciplinary training (science, comparative literature and TESOL) simultaneously contributed to the ITAs’ professional identity

constructions in the field of English. In the experience of these ITAs, a locally defined legitimate professional of English in the institution was a white, native-speaking, American/British-born English major. Ming and Bo, who learned English as a foreign language in schools, could document that they were seen as long-time learners and less legitimate member of the academic community of English in the U.S. However, rather than being determined by a “native speaker fallacy,” they were able to exercise their agency to resist the NNEST label. Ming strived for professionalism through her expertise in Science, hard work in polishing academic writing skills, and constant pursuit of her academic interest in the rhetoric of science. As a teacher, she was open to negotiate ambiguity with her students when misunderstanding occurred. Furthermore, personal training in Sports has taught Ming to be strong and optimistic. Bo was confident in his knowledge of World Literature. His expertise in both Chinese and English culture and language provided him solid foundation for his professional development in the field of Comparative Literature. Although both have turned to their disciplinary identity to establish legitimacy, neither Ming nor Bo had realized the potential values their translingual identities could bring to them in the profession. Sara, who grew up speaking British English and was educated through an English-medium education could escape a marginalizing status, and position her translingual identity as strength. Age, religion, professional credentials have all influenced how Sara positioned herself in the classroom. Furthermore, having gone through a MA-TESOL program that values translingual backgrounds and reflective pedagogy, Sara was able to draw on these different aspects of her “selves” intentionally and position herself strategically in the classroom.

The chapter suggests that the ability to re-imagine oneself as a “translingual” and utilize their

translingual identities as advantages should not be taken for granted. The ITAs in this study needed more support so that they could see their translingual, transnational experiences as valuable in the profession of English and the globalizing world. This needs efforts from both their home country and the host country. Bo was a good example of someone whose education in his home country had provided him strong confidence in his home culture and language. Holding positive attitudes towards both languages and culture helps them to construct a translingual identity. Some suggestions for academic programs seeking to transform the experiences ITAs include internationalizing the perspectives represented in coursework, inviting guest faculty from institutions beyond the United States, and organize social activities for international graduate students. These activities could help students find values in their international experiences and perspectives. Moreover, as ITAs tend to face initial prejudice from their students because of their nationality, race or language, ITA training programs could plan workshops that involve undergraduates in order to facilitate mutual understandings between the TAs and the students early on.

## **CHAPTER 5: NEXUS OF MULTI-MEMBERSHIP: BECOMING A COMPETENT COMPOSITION TEACHER**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter answers the research question: “How do the ITAs learn to become teachers for College Composition and what role does a ‘translingual identity’ play?” Using Wenger’s concept of “identity as nexus of multi-membership” (1998, p.159), this is a question of how the ITAs move between their current academic disciplinary communities and the community of Composition teachers.

This chapter starts with what constitutes a competent Composition teacher at the researched institution. Then it describes and analyzes case by case how the three ITAs learn to become Composition teachers. It finds that the ITAs initially all faced the challenge of reconciling the tensions between what is considered competence in their disciplinary communities and the Composition program. What’s more, although they were all committed to teaching, the ITAs of English did not all imagine teaching Composition as part of their future profession. Internalizing a professional identity as a College Composition teacher was a constant struggle for those who had a different imagined community of “English professionals.” Those who imagined Composition teaching as part of their future profession were able to integrate their professional identities developed in the disciplinary communities into their Composition teacher personae. Lastly, their perceived “foreign TA” identity did challenge them to establish a valid teacher identity in front of

their young undergraduate students, but it did not seem to play a determining role in becoming English Composition teachers.

## **5.2 Who are teachers of College Composition?**

Many teacher educators of literacy have pointed out that there were misconceptions about the profession of “an English teacher” (e.g., Alsup, 2006). A story told by Wayne Booth in his speech (1963) at the Illinois Council of College teachers of English described the attitudes held by the general public. He described a response he got after telling his seatmate on a train that he taught English: “Oh dear, I will have to watch my language.” The idea of an English teacher being an unfriendly gatekeeper was unfortunately engrained in many, including the general public and scholars inside the academy. Stanley Fish, in fact, argued quite bluntly in "What Should Colleges Teach?" that “all courses listed as courses in composition teach grammar and rhetoric and nothing else”(2009). The ITAs in my study have also identified prejudice students hold towards this profession. Ming described to me that she tended to receive low evaluation scores on the item of “confidence in the instructor’s knowledge,” which she believed was due to students’ prejudice against English majors: “what do they know except English, which everyone speaks any ways?” (Interview).

Such misconceptions towards writing and teachers of Composition both inside and outside of the academy in fact, showed ignorance of the intensive research and professionalization in the teaching of writing in the past forty years. Professional organizations such as College Composition and Communication (CCC) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) along with the

development of Composition and Rhetoric PhD programs have helped define a professional identity for the field. Current theorists in Composition, especially those who draw on postmodernist and/or social constructionist views of knowledge, have challenged the myth that problems students face in writing are primarily grammatical. They challenge the notion of a stable, unified writing ability that can easily be measured by looking at isolated texts and argue that good writing takes time to develop as one encounters different writing situations (Carroll, 2002).

At the researched university, the Writing Program that trains and supervises TAs of Composition is highly professionalized, directed under current research and theories in the field of Composition studies. The course is described in terms of these:100-level College Composition at Evergreen University serves the purpose of preparing students to write in different academic contexts, with a focus on reading academic discourse and producing complex claims. By using a portfolio for final evaluation, the course goal is to develop students' writing as a process rather than to produce an isolated paper. The course description is as follows:

All 100-level writing courses in the Writing Program at Evergreen University are designed to help students meet a shared set of outcomes in preparing them for writing in a variety of academic contexts...Most students take English 131, Composition: Exposition, where they read academic discourse from a variety of disciplines and develop a portfolio of writing that reflects an ability to write papers with complex claims that matter in academic contexts.

(Writing Program website, Evergreen University)

The four course outcomes further illustrate what's expected for qualified college writers after taking first-year Composition. The focus aims at rhetorical situation, use of evidence, argument and

writing process:

1. To demonstrate an awareness of the strategies that writers use in different writing contexts.
2. To read, analyze, and synthesize complex texts and incorporate multiple kinds of evidence purposefully in order to generate and support writing.
3. To produce complex, analytic, persuasive arguments that matter in academic contexts.
4. To develop flexible strategies for revising, editing, and proofreading writing. (Writing Program website)

Furthermore, the quarter-long training course, English 567 “Theory and Practice of Composition,” taught by professors who specialize in rhetoric and composition, provides a general survey of the field. The new TAs read articles ranging from how the outcomes come into being to theoretical underpinnings of different activities involved in the course: Designing sequence, Giving feedback to papers, Teaching argument, Teaching reading, Conferencing, Assessment and portfolio, Rhetorical grammar and etc. (English 567 Syllabus, Autumn 2009).

Despite the expectations of the Program, driven by current Composition theories and research, the graduate student teachers of Composition may not be studying Composition as their PhD concentration, and may be variously committed to Program goals. In fact, the PhD program in English Language and Literature includes many tracks: Language and Rhetoric (including Composition), Literature and Culture, and Creative Writing. As most students in the Literature track go on to teach upper-level literature courses in the department, most of the Composition TAs are students in the Language and Rhetoric track. Even so, these students represent diverse interests: critical discourse analysis, basic writing, ethnographic research, rhetorical studies, the teaching and

theory of writing, legal discourse analysis, national language policy and history, analysis of adult literacy narratives, language and gender in the military, community-based pedagogies, genre theory, and second language acquisition (English Department website, Evergreen University). It was challenging both for the Writing Program to build a teaching community of people with these diverse academic interests, and for the graduate students to find their place in this teaching community.

The selected readings in the required Composition textbook compiled by the Writing Program seemed to help create a teaching community of graduate students with diverse academic interests. The readings were classic texts that covered a wide range of academic interests of the graduate students and faculty in the English Department: media discourse analysis, genre analysis, cultural studies, language ideologies in the U.S., and etc. For instance, there are Foucault's *Panopticism*, Freire's *The Banking concept of Education*, Baldwin's *If Black English Isn't a Language Then Tell Me What Is*, Pratt's *Arts of the Contact Zone*, Amy Tan's *Mother Tongue*, to name just a few. New TAs have their freedom in choosing their course theme and their reading materials. Although these readings cover a wide range of English subdisciplines, the ITAs in my study identified challenges in using these readings as course texts.

The selecting criteria of new TAs also showed what's considered a qualified TA of Composition by the program. According to the departmental website, teaching assistantships of College Composition at the Evergreen University are awarded "on a competitive basis to outstanding graduate students" in the PhD program of English. The TAs are appointed based on their academic potential and quality of an application package which includes a personal statement and a writing sample (Writing Program website, Evergreen University). The ITAs are also required to pass

aSPEAK Test (see chapter 3). Based on the description, the graduate students who were appointed to teach Composition were already recognized as competent and legitimate members of the academic community of English. It seemed that they were already acknowledged as outstanding students in their fields (they are evaluated based on “academic potential”) and outstanding writers (they are evaluated based on the quality of a “writing sample”). The description did not seem to require prior teaching experience, or familiarity with the context of College Composition, however. It is understandable, especially in a research-oriented institution, that many new graduate students may not have any previous teaching experience or training. Despite their limited experience in teaching, the department and especially the Writing Program strived to make students imagine teaching, and teaching of writing, as part of their future profession. As the course description for the required coursework for new TAs (English 567 “Theory and Practice of Composition”) says:

If you are in the program for a full five years as a TA, you will be teaching writing for at least three of those five years. And even when you teach literature, the writing students do is central to their learning and evaluation...And realistically, you will be asked about your teaching practices and philosophy when you go on the job market. There are only a handful of jobs in English that don't require teaching, and they are always senior positions.(Course description for English 567, Autumn 2009)

In addition, to continue being awarded the TA-ship, the student is evaluated based on his/her teaching evaluations from previous quarters, along with their academic progress.

To sum up, at the department level, graduate student of English belonging to various subdisciplinary communities were granted legitimacy to participate in the community of

Composition teachers; nevertheless, the necessity of ITAs to demonstrate English proficiency was a prerequisite that differentiated them from the American TAs on the basis of their linguistic identity. The goal of teaching writing defined by the Writing Program was to teach students to develop meta-awareness for their writing process and make arguments that matter in academic contexts. A competent Composition teacher defined by the program, therefore, is one that can teach students to meet these learning outcomes.

### **5.3 Learning to teach College Composition**

To many newly-appointed TAs who have little teaching experience or even learning experience in Composition, making sense of this new teaching context can be challenging. The ITAs seemed to face more challenges as they were seen as “non-native speakers” by the department and their students. Before they entered their classroom, the ITAs in my study understood their jobs by taking up discourses from several sources: their previous learning experiences, the initial 7-day-training, the required English 567 “Theory and Practice of Composition” coursework, the assigned textbook and selected readings, the TA handbook compiled by assistant directors who are experienced TAs, and the interactions they had with their cohort members. There was a constant negotiation between what the ITAs thought the program required, what kind of teacher they wanted to be in the future, and their understanding of what the students expect. The following section discusses how they negotiated these conflicts and learned to become Composition teachers.

### **5.3.1 Ming: from teaching Chemistry to Composition**

*Before walking into a classroom to teach an English writing class for the first time, I had taught Chemistry for more than a decade, from a large class with over two hundred students to an intimate one of fifteen, in both Chinese and English, and as a teaching assistant, a lab instructor, or a lecturer. The challenge that I had not yet encountered was how to teach students from different disciplines in a classroom (Ming, Teaching Philosophy, 2011).*

Before Ming entered the PhD program in English, she had already taught Chemistry as a faculty member and TA in China and the U.S. Being in the field of Chemistry for more than a decade and granted a PhD in Chemistry, Ming was an old-timer in the community of Chemistry professionals and certainly an “experienced teacher” (Tsui, 2003). Because of her experience teaching Chemistry, Ming found she became a “more mature teacher” when she started teaching Composition. Ming thought teaching Chemistry gave her confidence as she already knew the “basics of being a teacher”: for example, how to manage a classroom or deal with students’ problems. The difference was that Ming saw Composition as a class “to teach students from different disciplines” and positioned herself as an interdisciplinary writing teacher.

#### **5.3.1.1 Learning to teach**

Ming’s central beliefs of what constitutes “a good teacher” are heavily influenced by her learning in the field of Chemistry. She emphasized that she was a teacher today mostly because she was lucky to have had many great teachers in her life who kept encouraging her for what she had

done well; she said that's why she strives to be responsible and encouraging as a teacher. The role models she identified were all Chemistry teachers in China: a professor of Quantum-Chemistry that was well known in the department for his personal charisma, who was energetic("精神"), elegant and eloquent; a professor of Inorganic Chemistry who taught Ming how to plan lessons when she first started teaching; and a fun and humorous teacher, who later became Ming's good friend. Ming said she had learned different and invaluable things about teaching from the three teachers, and they had become her image of "a teacher" (last interview, p7).

### **5.3.1.2 Learning to teach Composition**

Entering the Composition classroom from the field of Chemistry, the difference Ming noticed between her prior teaching experience and this new teaching context was that *Composition should teach students to write for their different disciplines* (Ming, teaching philosophy, emphasis added, 2011). Ming's imagination of her Composition class as such mainly came from her learning experiences taking Composition classes as a non-English major. Different from most TAs of English who had never taken an English Composition class (Long et al., 1996), and ITAs who come to the U.S. for graduate school and were unfamiliar with the undergraduate education, Ming took many English undergraduate courses in order to improve her dissertation writing in the Chemistry Department.

Ming's first undergraduate-level English class was English 111: Writing Through Literature. The experience turned out to be disappointing. She was asked to write a few papers based on two novels by D.H. Lawrence, and she had no idea "where to start, or where her problem was." In the

end she didn't feel she learned how to write. Ming didn't give up at that time, hoping that if she read more she would "learn writing naturally." She then took a grammar class in the Linguistics Department, and another literature class in the English Department. As a non-English major, Ming felt unwelcomed in the literature class. The professor even suggested that she drop it: "this is an upper-division English class and would be difficult for *non-English majors*" (Ming, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 4/5/2011). Ming insisted on staying and to her surprise, she received a 4.0 on her mid-term paper about a D. H. Lawrence novel and eventually a 4.0 for the class.

Ming was greatly encouraged and she suddenly realized what "good academic writing" was. She found a similarity between academic writing in English and the persuasion strategies she learned as an award-winning debate team coach in her university in China. She found that she was already familiar with how to form an argument from her coaching experience: "You establish a claim, and you develop 3 paragraphs with sub-claims and evidence to support it (立论以后三段论). The only difference is the subject matter." After this epiphany, Ming had stayed for many more English classes and learned little by little "how to put readings together and how to make a claim" (Ming, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 4/5/2011).

Changing academic communities from Chemistry to English, Ming also saw the differences between argumentation in Science and argumentation in the Humanities. The biggest difference she identified seemed to be a difference between "hard science," where there is a single factual truth, and "soft science" where knowledge is constructed. Secondly, what is considered as evidence is different. Ming noticed that the Toulmin Model she learned in the English Department didn't differentiate "data" from "evidence." She told me in Chemistry, confusing data with evidence can be dangerous:

only valid data can be used as evidence. Thirdly, the means of entering academic conversations in Science and Humanities is different. When Ming was explaining the goal of scaffolding in her first class I observed, she said to the students: “When you form your argument you need to negotiate with others. In the science, usually you do experiment; in the humanities, you talk with scholars, you develop your thinking and modify your argument. (Ming, class transcription, 3/29/11 )

Ming’s learning experience in the English Department as an experienced professional of Chemistry taught her to understand the goal of Composition from a non-English major student’s perspective. As she said, she taught Composition as “*how she wanted to be taught when she was a student.*” Her interdisciplinary background and expertise in Argument both constituted her pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) as a Composition teacher and allowed her to claim competence in the teaching community.

### ***Community of Composition teachers***

Ming saw the Writing Program as an important source of support for her when problems occurred. For instance, the “grading norming session” during the first quarter teaching, where TAs grade students’ papers together with the program director, helped her to justify grades to her problematic students. Besides, she felt more confident in explaining the language of the outcomes to students (e.g., a British student once commented that the word “outcome” was “strange”). She also knew where to go to when she had a student plagiarize. Nevertheless, although the Writing Program provided a place for Ming to go for help, Ming did not have a sense of belonging in a community of Composition TAs. She found every TA taught their own class, and some of them were not even

teaching writing. She stopped communicating with her cohort once the first quarter was over, as everyone was busy with their own studies and they all moved on to teach other composition classes. Ming's sense of alienation was also due to the fact that as a PhD candidate, Ming had completed her graduate course work and therefore didn't have occasion to communicate with other TAs in seminars. Besides, the TA' offices being scattered all over the campus made communication physically difficult. At the same time, Ming understood that the program had to be responsible for a large number of TAs, and it was difficult for it to deal with every problem perfectly. Ming said in general, she had "the best of the program."

### **5.3.1.3 Designing the curriculum: writing through thinking of science**

Before Ming was appointed to a Composition TA-ship, she had already received her Master's from the English Department and was quite familiar with the department culture. Therefore, Ming found the theories she had to read in the training course for new TAs (English 567) were not new to her. Her design of the course incorporated what's expected from the Writing Program and its learning outcomes, as the opening paragraph in her course description says:

ENGL 131 is to facilitate the transition of your study to the university level. Together, we will explore how academics read, think and write, that is, the effective and productive ways to engage with texts. More specifically, we will observe and discuss how reading, thinking and writing are synthesized and shaped, as well as reshaped by one another in academia, so that you will have the capacity to adapt your writing through adopting the writing strategies of various disciplines.(Ming, 131 Syllabus, 2011 Spring)

Different from all other TAs, however, Ming chose the social effects of science as the course theme because Science was her expertise and the topic was open ended enough to engage students with different interests. Following the scaffolding rationale used by the program at large, Ming designed two sequences of assignments. Students wrote short papers such as identifying an issue, a rhetorical analysis of their chosen articles, research proposals, and etc., which together led to the major papers where they were asked to put together an argument. Ming’s design of assignment sequence is as follows in Table 1:

**Table 1: Ming’s assignment sequence: Writing through thinking of science in our society**

<b>Assignments</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Related texts</b>
Sequence one			
SP21.1	What is your issue?	An essay of why a chosen issue matters to you	Students’ chosen articles
SP1.2	What are the relevant materials?	A report of library research (literature review)	Students’ chosen articles found in the library
SP1.3	To deconstruct an argument	Rhetorical analysis	Students’ chosen articles
MP1	How do you contextualize your issue in the academic field?	Argument paper	Previous papers and articles
Sequence Two			
SP2.1	Your research proposal	Research proposal	Previous papers and articles
SP2.2	Evaluation of evidence	Report and evaluation of data	Data collected from field research
MP1	Thinking of science in our society	Argument paper	Previous articles, field research, and papers

Although students were asked to write about materials they chose on their own, Ming also used other reading materials for her teaching. Based on the interviews and class observations, the

<sup>2</sup> “SP” stands for “Short Paper”; “MP” stands for “Major Paper.”

goal of the other accompanying materials were twofold: 1) they were classic texts that fit the theme of the course and were also meant to appeal to the young population 2) they were good examples for the writing tasks students needed to accomplish: for example, giving academic presentations, making an argument, and etc. Similar to the approach to readings provided by the textbook, these materials were used as both “methods and objects of inquiry” (Acts of Inquiry, p.xx) , which all serve the purpose of enabling students to fulfill the course outcomes (Acts of Inquiry, p.ix). Although some of the readings were controversial (e.g., Martin’s essay), Ming never showed her personal stance on the issues themselves. To her, that was not the goal of teaching writing. Below (Table 2) are the texts Ming chose to use:

**Table 2: Ming’s chosen reading materials**

<b>Course materials</b>	<b>Content</b>
<i>Acts of Inquiry</i>	Textbook compiled and required by the program
<i>Silence Spring</i>	A movie about Biologist Rachel Carson’s influential book that documented detrimental effects of pesticides on the environment
<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i>	A documentary on Al Gore’s campaign to educate citizens about global warming
<i>The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles.</i>	An essay written by the anthropologist of science and feminist Emily Martin on how language construct gender roles

As mentioned in the previous chapter, focusing on the topic of Science also gave Ming extra confidence in establishing authority in this teaching context. No matter what topic her student chose to write on, she would “more or less know about it.” Although her choice of this topic made her different from all other TAs, she didn’t feel she was less competent in this teaching community.

#### **5.3.1.4 Teaching in relation to the students: NNEST identity**

As Taylor argues (1989), for individuals “becoming a teacher is very much a process of learning, through their engagement in teaching practices, what aspects of teaching matters to them, and striving to become more skilled in those areas” (cited in Kanno & Christian, 2011). Although Ming’s design of the course was approved by the assistant directors and director during trainings, it was through teaching itself that Ming learned what’s considered important in her class. Ming’s first quarter teaching Composition taught her that to be acknowledged as a good Composition teacher, it was not enough to have pedagogical content knowledge (to Ming, the knowledge to teach writing across disciplines), but also required showing that she had that knowledge in front of her students. That is to say, although she was acknowledged as a competent member by the program, her students had their own initial definition of what constituted competence in the community of Composition teachers. Based on the student survey, a native speaker fallacy was apparent: students were honest about their initial doubts of Ming because of her perceived accent and Asian ethnicity (student survey).

As a novice teacher, Ming said the first time teaching was challenging as it was “double blind” both to her and her students: she did not know the level of her students, and her students did not know what was expected from them. Therefore, she didn’t know what problems she would encounter, and she would not be able to deal with them until they occurred. To complicate her novice teacher status, her acknowledged full membership in Science (as seen from her CV downloadable from her course website), and her perceived identity as a non-native speaker further challenged her to construct

a competent Composition teacher identity in front of her students who were mostly Americans. As she noted:

When they stand in front of you, they are all L1 learners; you are not from their educational system, and your first language is not English. For me I cannot avoid introducing my academic background either; but when I say I am from the Chemistry Department, it makes things even worse....(Ming, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 4/5/2011, p.6).

Ming started teaching in the fall, and she also attributed this challenge of self-positioning to the student population in fall quarter: “Students of fall quarters are usually quite arrogant. They were fresh out of high school and they thought they were good students and good writers already because they were admitted to the Evergreen University. However, they did not really know what college writing was.” (Ming, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 4/5/2011, p.6).

It seemed the students in Ming’s first class subscribed to both the “native speaker fallacy” and the myth of what constitutes as good “college writing.” It was difficult for Ming to make the students see themselves as “novice” writers (Sommers&Saltz, 2004). Ming mentioned challenges from two students specifically. One was a native speaker white female student, whom in Ming’s eyes was a good writer: she could find and understand difficult science publications and put them into conversation; however, she often misused them as her own argument. So whenever Ming pointed out her weaknesses, she would think it was Ming who could not understand how good she was. The other student was a Taiwanese ESL student. In Ming’s own words,

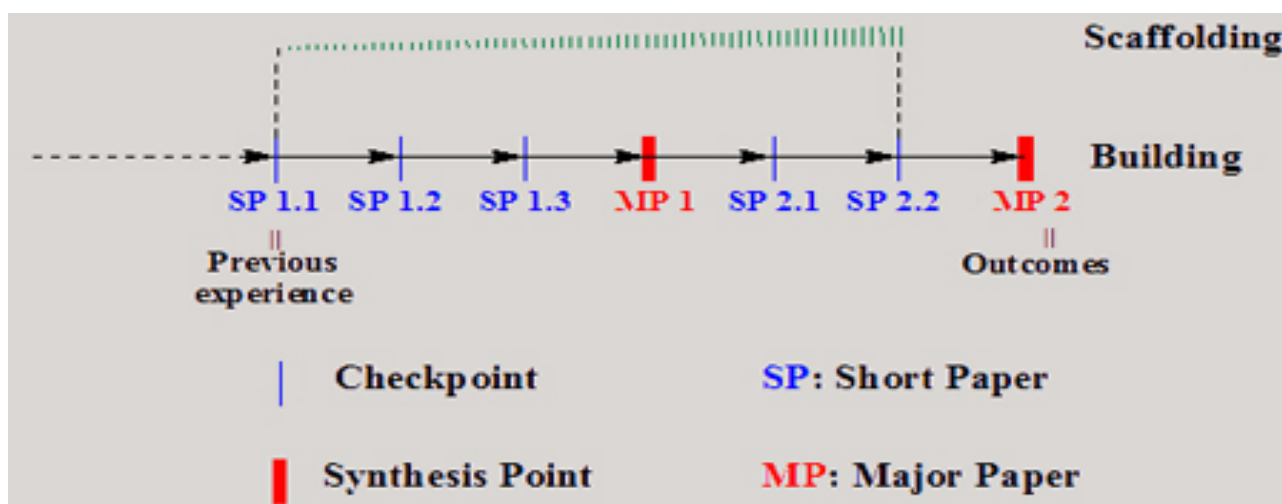
The student thought that since we were both “ESL person,” she and I were the same. She thought I was no better than her. So if you told her she had a run-on sentence, she would say,

so what, I just forgot to add a comma there. Once when I asked them to make an argument about technology, she wrote a personal reflection paper. When I told her that she was composing a wrong genre, she was like, you didn't understand anything, my paper was great. (Ming, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 4/5/2011, p.7)

In sum, it was difficult for Ming to display competence as a Composition teacher in class because she felt that students did not see the differences between high school writing and college writing. Her perceived NNEST identity complicated the situation even more.

### 5.3.1.5 Displaying competence: constructing a scientist identity

After the first quarter, Ming realized she needed concrete tools to demonstrate her competence. She started to develop many visual tools and used them in the following quarters: course website (where students could access everything about the course), flow charts, diagrams, PowerPoint slides, and etc. For instance, to explain scaffolding she developed this chart (Picture 1):

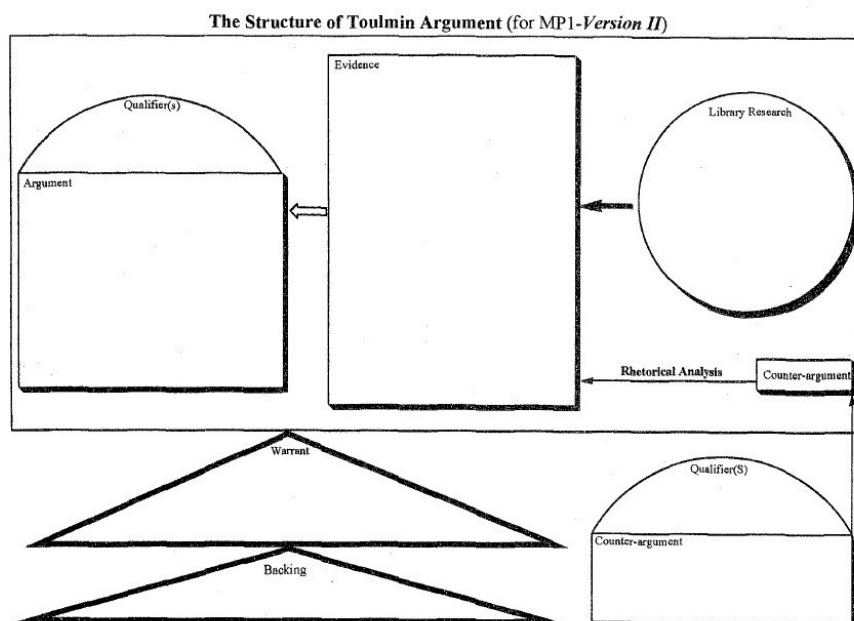


Picture 1: Scaffolding chart, Ming's English 131 course website

By using arrows, mathematical symbols, and acronyms, the chart seemed to evoke schemas

from the discipline of science. In the class I have observed, after the initial display of this chart, no student questioned the theory of scaffolding or what was expected from them.

Another example is the Toulmin Argument chart (Picture 2) Ming created in order for students to create outlines for their major papers:



**Picture 2: Ming, the Structure of Toulmin Argument**

Ming noted that after she applied these visual tools they significantly decreased questions from her students, as since then she rarely received emails questioning the clarity of her teaching. Her use of PowerPoints, as she explained, also helped to clarify her points, and especially in cases when “her accent” might get in the way. She said even when the students couldn’t understand her, the words she used on the slides served the purpose for their “mutual adjustment” (1<sup>st</sup> interview, p8).

Thirdly, Ming informed students who she was as early as possible by sending out her class website and CV before the term started. She thought it would keep away students who didn’t want to

be taught English by an “ESL person,” and she did notice a few drop-outs and add-ons afterwards. The display of the class website looked quite professional. Everything about the course was organized under different categories and explained in detail, including calendar, assignments, students’ concerns etc. The instructor’s name was hyperlinked to her personal website, which was another professional space that was filled with Ming’s educational credentials, awards, publications, and other professional experience. It’s worth noting that there were two sections on Ming’s personal website, which separated Ming’s professional fields into Chemistry and English, with English being fronted. In a short opening paragraph, Ming introduced herself by listing her current student status, dissertation topic, research interests, and master’s thesis, which had won a major award, followed by her experience in Chemistry. There is a clear discursive pattern in this paragraph where she emphasized her receiving of multiple degrees and various awards: for example, “My dissertation was supported by XXX fellowship.” “I received Master degree in English language and rhetoric in March, 2008. My master’s essay was awarded XXX Award.” “I received a Ph. D degree in bioorganic chemistry from the Department of Chemistry at the Evergreen University in March 2005.”

Along with using these visual tools and academic achievements to construct a competent teacher identity in front of her students, Ming also had a bag of other “tricks”: 1) She sometimes used a “cheap trick,” which was “name-dropping” (1<sup>st</sup> interview, p8). That is to say, she would provide big names for the evidence she used in class: e.g., Aristotle, Plato, and etc., because “otherwise they thought I got the evidence from some exotic sources.” 2) To address students’ lack of “confidence in the instructor’s knowledge,” Ming found it more effective not to confront this prejudice directly, but to point out and explain to the students the specific problems in their writings

(last interview, p15). 3) Ming said she took an open attitude to criticism and different perspectives. She said she was willing to negotiate knowledge with students (as she said on her website, “teaching is dialectic.”)She found her class most successful when both students and the teacher could take criticism openly, because “everyone makes mistakes.” The last point, however, did not seem to be consistent with the authoritative figure she played in the classroom. I will discuss the classroom discourse in the next chapter.

After being in the English department and teaching for 8 quarters as a Composition teacher, Ming was confident and evaluated herself as “an effective English teacher.” She was able to articulate her teaching philosophy, and knew how to adapt it to different classes. Her sense of self as a Composition teacher and her teaching practices were relatively stable during the quarter I observed her class, compared to other ITAs who still had more struggles and changes in their teaching beliefs and practices.

### **5.3.1.6 Ending note: teaching writing is meaningful**

When Ming was working towards her PhD degree in English with a concentration in Rhetoric, she saw teaching Composition an important part of her professional identity. She foresaw a future as a faculty member teaching courses including Composition, especially Writing across Disciplines. She mentioned that although many people in the English Department and students across campus do not see Composition as an important class, she believed that a good writing class could be very useful and make a difference to students’ lives and the society, as she herself once benefited a lot from taking it. She tried hard in her class to make students see the connection between what they

learned in the class and reality, and to help students not only become good writers, but responsible citizens. She summarized this connection nicely in her ending speech in the last class I observed:

I am really proud of you guys because last time I looked at *New York Times* headline, and it's about Germany just decided to synthesize nuclear power, which has a lot to do with John and David's argument... So, what are you guys doing are actually what is happening in our society. It has true meanings to our lives... You are gonna get out of your university and you are going to be the one to make decision for the society... be aware that whatever you do for your future, science or humanities, once it's out of your hands, there is social effect... no matter how good or noble your intention is, sometimes the consequences might be devastating. We have watched this the whole quarter especially in Rachel's movie. We should be careful of what we are doing. (Ming, last class transcription, 6/2/2011)

Ming felt most fulfilled when her students found real meaning in their writings, and when she felt her class played a role in making her students become participants in their respective communities. As she said nicely in her teaching philosophy:

I was deeply touched when a student told me the reason why he argued about the abuse of energy drinks was that many of his friends in collage were doing it, and he was worried that the advertisements were misleading, which would bring about greater harm... My proudest moment has always been at the end of every quarter, when, as my role as a teacher recedes, I become one of the participants of the intellectual conversations in my class, arguing and laughing with my students. Nothing can be more rewarding. (Ming, teaching philosophy, 2011)

Despite students' initial prejudice in what constitutes competence for Composition teachers, Ming was able to display her competence through various means. Genuinely invested in her imagined community of English professionals whose teaching changes students' lives, Ming was able to incorporate her past and future into her present Composition class, and had become a successful ITA of Composition.

### **5.3.2 Bo Li: from a community of literature scholars to teaching novice writers**

*I end up teaching English composition thanks to the impact of the budget cut on the educational resources at Evergreen. The teaching situation I am facing is not an informed choice; it is what one might dub an existential decision that happens to all of us all the time in college regardless of our will or interest. The same can be said of students. (Bo, Teaching philosophy, fall 2009)*

At the time of this study, Bo was not as committed to the profession of teaching as Sara or Ming, nor did he see a future being a "Composition Teacher." Bo had to take the role of a teaching assistant for various literature classes because it funded his graduate studies. Teaching Composition was the first time Bo had taught his own class independently. Identifying himself as a scholar of romantic literature, Bo was very uncomfortable in his role as a Composition teacher. By the time I studied him, the second year he had taught Composition, he was still not able to reconcile the conflicts between his home community of romantic literature scholars and the teaching community of Composition teachers. Nevertheless, as he said, teaching Composition helped him "start the

journey” (上路) of teaching.

### 5.3.2.1 Learning to teach

Unlike Ming or Sara, Bo emphasized that it was his extensive reading that had heavily influenced his philosophy of teaching, more than his classroom or life experience. Specifically, he thought that the philosophies he read in both Chinese and English classics, alongside with his own thinking, had influenced his way of teaching “gradually and silently” (as the Chinese saying “qianyi mohua 潜移默化”) (After class interview, 6/11/11, p32). Interested in and being influenced by classic texts, Bo considered himself a very traditional teacher. The image of a teacher in his mind was the most respected philosopher and teacher in ancient China: Confucius, who is “wise, tolerant, benevolent and a moral exemplar” (Last interview, 6/13/11). Another role model he identified was a female teacher in his elementary school who was “traditional, hard-working, self-sacrificing (he used a common metaphor for teachers in China ‘candle-like’), diligent and cares about the students way beyond the classroom walls” (Last interview, 6/13/11).

As these role models exemplified, Bo believed a good teacher teaches beyond the subject itself; that is, a good teacher cultivates the mind. To illustrate his idea further, he cited the Tang Dynasty essayist and poet Han Yu 韩愈 from his famous essay “On the Teacher” ( “Shi Shuo” 《师说》 ): “teacher is someone that propagates the doctrine, imparts professional knowledge, and resolves doubts” (“Shi zhe, suoyi chuandao shouye jiehuo ye. 师者，所以传道受业解惑也”). He held the saying as standards for him being a teacher and he criticized teachers in the West half-jokingly,

Westerners will never be able to understand this saying; we (Chinese and the Westerners) are

not even on the same page in terms of teaching philosophy. What they are qualified to do now among the three is only to impart professional knowledge. Not even to mention the other two.

(Last interview, 6/13, p.13)

As Chapter Four has illustrated in detail, Bo was strongly influenced by classic Chinese texts and had a dream of reviving the traditional Chinese culture. He identified himself as a responsible Chinese scholar, and seemed to be cynical towards the modern Western education. He was disappointed and disillusioned to find out that the education he experienced in the U.S. was more like a shallow business: students pay tuition and teachers sell them the knowledge in return. He saw both sides treating education as a game: students care about grades rather than pursuing knowledge and truth, and teachers only teach techniques to help them achieve their utilitarian goals. He did not want to give up his ideal world to join this community of “business-men like Western teachers,” and strived to make his class truly meaningful to students’ lives.

Although Bo had been teaching independently only for a year and half, he had once achieved his ideal of “teaching as cultivating the mind.” It was after he had taught Writing through Literature in his home department (not a Composition class), a student often came to his office to chat with him. He was a second-generation Vietnamese American student, and he seemed to trust Bo by sharing with him his personal experience as an immigrant, school work, and life in general. Bo thought with this student, he was able to be that kind of teacher that not only helped him learn, but also had influence on his life. The student made him feel that there was meaning to his teaching.

### 5.3.2.2 Learning to teach Composition

There have long been disputes between scholars who self-identified as “literature persons” and “composition persons.” (e.g., Elbow, 2002). Historically, literature has remained superior and favored over Composition in the development of English departments according to Berlin (1987). “Literature persons” are more likely to see their scholarship and teaching separately, with their “real work” being more important, whereas “composition persons” see teaching as part of their scholarship. Disciplinary representations of literature people characterize them as more sophisticated because they analyze metaphorical, imaginative language, compared to “composition persons” that are likely to treat texts for pragmatic, social purposes (Elbow, 2002). Despite its recent development as a field, Composition tends to remain at the bottom of the English Department hierarchy. As Elbow pointed out, “teachers of writing are usually paid less to teach more under poorer working conditions—in order to help support literature professors to be paid more to teach less under better working conditions.”

Such a hierarchy is seen at the research site. At the English Department of Evergreen University, the majority of the faculty members specialize in some aspects of literature: 31 Literature and Culture faculty compared to 10 Language and Rhetoric, and 9 Creative Writers. Besides the English Department, the other department from which TAs come, Comparative Literature, focuses entirely on literature. Considered an enabling skill, Composition courses remain mostly at the 100level and are taught mostly by 1<sup>st</sup> year TAs or 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> year TAs who are at the bottom of the teaching priority list, whereas most literature classes are upper division classes, and only TAs who

have passed their 1<sup>st</sup> year can teach them. In fact, most graduate students who specialize in literature would go up the ladder as quickly as they can, as the upper-division literature classes enjoy higher prestige and have fewer students and less workload. Graduate students in Language and Rhetoric track, on the other hand, do not have as many choices.

Self-identified as a literature person, Bo was extremely uncomfortable to take on the role of a 100-level Composition class teacher. He looked down upon basic writing courses for their “lack of sophistication,” and his sense of superiority was even evident during our interviews, where he positioned me as part of the English Department and the Writing Program whereas he himself was not.

Bo’s learning experience as an independent thinker and academic training as a traditional literature person conflicted with the social approach to writing advocated in the Writing Program. The training provided by the program and the department he made him more aware that he did not, and would not belong to this teaching community. To him, writing was “an art that transcend time” and in this sense “unteachable.” If the Writing Program made writing a teachable subject, it was because it approached the teaching of writing as just teaching techniques, which was shallow. Bo believed that students only become better writers when they become more sophisticated thinker and readers; or even, when they have more life experience. To him, learning to write is learning to behave as a responsible person (“zuoren 做人”): “if you really want to learn how to write better, think about how to be a better person first” (Last interview, 6/13). He illustrated this idea with the example of plagiarism:

For example, why shouldn’t students plagiarize? As teachers you could approach this issue in

several different ways: you can say that plagiarism leads to serious consequences; legally speaking you can say it is like stealing others' intellectual property; regarding academic standards you can teach them specific rules for citation; or you can say practically if you cite, you give other people credits. But what is the real issue? It's about being honest as a person, the issue of academic honesty. (Last interview, 6/13/11, p.8)

Seeing writing as a sophisticated art that was essentially unteachable to naïve, shallow undergraduates, Bo actively resisted the social view of writing pedagogy promoted in the trainings. He said these theories were "strange ideas transplanted in (him)," and if he followed these ideas, "it's no longer me" (interview, 6/13/11). In his teaching philosophy statement in the final portfolio for the training course, he described his doubts on a social constructionist approach to writing pedagogy:

Not only have I been "placed" into a rhetorical situation in which the motivation of the participants is in question, but also directed to design the class in a way informed by a pedagogy that derives more or less from the contemporary theoretical debate about teaching (English) writing in general. The most vocal pedagogical school embraces a social constructionist conception of knowledge production. It is supposed to replace the traditional approach known as 'cognitivism' that locates knowledge in the mysterious place called the individual mind. The 'social turn' of contemporary epistemology requires a corresponding turn in actual practice, if critical theory is to make a difference. The logic at work is, if I am not entirely mistaken, that since knowledge is socially produced, writing as a particular mode of social production must be socially taught. Hence the class comes into my hands with a complete pre-tested pedagogical apparatus that is supposed to function socially. Some of it

has been in use longer than others, which, however, does not alter their fundamentally social character. In-class and online group discussions, peer reviews, teacher-student conferences, student evaluations etc. have been incorporated into my course syllabus without my knowing consciously their whys and wherefores - a somewhat purposeless application of critically informed pedagogical tools.” (Bo, Teaching Philosophy, Fall 2009)

In this statement, by repetitively using passive voice Bo constructed himself as an object that has been imposed upon by the teaching beliefs promoted by the “most vocal pedagogical school.” Nevertheless, he was not an agent-less object that was marginalized by the most vocal pedagogical school; he chose to remain in the marginality because he claimed expertise in another community of more sophisticated scholars. He actively positioned himself as anon-participant in the community of Composition theorists: Although he summarized the theories and practices under the social approach to writing pedagogy, he used many hedges to emphasize his outsider-ness: e.g., “more or less,” “it is supposed to,” “if I am not entirely mistaken.” Therefore, what’s considered legitimate in the community of writing teachers and theorists (e.g., “critically informed pedagogical tools”) became “purposeless” in his class.

Because Bo developed an identity as an outsider of the community of Composition teachers, it made it difficult for him to interact with other members as a participant. He didn’t find the training or the Composition Pedagogy course provided by the Writing Program helpful for him, nor did he communicate with other TAs after the training was finished.

### 5.3.2.3 In the classroom: 1<sup>st</sup> time teaching Composition

Not being able to see himself as part of the teaching community of Composition teachers, as a good student all his life, he still wanted to do a decent job in teaching. However, because his teaching beliefs conflicted with the program, along with the other challenges he identified (e.g., non-native identity, cultural difference etc.), he faced many challenges in constructing a competent writing teacher identity both inside the Writing Program and in front of his students. He was putting as much effort as the other new TAs, if not more, but upon recalling, he said his first teaching experience was “terrible” (Last interview, 6/13/11, p.4).

Bo was overwhelmed by the challenges he had to face when he first started teaching ENGL131. Being a first-time writing instructor on his own, he struggled with “what to teach, how to teach writing, and how to meet the requirements set up by the program (as he explained further, ‘the way it should be taught’)” (Last interview, p.4). Overwhelmed as a novice composition teacher, he described his first teaching experience as “disorganized”: although the initial TA training helped him to design his first sequence, he didn’t think he designed the materials well; he had to think about how to “make through tomorrow’s class” every day. He emphasized that he couldn’t develop course materials that were in his academic interests or specialty, because none of the selected readings in the textbook were in his academic interests.

For his first quarter teaching Composition, Bo designed his assignments around the topic of identity and language, as he thought this topic was more related to his personal experience and may empower a minority teacher like him. For course readings he chose Amy Tan’s essay *Mother Tongue*,

and James Baldwin's *If Black English Isn't a Language, then Tell Me, What Is?* However, in the interview he complained about this choice:

These texts should have been empowering for me but in fact they are not, because they alienate the students. The white students are not interested in these authors because these are far away from their lives. Only 20-30% of my students who share similar experience, like me, can connect with them.(last interview, 6/13/11)

Bo emphasized the difficulty in positioning himself as competent in front of his students, that is, “how to win their trust and whether they have confidence in your capability and your knowledge” (first interview). Although Bo found “his language background, nationality as a Chinese, qualification, credentials, age, life experience and cultural background” as I listed in the interview questions had all somewhat contributed to the challenges, the fundamental problem still came from his professional positioning. Since he is a “sophisticated literature scholar,” he couldn't identify with the students “who are only interested in popular cultures.” Bo did not find a good way to teach them, and received only an average 1.5 (0-5 scale) on his teaching evaluations after the first quarter was over. He felt bad about himself and said this teaching experience was a “nightmare.”

#### **5.3.2.4 Changing the curriculum: constructing a “literature scholar” identity**

After teaching Composition for a year, Bo taught a new course (Writing through Literature) in the Comparative Literature Department for two quarters. He found himself a more competent teacher in his home department (his teaching evaluations were significantly higher), and he attributed the reasons to the fact that he was teaching his expertise – literature – in his home department. Therefore,

when he returned to the English Department in spring 2011, he had changed his original curriculum by making all the reading and writing assignments in his academic expertise: the genre of literary criticism and literary analyses. His new design of the course highlighted his identity as a “serious literature scholar” whose competence is far beyond his students’.

The course readings Bo chose this time were all related to his academic interests except the first essay, and the writing assignments looked similar to the genres usually produced in a literature class. Bo justified his choices by stating that these literary criticisms are “real arguments,” in other words, more sophisticated than the ones in the textbook for beginner writers. Below (Table 3, Table 4) is his design of course materials:

**Table 3: Bo’s chosen reading materials**

<b>Course materials</b>	<b>Content</b>
<i>Acts of Inquiry</i>	Textbook compiled and required by the program
Boring from Within: The Art of the Freshman Essay	An essay written by Wayne Booth on what college writing should teach
Coleridge and the Deluded Reader: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.	Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem(the original version in 1798 and the revised version with his gloss in 1834) Frances Ferguson’s literary criticism
Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798.	William Wordsworth’s poem
Insight and oversight: reading Tintern Abbey	Marjorie Levinson’s literary criticism
The Uses of Dorothy: The Language of the Sense in Tintern Abbey.	John Barrell’s literary criticism
<i>Tintern Abbey: Two Assaults</i>	Helen Vendler’s literary criticism

**Table 4: Bo’s assignment sequence**

Assignments	Topic	Genre	Related texts
<b>Sequence one</b>			
SP1.1	Reading the “Rime”	A literary analysis of the poem in order to respond to an identified issue	The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798)
SP1.2	Reading in the Margins	A literary analysis of the revised poem with a gloss	The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1834)
MP1	“The Rime”: A Final Look	An essay about “the Rime” in response to a preexisting critical essay	The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and a chosen critical essay
<b>Sequence Two</b>			
SP2.1	“Tintern Abbey:” First Assault	A summary of Levinson’s essay “Insight and Oversight: Reading ‘Tintern Abbey.’”	Marjorie Levinson’s “Insight and Oversight: Reading ‘Tintern Abbey.’”
SP2.2	“Tintern Abbey:” Synthesis	A Synthesis of Vendler’s argument with either Levinson or Barrell	Vendler, Levinson or Barrell’s essay
MP2	“Tintern Abbey:” Final Look	An argument paper analyzing “Tintern Abbey”	All previous texts

Apart from reading and writing assignments, right from his course description on the syllabus (below) he constructed a dichotomy between serious scholars like him and the shallow students. The serious scholars were represented by “Dr. Samuel Johnson,” an 18<sup>th</sup>-century poet, whom he liked. The class was constructed as difficult: for example, students who are “deluded” and find academic writing “difficult” should read serious texts with “effort” and “hard work.” Although they may have had writing experiences before, they would surely encounter “difficulties” as academic writing was a

“complicated process.” Below is his course description:

### **ENGLISH 131 H – COMPOSITION: EXPOSITION SPRING 2011**

#### **Course Description: “The Deluded Reader: Two Case Studies”**

What is written without effort, Dr. Johnson once shrewdly observed, —is in general read without pleasure.

The maxim gives expression to the fact that good writing almost always means hard work. Your own writing experience might give you an inkling of how this can be true, but some inkling alone is not enough for you to succeed in various academic situations you will encounter during your undergraduate career.

What difficulties are involved in academic writing? How to deal with them? English 131 is designed to guide you through the complicated process of academic writing. (Bo’s English131 Syllabus, Spring 2011)

Constructing himself as a literature scholar had certainly granted Bo more confidence in the classroom. He spoke more enthusiastically when he was teaching the literary texts compared to the days when he had taught from the textbook. However, this construction of teacher identity did not benefit his students. His students were overwhelmed by the amount of difficult readings they had to do, and struggled throughout the whole quarter. Bo received only an average of 2.5 in his teaching evaluations, and the lowest score on the item “relevance and usefulness of course content.” Almost all the students complained about the difficult course content which was inappropriate for a 100-level English class. Some of the students wrote:

“The class stretched my thinking too much—I got a headache.” “The readings were too much, ridiculously hard.” “Eighteen century’s poetry about gods and nature? NO. Sometimes I didn’t even know what I was writing.” “It blew my mind off.” “The level of difficulty was too high for an intro requirement class.” (Course evaluations, spring 2011)

### 5.3.2.5 Ending note: still developing a teacher identity

After the quarter had ended, Bo still felt as a Composition teacher he saw himself in “a misplaced position while still trying to make his job meaningful.” Nevertheless, compared with his first time teaching Composition, he found his teaching had made improvement and was no longer “substandard.” He said he had learned a lot from teaching, even though he did not like it in the beginning. To improve his teaching he hoped he could have more freedom, teach more about reading and literature, and learn more about the subject matter as well as the mainstream American culture. He acknowledged that he hadn’t figured out a way to teach a diverse student population, but this study had made him concerned more about this issue. After this quarter Bo went back to resume teaching in his home department. I was happy to receive his phone call from time to time to discuss teaching issues in his class, especially regarding an increasing number of Chinese students, and have also shared with him ideas to know more about the students’ needs. Although teaching basic writing was not part of Bo’s future plans, I could see him become more reflective with teaching itself<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>Although Bo self-identified as a literature person, it is important to note that Bo’s experience was not typical of other TAs who specialize in literature. Studying in the Comparative Literature Department, Bo’s resistance to Composition teaching was more grounded in disciplinary differences. Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge that Bo came to the writing program during a year when the program faced severe budget cuts, cutting one of the two pedagogy seminars and placing all 20 new TAs (down from a usual of 33 new TAs) into one section, which reduced the level of individualized attention. The unique material conditions Bo was in also contributed to his sense of alienation.

### 5.3.3 Sara: from teaching ELL students to teaching All Students

*English as a Second Language has long been my forte, especially English for Academic Purposes (EAP). English Language Learners (ELLs) have always been my key student population, and a great part of my teacher identity comes from working with ELLs. This portfolio comes at a transitional point in my teaching career. I am now starting to teach English 131 at Evergreen University which is a required course for all students.* (Sara, teaching philosophy for English 567 final portfolio, Fall 2010)

To Sara, teaching is her true vocation. Since she was young Sara has always liked teaching. When she was a child she would even get a whiteboard in front of toys and teach. Then the higher the level she went in school, the higher the level of students she wanted to teach. So now, since she is in graduate school, she wants to become a teacher educator that prepares graduate students to become teachers. Sara started her teaching career by teaching Academic English to English language learners, and had earned a Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at Evergreen University. As she said in her teaching philosophy above, working with an ELL population constituted a great part of her teacher identity. She self-identified as an English as a Second Language teacher before she started teaching Composition. By the time I studied her, she had taught Composition for 2 quarters, and she told me she still felt she was a "better ESL/EFL teacher" than a teacher of Composition.

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### 5.3.3.1 Learning to teach

Sara entered the profession of English teaching because she was genuinely happy, most at home, and fulfilled when she was teaching. She had a sense of calling to this profession and took every learning opportunity to improve her teaching. Teaching is part of her, as she said nicely in her teaching philosophy for the TA training course ENGL567: “I think teaching cannot simply be considered as a job. It is part of who you want to be in this world and it becomes integrated in your personality”(Sara, teaching philosophy, Fall 2010). She attributes her love of this profession to her personality (“I like to talk and engage in discussions”), competence in English (“I was pretty good at English and feel like I have something to offer”), and influence from good teachers (“I love my teachers”). As she puts it,

I had some bad experiences but some of my good teachers really made a difference in my whole learning process and I feel like if I can recreate that for some of my other students, that is just how life should be. I tried for a while to work as a translator and I hated it, I hated it for sitting in front of a computer for 8 hours I couldn't do it. I need human interaction. (Sara, last interview, p. 9)

Overall, Sara listed three factors that influenced her learning of how to teach. First, Sara learned teaching mostly from her BAD learning experiences. When she was an undergraduate she would draw boxes in her notebook and write in encoded language: what NOT to do when teaching. One thing that annoyed her the most was how some teachers did not explain why they were doing certain tasks in class; so when she became a teacher, she was always explicit with respect to her purposes and goals. Secondly, she said through her previous teaching in Egypt she had learned

different techniques in every class, such as things that worked or things she should avoid.

Lastly, she said the MATESOL Program she went through at Evergreen University had influenced her teaching the most. Sara came to the program because she sensed that her “pedagogical choices needed theoretical backing which would in turn help (her) become more confident and aware of (her) teaching methods” (Teaching philosophy, Fall 2010), and she found the program “extremely useful” in helping her identity development as a teacher: she became more confident and more reflective. As she said,

To be honest, till now I feel that a lot of topics we discussed, I don't have 100 percent grasp of those topics. But it is more that I have a collective understanding of methods, techniques, theories and a lot of critical questions we have to keep asking yourself. But if you ask me like individually what did you do in this class, what did you do in that class, I may not be the best person to tell you what I did. But it's sort of like lesson planning or what I am in class, it's a combination of who am I as a teacher? But I think a lot of it is like me today thinking that I embarrassed a student, maybe I didn't, but like a lot of we talked about in the practicum and just like in professor's class it's like it triggers ideas which isn't necessarily good – standing in the middle of class and like oh boy what do I do now? (First interview part 2, 4/18/2011, p9)

### **5.3.3.2 Learning to teach Composition**

As an ESL/EFL teacher, Sara had taught many English classes for Academic Purposes (EAP) to university ELL students: writing, reading, presentation skills, and etc. Unlike Ming, Sara had never taken any classes on academic writing in either English or Arabic. She learned how to write

academically in English while she was teaching it to her students: “when I started teaching at the private university in Egypt, they gave me this textbook, and it was all about academic writing. And I was like, yes, this makes sense! So I learned with my students. It was interesting.” (Sara, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 3/30/2011, P11)

Sara liked teaching writing the most and had the most experience teaching writing. She compared it with other skills:

When I first started teaching I was teaching writing. I am not comfortable teaching listening and speaking. Also I feel as a teacher I ...like writing, also I feel like when you teach writing you can really put your finger on the issues your students are having. It's more concrete. But listening and speaking, it's way more hard to explain to your students what they need to work on its hard to catch what they need to work on.” (Sara, 1<sup>st</sup> interview, 3/30/2011, P12)

So when Sara started her training in teaching Composition, she was confident in teaching the subject of college level academic skills, especially writing skills. However, she still saw teaching Composition a “transitional point in [her] teaching career,” as she self-identified as an ESL teacher at that time. The uncertainty for her came from several sources: 1) she was unfamiliar with the nature of this required course and the student population, 2) she had just entered the PhD program in Language and Rhetoric and was still learning about the field of Composition.

Scholars in Second Language Writing and in Composition have compared their scholarly traditions and many have found differences between first-year composition courses and writing in an English Language (ESL) Program: “the former takes an inductive approach, emphasizing critical thinking and avoidance of formulaic writing (e.g., the five paragraph essay), while the latter

emphasizes a deductive approach by teaching formulaic writing and giving priority to communicating fluently and accurately rather than to critical thinking” (e.g., Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995, cited in Kang, 2011, p.157). Trained in TESOL and having taught in the ELP before, Sara’s first observation of the Composition class was its intensity. She found it overwhelming to cover the four demanding outcomes while still meeting her own standards as a good teacher. So the biggest challenge Sara had initially was how to manage to “cover the intense course content powerfully and not run through them” (interview, 4/18/2011, p.7). Trying to meet the program requirement, Sara found it difficult to make her course content interesting and creative, while also having to deal with the amount of correction she had to do. Due to time constraint, she also had to recycle handouts and materials other TAs had developed, which made her feel that she didn’t own the curriculum yet. By the end of the quarter when she taught for the second time, Sara said “still I feel I have more to achieve, and I am not as good as I could be...but I don’t know how to get there.” (Sara, interview, 6/2/11, p8).

Another difference Sara noticed between teaching ESL students and students in Composition was that being an ESL teacher, she was used to “starting from the bottom and work up,” but with this new population, she could build on what they already knew. On the one hand, these students’ previous knowledge were advantages they brought to Sara’s class. She realized she could depend a lot more on these students, for what they said would usually generate a discussion. However, the challenge lay in balancing what they had and the amount of help she needed to give them. Sara was made more aware of this difference when she met with the program director after the first quarter. As part of the program support, the director of the writing program had a meeting with Sara to go over

her teaching evaluation from her first time teaching. The contradiction in the evaluation results showed to them that the students understood the course content, but they were not challenged enough. Through talking with the director Sara realized she could go into more depth with readings. (Interview, 4/18/2011, p4)

### ***Community of Composition teachers***

Starting her first year in the PhD program, Sara also noticed the difference between her MATESOL cohort and the English PhD students at large. Sara used to attend many social gatherings with her MATESOL cohort and it felt like a close community. Now since she had entered the PhD program and was one of the few students graduated from MATESOL, she started to feel a lack of interaction with other PhD students. Although the English PhD students had a weekly social gathering at a pub, due to religious reasons, Sara never attended it. She said,

With TAs, it's like you see them in office but you don't interact with them much. I know they go to the bars sometimes but I don't go to bars. I sort of missed out. It's usually late on Thursdays and I wanna go home. And their party theme is like drinking. It's different from the MATESOL social gathering. MATESOL is more like restaurant, or family, or our chair's house. I haven't been able to socially gathering. I know we are all in the office and we are in good terms. That's socially. Pedagogically, we don't talk much really, I just talk with Jenny because we are doing coursework together. (Last interview, 6/2/11, p3).

Sara's cohort of Composition TAs was the first group that was assigned a big office together in a newly renovated building in the center of the campus. For those who started earlier like Bo and

Ming, their offices were scattered around campus: the basement of the English Department building, top-floor offices in the art building with no windows, or a two-floor annex that looks like a poorly maintained construction site. The physical segregation of first-year TAs contributed to their feeling of alienation and marginalization. Bo and Ming almost never communicated with other TAs after the initial training. Fortunately for Sara, since she shared the office with other TAs, it was easier for her to check in with her colleagues. Even so, Sara felt their communication was just “a lot of greetings”; they never talked about class content. During the quarter I observed Sara, she only had frequent communication with one other TA, who was trained in the MATESOL Program and was teaching the same class as Sara. Sara acknowledged that graduate students were usually too busy to socialize, but she was active in emailing the assistant directors, and kept in touch with the director as well. She said it was important to her to maintain this kind of contact even when she was not asked to do so.

Sara highly praised the seven-day training provided by the program:

I was amazed how much we got done within that seven days. They were extremely supportive. And they gave me the feeling that no matter what happened, we are here to support you, listen to what you need, and that makes me really comfortable. And in close groups, that helps us to get to know each other better. We spent a lot of time in those five days. (Interview, 6/2/11, p4).

### **5.3.3.3 Designing the curriculum: incorporating TESOL teaching into Composition teaching**

Although Sara had noticed the differences between her previous TESOL experience and the Composition program, she also found many similarities in their approach to teaching academic

writing. She didn't feel she was a different person teaching this new course, as she said, "In both ESL and this context, I still feel like I am myself." (Sara, interview, 6/2/11, p4).

Seeing the goal of Composition as preparing students for college writing, Sara did not have many problems incorporating what's required in the program into her course descriptions:

**Why do we offer English 131?** So you've probably taken writing classes before, and have your own idea about what writing means. Together we will work on modifying and expanding all the writing skills you already know in order to meet the writing standards expected of you in an academic context regardless of your field. These skills will help you beyond your university career, and will resonate with you in both your professional and personal lives. Wherever you go or whatever you do, you need to be a savvy writer, and a sharp reader of texts- regardless of what genre or form they come in. (Sara, 131 Syllabus, Spring 2011)

In the description, Sara positioned the students as "novice with potential" (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). That is, the students bring into this class their previous writing experience, which they can build on to meet the new demands of college-level writing.

Based on her academic interests in language and social issues, Sara decided on "*Language, Identity and Representation*" for her course theme. She explained what the theme meant in the syllabus:

During this course we will begin to explore the theme of *Language, Identity and, Representation*. During our first sequence we will address how *language* can play a crucial part in identity formation. In the second sequence we will delve deeper into how *identities* within societies are formed and represented through factors

that go beyond *language*. I hope through our in-class discussions and assigned writings that you find a personal investment while utilizing the rhetorical devices and writing skills that we will learn (remember that *secret code* above). The course theme of **Language, Identity, and Representation** will provide you with a chance to explore your views on the issues discussed in class through your academic writing, while also assessing other authors' views. (Sara, 131 Syllabus, Spring 2011)

The readings she chose covered a wide range of identities in the U.S.: Mexicans, Asians, Muslim, females, African Americans, and etc. She strived to make the topics as diverse as possible, so that her students wouldn't find her singling out a certain culture over others. Below (Table 5, Table 6) are some of the readings she chose and the assignment sequences she designed:

**Table 5: Sara's chosen reading materials**

<b>Course materials</b>	<b>Content</b>
<i>Acts of Inquiry</i>	Textbook compiled and required by the program
<i>Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood</i>	A memoir written by Richard Rodriguez of himself growing up bilingual and bicultural as the son of Mexican immigrants in a mostly white neighborhood
<i>Mother Tongue</i>	An essay written by Amy Tan on her experience growing up in an Asian American family and her relationship with her mother
<i>How to Tame a Wild Tongue</i>	A book chapter written by Gloria Anzaldua, a sixth-generation Tejana (a person of Hispanic origin born in Texas) on her use of multifaceted language and its intricate relation with identity
<i>If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?</i>	An essay written by James Baldwin on the identity and language use of African Americans
<i>Teaching New Worlds/New Words</i>	An essay written by Bell Hooks on black English

<i>Bitch</i>	An essay written by Beverly Gross that explores the different meaning of the word “Bitch”
<i>Life on an Indian Reservation</i>	A documentary episode from Morgan Spurlock’s <i>30 Days</i> series on identity of Native Americans

**Table 6: Sara’s assignment sequence: *Language, Identity and Representation***

Assignments	Topic	Genre	Related texts
<b>Sequence one</b>			
SP1.1	Rhetorical analysis	Rhetorical analysis	Richard Rodruigez’s <i>Aria: A Memoir of Bilingual Childhood</i>
SP1.2	Creating a conversation between two scholars	An imagined dialogue	Richard Rodruigez’s <i>Aria: A Memoir of Bilingual Childhood</i> and Amy Tan’s <i>Mother Tongue</i>
SP1.3	Reflections on one’s language use by using Anzaldua’s argument	Argument paper	Anzaldua’s <i>How to Tame a Wild Tongue</i>
MP1	Developing an argument on language and identity	Argument paper	Previous papers and articles
<b>Sequence Two</b>			
SP2.1	Identifying claims through different genres	Genre Analysis	A documentary <i>Life on an Indian Reservation</i>
SP2.2	The Power of Words	Argument paper based on research evidence	Beverly Gross’s essay “Bitch,” survey, observation notes
SP2.3	Annotated bibliography and research proposal	Bibliography and proposal	Articles students found
MP2	When Stereotypes Attack!	Argument paper	Previous articles and papers

Sara explained that she chose the theme because “it relates to [her] master’s and relates to

[her].” Although it’s not her translingual identity that determined this choice, being translingual, transcultural herself certainly added authenticity to this topic. Because of this reason, Sara’s class certainly had a personal touch to it. In the syllabus she said she hoped students would “find a personal investment” in writing about this topic. In chapter six I will illustrate in detail how Sara positioned herself as a translingual, transnational person in classroom discourse and how her students responded to that identity in the context of her course theme.

#### **5.3.3.4 Ending note: a TESOL expert in the community of Composition teachers**

Sara has always been strongly invested in becoming an outstanding teacher, and imagined herself part of the community of language teacher educators. Her expertise in working with ELL students did not hinder her professional development in her imagined community; in fact, it facilitated her finding a place in the community of Composition teachers: at the time of this writing, she had become the newly appointed ELL consultant for all Composition TAs. Although Sara still sensed a lacking in the Composition class I observed, she continued to seek help from her colleagues and faculty in the department and continued to make progress. The changing demographics of the students’ population as well as the efforts of the department to support multilingual writers further affirmed her identity as a competent English professional with expertise in TESOL--someone who not only knows how to teach Composition, but knows how to support multilingual writers and prepare teachers for this population. Her translingual identity further contributed to her authenticity in this positioning.

## 5.4 Chapter Summary

In sum, as previous literature indicates (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997), the ITAs' identities as Composition teachers developed along two dimensions: a biographical/professional basis and a contextual basis. The ITAs' biographical and schooling experiences, previous learning in their disciplinary communities, institutional structure, and future goals, all played a role in shaping who they were as teachers in this context. Their translingual identities influenced how they displayed competence in front of their immature students, but did not determine their identity construction as Composition teachers.

In learning to become competent Composition teachers, the ITAs initially all faced the challenge of participating in the community of Composition teachers as defined by both the program and the students. In learning to participate in the community of Composition teachers as defined by the program, both Ming and Sara believed the goal of College Composition is to teach students to write for their disciplines, and therefore saw their writing class as truly meaningful in helping students to transition from high school to college. Imagining teaching Composition as part of their professional development, Ming and Sara were able to utilize their competence in the academic disciplinary communities as an advantage. For instance, Sara realized the difference between ESL teaching and Composition teaching and had found ways to incorporate her TESOL expertise as an advantage in the Composition class; Ming had incorporated her interdisciplinary knowledge in teaching Composition. Bo, on the other hand, failed to reconcile the conflicts between his imagined community of literature scholars and the community of Composition teachers. He did not see first

year composition course as meaningful and made his class into a game of sophisticated thinking and reading of literature. He had troubles in designing the curriculum that both fit the program and his specialty. As a novice teacher, Bo was still struggling in finding himself in the classroom.

Although Ming and Sara were able to become competent members in the community of Composition teachers as defined by the program, Ming and Bo both faced challenges in displaying competence in front of their students because of a perceived “NNEST” identity. Ming had developed various strategies (creating a professional website with links to her academic achievements, use of visual tools in teaching, and etc.) to cope with this challenge. Bo, on the other hand, did not find a way to bridge the cultural gap between him and the students, and his choice of sophisticated texts and assignments had further alienated the students.

The Writing Program in the department had provided a space to develop a Community of Practice (COP) for the new TAs in the beginning, and had allowed graduate students of different academic interests to take different forms of participation in the community. This flexibility was often quite positive, but it did leave the ITAs in this study often trying to understand their teaching situations on their own. It is important to note that their stories are not representative of all other ITAs’ experiences. There have also been important changes: Since Bo and Ming started teaching, the Writing Program has built up support for international students more than ever: it has created studios, linked ESOL/Composition courses, ELL Composition sections, a Global Classrooms committee, and a Global Classrooms director. It has offered more workshops, including a workshop on teacher persona and authority. It has also offered an optional endorsement in critical pedagogy which addresses identity and power in the classroom. These efforts in addressing the needs of international

students and TAs would have been beneficial to the ITAs in this study, and will contribute to creating a COP for future ITAs.

# CHAPTER 6: TRANSLINGUAL IDENTITY-AS-PEDAGOGY IN CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines classroom discourse in order to answer the research question: “To what extent and how do the ITAs draw on their translingual identity as pedagogical resources (“Identity-as-Pedagogy,” IaP) in their Composition classrooms?” Similar to some traditions of analysis such as conversational analysis(CA; e.g., Kasper, 2004; Sacks, 1992; Sacks, et al., 1974; Silberstein, 2011; Tannen, 1984), instead of treating the identities of “teacher,” “student,” “NNEST” as analytically given, I looked at how identities are the products of the interactional work of participants. Drawing on Zimmerman’s (1998) distinction between situated and transportable identities in talk, I analyze episodes from the three ITAs’ classrooms where transportable identities were evoked. As Richards has suggested, “introducing transportable identity in the language classroom...and encouraging students to do the same may have the power to transform the sort of interaction that takes place in the classroom ” (2006, p.71), I examined whether orienting to transportable identities in the Composition classrooms, especially a translingual, transnational identity, provided pedagogical potential for the ITAs’ classroom.

By using CA techniques, this study has found that: 1) all three ITAs have introduced and oriented to transportable identities in their teaching: Sara as a transnational, translingual speaker, a graduate student, a relatively young person; Ming as a scientist, an experienced writer, an older person; Bo as a sophisticated scholar and a literature lover. For Sara, orienting to a transportable

identity added authenticity to the classroom; but Ming and Bo resisted orienting to a translingual identity.2) Simply orienting to transportable identities in the classroom may not transform the sort of interaction that occurs in the classroom. Only when the introduction of transportable identities brings pedagogically rich changes to default identities (that is to say, for example, when the teacher is willing to take on the situated identity of “learner,” thus drawing on and developing student knowledge), can classroom conversations be formed that benefit students’ learning. Such transformation was only found in Sara’s class where students became cultural informants. 3) Although identity-as-pedagogy may not always be intentional in this study, the translingual, transnational identities of the ITAs all brought advantages to their classrooms to different degrees. I argue that their translingual identity could be better supported so that the ITAs can fully realize its value to benefit the diverse student population.

## **6.2 Ming’s translingual identity-as-pedagogy**

Although an “ESL person” identity is dominant in Ming’s narratives in the interviews, Ming never oriented to an identity of an “ESL person,” an ITA or a bilingual in her teaching, even when the situation called for it. Although she said in the interviews that she was obviously a “Chinese” in the English Department, in her classroom she often positioned herself as an American by using the pronoun “we” as in “we have similar cases in the U.S.” (class observation, 4/7/11). She never spoke Chinese to her Chinese students, even after class. She felt it would have been ok in her Chemistry class but since now she was teaching English, it would not make sense to use Chinese. The only time other than the first class where she had oriented to an identity of someone not born in the U.S. was

when she encouraged students to run for president after watching Al Gore's speech. She said it humorously: "If you guys have a chance, do a better job than him. I don't think I will have a chance though. Haha. ((Students laughed))." (class observation, 5/15/11).

There was little change in discourse and situated identities in the classroom discourse. Ming was always the teacher who knew everything and the only one that offered the right answer. Her classroom discourse followed the IRF pattern (initiation-response-feedback). In most of the cases when Ming introduced and oriented to a transportable identity, it is the identity of an experienced scientist. For instance, she told her students she had earned a doctorate in Chemistry and she often talked about her previous experiences in the labs to help her students write about the social effects of science.

The chosen episode (Episode 1) shows an incident in class where the teacher could have oriented to a translingual identity herself but didn't do so. I chose this episode because it struck me as a teaching moment where orienting to a translingual identity might have better facilitated students' learning. An important daily activity that's unique to Ming's class was an in-class presentation or discussion based on an assigned homework the day before. All students sent their answers to Ming, and they had to report on them during the class. Although students spoke for the majority of time in Ming's class, Ming was the one that gave the right answer, made sure students met the requirements, and had the final say. This student-centered, teacher-guided activity became the main type of interaction in Ming's class. Almost every class I observed followed this type of interaction. Episode one is an example of this type of interaction. The day before, the students had read the article "*The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female*

*Roles*,” an essay written by the anthropologist of science and feminist Emily Martin on how language constructs gender roles.

In the episode, Ming asked the student Kay to answer a question on her provided handout: “Do you agree with the author? Why or why not?” The student said she disagreed and brought up the point that cultural differences influence how language constructs stereotypes. The student used the example of “menstruation” to explain her point that the author did not consider how gender stereotypes can be constructed differently in languages other than English. The teacher acknowledged that this was a great point (turn 03) and made this into a teaching moment. She posed the question to the whole class (turn 07). In doing so Ming introduced a transportable identity for all the students: translingual speakers, as she said: “you guys have, I believe, already started your second language, or third language?” She assumed all students have at least learned another language and hoped they could draw on that knowledge to provide an example. In the next question she specifically singled out the group of “non-native English speakers,” calling on them, saying, “those of you whose English is not first language, you have another native language there.” In asking these questions Ming positioned students who speak more than one language, especially non-native speakers in a positive light, as she provided a chance for them to claim their nuanced knowledge in different languages and cultures. The positive positioning became more apparent when Ming said “you knew better”(07).

Episode 1: Stereotypes are cultural specific (Fieldnotes and class transcription, 4/21/11)

01 T: Question number 2, Kay.

- 02 S1: I didn't really agree with what she is saying?((T: Ok. Fine)) I think the biggest issue I had was(XXXX<sup>4</sup>)((T: Uh-huh)) ...what she is analyzing is that English as a science language and that American and British as a society; all the evidence she used were in the UK not the US. Gender stereotypes and culture vary by countries. ((T: A-ah)) ...generalization like oh I will use gender stereotypes...but if you took a textbook like from Japan, it's different from say France ...languages differ across countries and gender stereotypes vary across countries...as an anthropologist she doesn't really address that? She is an American; she didn't mention people outside of the US, and how they study science...her opinions are biased...I have an issue with this.
- 03 T: ((interrupts)) Ok. Do you have an example? No. You have a very good point here. I mean those stereotypes are cultural specific.
- 04 S1: Yea.
- 05 T: Right. So if you want cross-cultural talk about other cultures and stereotypes, be careful, because you might not know at all, you know, that about the stereotypes of another culture. That's sure, but...Ok. Do you have an example ((S1: An example? )), Uh-huh, to support your argument?
- 06 S1: Cuz like... She says like menstruation...in English is like making trash...that's like the connotation of it. But in other cultures, maybe menstruation wouldn't have that kind of connotation as in English...maybe not making trash, but making something else...so it's like...
- 07 T: **Ok I am gonna make this question for the whole class, you guys have, I believe, already started your second language, or third language? Ok, do you have, anyone who knows another language...say a situation that has a different connotation there? (1) Or those of you whose English is not first language, you have another native language there? You knew better. Do you have an example? Ok. Yizhong, right?"**
- 08 S2: Chinese
- 09 T: Ok go ahead, what's Chinese, what's the connotation of a Chinese word?" (2)  
Um...It's not much about language, but cultural difference. Not the language itself. Based
- 10 S2: on culture, what's difference between English and (XXX)  
Ok. Ok. Xing yang?  
I didn't get the question.
- 11 T: Kay?
- 12 S3: It's like we don't talk about menstruation as much in the U.S. as in some other
- 13 T: countries? ...We don't openly talk about this... she didn't talk about this cultural
- 14 S1: difference...
- 15 T: Yea. That's an important point about her writing...Ok, any other...? I hope this topic doesn't make guys uncomfortable here. (Ss laughed). So I apologize haha.

Ming's intentional positioning of translingual identity as a strength was immediately taken up

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<sup>4</sup>(XXXX) stands for unclear words.

by a Chinese international student. He raised his hand and said he spoke Chinese other than English (turn 08). When Ming asked him to provide an example in Chinese, however, he failed to do so. In his turn he only mumbled his opinions on language and culture in general (turn 10). The teacher turned to another Chinese student, but she did not seem to understand the question. At this point the student who brought up the point raised her hand again and continued to explain. Ming didn't elaborate but simply commented that this was a good point. She realized the example of "menstruation" and the feminist lens of the article may have alienated the male students and oriented to a female identity in the end: "I hope this topic doesn't make *guys* uncomfortable here." Then she moved on to the next question without further pursuing of the issue.

If Ming had oriented to a translingual identity herself here, for instance, by providing an example on her own from Chinese, it may have added authenticity to illustrate the point on cultural difference, and could have generated more responses from the students. But for Ming who had positioned herself as a competent professional of writing and rhetoric and an established scholar of science throughout the quarter, it would have been difficult for her to orient to a translingual identity in this one episode. Furthermore, she might be uncomfortable being too personally involved in an already controversial topic, on how scientific language constructs gender stereotypes. In fact, she told me in the interview as "both a woman and a scientist," she disliked this feminist essay<sup>5</sup>, but she

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<sup>5</sup>It may be worth noting that Ming's reaction to the article may have affected her instructional decisions. The student who thought the article was biased by being culturally specific may well have been misunderstanding the article (which did not claim cultural universality) or even misunderstood the notion of bias itself. But Ming's dislike of the article may have led her to use the issue of culture to avoid what would arguably have been a more relevant discussion of bias; that is, beginning students often mistake having a position or location as "bias." Or Ming may simply have been ratifying a part of the students' reaction that she knew could be productive, culture, while avoiding the feminist aspects of the essay.

chose to teach it because it was a great argument paper.

Similar to Morgan (2004), Ming knew students tend to produce certain “image-texts” for non-native speaking teachers or Asian teachers like her: she had one or two resistant students every quarter and some complained about her “accent.” Besides their prejudice based on race and accent, some students thought Ming was a feminist because she assigned them feminist essays and, she had been called a “feminist bitch” before. But different from Morgan (2004:173), who proposed to draw on personal identities to rescript students’ image-texts, Ming found other ways to “rescript” herself. Instead of transforming an NNEST identity to a translingual identity, she emphasized professionalism and performed as a competent writing teacher and established scientist. She had rarely brought in her personal self in class. In fact, Ming told me in the interviews that she had resisted teacher self-revelation in the classroom. To her, the goal of teaching Composition is to teach how arguments are made rather than what the arguments really are. She felt projecting her positioning on the issues would be using the class for one’s “political agenda.” Ming explained that she learned that a teacher should remain “neutral” through teaching in the Chemistry Department, as she said in the interview:

I usually don’t project my own positioning; although sometimes I may be doing it subconsciously. But whenever I choose materials or discussions, I never involve my personal positioning in it. I started teaching like this because I started in teaching in science. In science, teacher is the authority; teacher tells you what knowledge is, what is right, and what is wrong. But when I came to English, a big contrast is that I found there is no right or wrong, as long as you can argue for your position. So my personal beliefs do not matter here, and my students’

preferences also do not matter, as long as they can express it logically... It is a selfish way to force someone's belief onto the class, whereas really the methodology of argument should be taught. (Interview, 4/27/12)

Although not introducing her personal self and resisting students' image-texts directly, Ming's strategy was to make students' stereotypes a teaching opportunity. As she taught argument in the Composition class, she treated students' stereotypes as a "warrant" in the Toulmin Model. She said if students assigned certain image-texts to her that's because of their immature pre-assumptions. She took the opportunity to teach them "how to negotiate their pre-assumptions and to approach a text even when they don't like it." (Interview, 4/27/12) Ming's positioning of a professional identity had been successful. In her teaching evaluations students praised highly her professionalism. Only one student said she was "trying too hard to hide her accent."

### **Positioning in relation to international students**

Even when the number of international students increased significantly in recent quarters, the change in the student population did not change Ming's positioning in her class. Ming's translingual identity could have brought benefits to the international students but she never used it intentionally. Nevertheless, her experience learning English as a second language was indeed an asset in teaching nonnative-speaking students. It made her understand the difficulties her international students had to go through. For example, she was aware that in China, high school writing is still focused on personal essays with moral judgments, and therefore knew that students from China may struggle with how to find evidence to support their argument in college writing in the U.S. She also said it was easy for her to identify problems in the students' writings when they shared the same native

language. Lastly, she often encouraged her international students to put in more effort to succeed in an English class, because, as she experienced first-hand, “non-native speakers need to work a lot harder than native speaker students in the U.S.”

Ming thought both native-speaker American students and nonnative-speaking international students have language issues, although these issues were different. Furthermore, based on her own experience taking Composition classes and going to the writing center, she realized the problem with many novice writers, no matter what their first language is, is to develop and articulate a clear idea. So, in practice, Ming emphasized teaching argument, but she added a separate grading category to evaluate students’ language use, and she found it especially encouraging to her ESL students: even if their score for language was low, they could still earn a high grade in other categories such as content, argument, evidence use etc.

Although not intentionally drawing on her translingual IaP, Ming’s translingual identity was well received by many international students. In this study one of her Chinese students emphasized the advantages Ming brought for him:

Because I am also a non-native speaker, the instructor really encourages me to do better in this class. If she could do well on English Writing, I may be able too. Also, I think Ming is more likely to understand what I should improve since I have just followed the same (learning) process as she did. (Student survey)

To sum up, different from Morgan’s proposal of directly drawing on one’s personal identities as pedagogy, Ming found other ways to “rescript” herself to counteract students’ stereotypes. Instead of transforming an NNEST identity to a translingual identity, she emphasized professionalism and

performed as a competent writing teacher and established scientist. It should also be noted that simply through being obviously Chinese in the Composition setting Ming's identity presumably played a role in instruction. But the focus of this study is identities consciously oriented to in interaction. And even by that standard, although used unintentionally, Ming's translingual experiences did help her international students in various ways.

### **6.3 Bo's translingual identity-as-pedagogy**

Consistent with the interviews, Bo performed as a sophisticated literature scholar in his classroom. His teaching style followed a traditional literature classroom. It was heavily teacher-centered: almost every class was a lecture where the teacher spoke most of the time, asking questions from time to time. As in many IRF/IRE lesson structures, the teacher asked only "display" questions to which he already knew the answer (Cazden, 2001), and most of the time only he knew the answer. Because the texts he chose were way beyond the students' ability to comprehend, the asymmetry of knowledge was too imbalanced; students were often silent during T-S interactions or simply complained about the course in their group discussions. He had created a hierarchy discursively, with himself being the "sophisticated literature scholar" on the top, "shallow composition teachers that only teach techniques" in the middle, and "stupid students and bad writers" on the bottom. For instance, he often used the writers of his chosen poems and literary analyses as his allies and criticized the textbook assigned by the program. Although a relatively new and inexperienced teacher, he looked a lot more confident and sure of himself when he was teaching his chosen texts, compared to the days of uneasiness when he taught from the textbook.

Unlike Ming or Sara, prior to this study Bo had not automatically associated a non-native identity with his professional identity of a writing teacher. It was my first interview that had made Bo conscious of this issue and he struggled to reposition himself as a legitimate writing teacher. Episode 2 is an example of how he positioned himself in his self-introduction in the first class:

Episode 2: I am a foreigner (class transcription and fieldnotes, 3/28/11)

Bo started his class this way:

01 T: How do instructors usually start a class? By introducing themselves? Definitely. Common opening strategies people use? I am wondering what, how I should open, or begin with. (1) Well, since that's the traditional way of teachers starting a class, and I am a very traditional kind of person, I will begin by an introduction. ((Writing on the board)). My name, is, some of you may already know, Bo, Li, and as you can tell, this is not, a traditional American name, right? You are right, I am a foreigner, English is NOT my native language, uh, come in ((late students came in)), I am a graduate, 4<sup>th</sup> year PhD student, in the Comparative Literature Department, not in the English Department, which is something SURPRISING. What is NOT surprising is that I am a teaching assistant for the English Department ((a student couldn't find a seat. Lin pointed and said "here is one.")) Most of the 100-level English classes are taught by teaching assistants, either in the English Department or elsewhere like me. But what's unusual about me is I am one of the FEW, I think, quite a few, uh, international teaching assistants. So uh...hum...the problem with me is that sometimes I may have difficulty explaining myself. If in any event you don't quite understand what I am saying, you can either raise your hand ask me a question, or come see me after class.

02 Ss: ((Laughed))

Bo's self-introduction consisted of many contrasts between what he thought students' expectations were and several marginalized identity categories. By use of negations he positioned himself as someone that was an anomaly in the community of Composition teachers. He started with his "foreigner" identity by saying his name was NOT a traditional American name, and he was NOT a native speaker. Then he said he was NOT from the English Department, which composition teachers should come from. It sounded like he believed in an image of a writing teacher as the opposite of him: an American, native speaker, PhD student from the English Department. Although

he self-identified as anomalous, Bo didn't portray his strangeness in a negative light. He used words such as "surprising," "unusual," and "one of the FEW ITAs" to imply his uniqueness. It almost felt like he was saying "although I am not what you expected, the fact that I am still here teaching this class means I am fully competent." Lastly he mentioned he may have problems explaining himself as an ITA; but he said this almost half jokingly and students perceived it to be humorous. In the interview, Bo explained to me that he didn't properly plan this speech but he had noticed a change in his self-introduction:

Although I have been telling my students I am a non-native English speaker, it had been a defensive strategy in the beginning, to stop criticism in a way, to say my English is not native, so it's permissible for me to make mistake. Later on it was something different. I was just stating it. Maybe to tell them there is a cultural gap between us, to let them know me, know more about me, rather than strategies to stop criticism. (Initial interview, 3/25, p.6)

Other than this first class, however, Bo never introduced and oriented to a nonnative-speaker identity again.

### **Translingual identity in teaching international students**

Because his course content itself was too difficult for not only international students but also American students, Bo's nonnative identity did not limit his performance of a competent English teacher identity. In fact, some students were surprised by how well he writes when they knew he wrote the writing prompts himself. His perceived national identity as a Chinese had also attracted a lot of Chinese international students to choose his class. Some of the Chinese students were enthusiastic in the beginning to take an English class from a Chinese instructor, and often chatted

with Bo after class in Chinese about the course readings. Nevertheless, as the quarter went along they didn't find their shared national identity an advantage for them, and were overwhelmed by the difficult readings. Some dropped the class, some skipped many classes, some plagiarized, which caused headaches for Bo. In sum, initially, Bo was not aware of how to draw on his translingual, transnational identities as pedagogy and struggled in teaching this population. This lack of awareness and a developing shift becomes more evident in the discussion that follows.

Bo had an especially diverse classroom the quarter I observed him: among the 22 students, there are 10 international students: 4 Chinese, 3 Koreans, 2 Vietnamese, 1 Chilean, and the rest Americans. Unaware of the continuing effort for supporting multilingual students at the department level, Bo felt under-prepared to teach this population. He had noticed that there were always more Chinese students in his class than in other sections. When asked whether he thought these Chinese students chose his class intentionally because of his nationality, he said "I don't know, but I am curious. But I have to say they won't have an advantage because my curriculum is actually very Western-based."

The presence of many Chinese students made Bo feel "uncomfortable," especially when they were chatting in Chinese before class started. He often had to walk outside of the classroom and came back when the bell rang. His "uncomfortable feelings" may have been due to the belief that the presence of Chinese students made his Chinese identity stand out, which was actually not the identity category he wanted to project or draw on in an English writing class. He also told me that showing that he could understand these students' conversation might alienate the American students.

Although an international student himself, Bo had never thought about how to teach for this

population. Based on the interviews, it was clear that it was my study itself that had made him begin to see challenges nonnative-speaker students face, as seen in our interviews:

I found my class a special classroom this time...*I was not aware of these before*, but if you really started to pay attention to your teaching, the issues all appeared. *Just like what you have asked in the interviews*, identities, cultural differences, language barriers...how do you deal with these issues all together? ...Apparently the few whose English was not native differ greatly from the rest of the class. I didn't know how to deal with them in class; I didn't want to humiliate them by picking on them all the time....(Bo, Interview, 4/13/11)

During our interviews I could see that Bo had started to pay more attention to the international students: At the beginning he was worried whether his reading materials were too difficult for them. Then he found the international students really quiet in class and did not know how to encourage their oral participation. When grading these students' papers, he was confused by whether the writing problems were due to reading comprehension, or language. He complained that some Chinese students' writing was disorganized: "they didn't even know how to write a 5-paragraph essay; American students had this kind of training in high school but they didn't." He was also particularly frustrated when his Chinese students didn't show up for class or turn in their homework, because(like Ming) he believed that as second language writers, they needed to "work harder." He even caught two Chinese students plagiarizing for their papers and shared his frustration: "I don't know what they are thinking about every day. For a 15-minute conference that student was late for 10 minutes. Was

that because they are the Generation Post-90s<sup>6</sup>” (Post-conference interview, 5/14/11) By the end of the quarter he acknowledged that he hadn’t figured out a way to teach this diverse population. He suggested that the international students might need to be put in a different section and to learn the basic skills first, taught by a TESOL specialist.

Still learning how to teach this “special population,” Bo was trying some strategies by drawing on his translingual identity as resource. For example, he had conferences with Chinese students in Chinese, in order for them to understand the difficult texts. During the conferences, he used references in Chinese culture to explain certain concepts: for example, he referred to different editions of “LuXun QuanJi” (Collections of Lu Xun’s essays) to explain why using MLA documentation for references is important: “so that you know which edition you are referring to” (Bo, student conference). As an international student who understood the difficulties international students might have, Bo paid extra attention to them. For instance, to encourage verbal participation, Bo started to assign group work and intentionally chatted with the international students to make sure they understood. However, because his dominant identity projected as a serious literature scholar alienated the students, his translingual identity was not seen as an effective resource as in Ming’s or Sara’s class.

## **6.4 Sara’s translingual identity-as-pedagogy**

Among the three ITAs, Sara was the only one that introduced and oriented to a translingual,

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<sup>6</sup> The “Generation post-90s” is a term coined by the Chinese public media. The media claimed that Chinese teenagers that are born after the 1990s are “out of control, behaving badly and engaged in sexual activities too early.” (Chinahush.com, 2012)

transnational identity in her teaching. She introduced herself as a bilingual bicultural the very first day when she was explaining the theme of the course: language, identity, and representation. She drew on her transnational, translingual identities as pedagogical resources throughout the quarter. The classroom discourse sometimes followed nontraditional classroom discourse patterns (Cazden, 2001). Below I am going to first analyze s from Sara's teaching to show how Sara positioned herself as a translingual, transnational teacher and how students received that positioning. Then in a separate section I will illustrate episodes where orienting to transportable identities brought changes to classroom interaction.

### **Episode 3: Self-introduction**

This episode is Sara's self-introduction during her first class. In establishing a teaching identity, the first day of class is often seen as the most important occasion for teachers to explicitly project their teacher identities to the students. Before her self-introduction, Sara started the class by introducing class information: section name, her name, class time, and course theme. Then in her self-introduction, again, she started with her professional identity first and personal identity second: she was a doctoral student, had a Master's, studies teacher education, and is bicultural and bilingual. Moreover, she didn't just introduce herself personally as a bicultural, bilingual in isolation; this personal side of her is always associated with her professional identity as a teacher for this class. For instance, in turn 03 Sara mentioned speaking two languages will "help us talk about the class theme," which was language, identity and representation. Besides, as she said in the interview, the Egyptian revolution made her even more proud of her Egyptian side and she was not shy to reveal her Egyptian identity to the students; for instance, she asked if the students knew the Egyptian revolution

at the end of turn 01.

### Episode 3: Self introduction (Fieldnotes and class transcription, 03/28/11)

On the very first day Sara wore a blue veil, a necklace and high heels. As soon as she walked in the classroom, she wrote on the blackboard the information for the class and checked attendance informally. Then she started the class, speaking in a fast, fluent and confident manner:

01 T:        Alright. Welcome everyone. So, this is English 131 section C. My name is Sara L, I will be teaching you this quarter, we will be meeting everyday at 9:30 so thank you for being on time, which is always a good sign. And the course theme, we will be discussing a few, but is about on language, identity and representation. Um...Firstly tell you a little bit about myself. I am currently a first-year doctoral student at Evergreen University. I did my master's here too and in teaching English as a foreign language. And my focus of study is teacher education, specifically in English for foreign language situations, **which brings back to my own background. I am half British, half Egyptian, born in UK, lived there for a few but mostly lived in Egypt. And who has heard of the January 25th Egyptian Revolution recently?**

02 Ss:       ((Students raised hands or said yea.))

03 T:        Alright. I have been extremely happy with it. Although right now things are a little bit...but I am hopeful. So...um...and **I speak two languages, English and Arabic, which will help us talk about this theme.** So what I like you to do is to have each of you introduce yourselves. Have you guys chosen your majors, or not yet? Who has chosen it? Who is almost decided? ((T gestured students to show hands)) So I am curious. Just tell me your name, what you would like to be called in class, and one interesting fact about you...((Sara wrote the key words on board.)) So I don't really have an interesting fact, but I am crazy about the color blue. So I hope you guys remember each other's names, cuz one big part of the class is working with each other. How about you...I forgot your name?

04 S1:       Emily.

05 T:        Emily, go ahead.

06 Ss:       ((Students started introduce themselves one by one. The "interesting fact" they shared include sports, music, and languages they speak.))

After Sara's self-introduction, she asked students to introduce themselves by adding "an interesting fact" about their personal selves. Interestingly, it might be due to Sara's orientation to a bilingual identity that many students also did so: more than three students' "interesting facts" were that they speak more than two languages. It struck me that within the first 10 minutes of the class being bilingual became a positive construct in the classroom.

### Episode 4: Language, identity and representation

Some may question whether positioning oneself as a bilingual speaker would alienate monolingual students. In the episode 4 (also from the first day), Sara intentionally scaffolded the class theme to reposition all students as multilingual, multidialectal speakers.

#### Episode 4: Class theme (Fieldnotes and class transcription, 03/28/11)

- 01 T: I mentioned the course theme is language, identity, and representation. Don't worry, you by any means, do not need to know a second language. The readings we will read just sort of talk about what it means to speak more than one language and be bilingual; language and culture is affecting identity... But I am curious; I'd like to know, um, even if you know really basic...who knows 2 languages at least?
- 02 Ss: ((Many Ss raised hands.))
- 03 T: Alright. So what languages do you speak? Just shout them out.
- 04 Ss: Spanish, French, Hindi... ((loud volume))
- 05 T: Spanish. Spanish. ((T wrote on board)). I unfortunately don't know Spanish. And French. ((T wrote on board)). Anyone else? Other languages?
- 06 S1: Chinese.
- 07 T: Chinese. Ok...((T wrote on board)). Someone raised their hands?
- 08 S2: Swedish.
- 09 T: Swedish! Ok. Any other languages?
- 10 S3: Vietnamese.
- 11 T: Vietnamese. Ok. One more. ((T wrote on board)).
- 12 S4: Hindi.
- 13 T: Alright. Hindi. ((T wrote on board)). So there are languages and also there are dialects. Can you give me an example of a dialect?...((A student raised his hand) Yea.
- 14 S5: Cantonese is a dialect of Chinese.
- 15 T: Ok. Any other examples?...Alright. Let's talk about accents. What accents do you have?
- 16 S6: French Canadian?
- 17 T: French Canadian versus?
- 18 S6: French? ((T and S laughed))
- 19 T: Alright. What about US accents?
- 20 S7: Southern.
- 21 T: Can anyone do a Southern accent? No?...Can anyone copy a Southern accent?
- 22 Ss: ((Laughs.))
- 23 T: Alright. We will try that later maybe. Any other accent you guys. Like you mimic, or you switch maybe, your parents went to another parts of the States and you kind of have the accents maybe. Does anyone do that?
- 24 S8: New York. New Yorker.
- 25 T: So New York accent. Anyone also have different accents you play around with?...Alright. Let's be honest. Do we talk on campus...is that the same with how you talk at home?

26 Ss: No.

27 T: I forget your name. Ben? Tell us about that. If you are willing to share.

28 S9: Um...probably proper English versus not proper English? (Ss laughed)

29 T: Ok. Proper...We will be, we will be talking about that. Anyone else? The language you speak on campus versus the one you speak with your parents. Anyone?

30 Ss: ((Silence))

31 T: Alright. We will talk about that later. It's not just your language per say as Spanish, Italian or Vietnamese, it's your dialect, your accent, your word choice, slang versus, you know, proper English, so we will be talking about all that. Um. **For example in my case...my British relatives tease me that I sound like an American now. And when I talk to my mom, I sort if say 'I CAN'T' and 'HALF' and so on so forth, instead of Haaaalf...so I have to be careful with my vowels...**we will play with that the first half of the quarter. So that's just to get you guys comfortable. It's ok, you know, whatever languages or accents or dialects you speak, you can use them in your writings.

In this episode, Sara started in turn 01 by reassuring students that speaking only one language would not put monolingual students at a disadvantage in her class. Then she not only asked what languages the students spoke, but also brought in accents, dialects, and other social variations (e.g., language on campus versus language used at home in turn 25). The students had accepted the identity of “speaker of more than one language” very quickly, as they responded to the teacher’s first question (“what languages do you speak”) in turn 03 very enthusiastically. Nevertheless, when it came to the question of dialect or accent, students became resistant to take on the identity of “English speaker with an accent.” The first accent they brought up was French Canadian (turn 16) which may not be seen as a stigmatized accent, and which, in any event, they positioned as an accent of French. In turn 19 when the teacher asked about US accents, the students brought up a stigmatized accent: Southern, and none of them were willing to mimic this accent when the teacher asked for it. They simply laughed, which again showed the negative connotations a Southern accent has. When the teacher pushed them to say more (turn 25), they didn’t respond. It was also interesting that when the teacher asked them about the difference between the language they used on campus versus the

language used at home, students saw the difference as “proper English versus not proper English” (turn 28). It seemed that these students were already socialized to view academic language as “proper” and were not willing to claim the identity of “a speaker of improper English” (e.g., they did not respond in turn 30 when the teacher asked for details of “proper English” versus “improper English”).

When seeing there wasn't much response in the end, the teacher ended this sequence of conversation by telling the students “we will talk about that later.” In turn 31 she again oriented to a transportable identity to illustrate her point. Having already positioned herself as a bilingual speaker of Arabic and English, she now took on the identity of a speaker of two Englishes: British English and American English. In this short episode, Sara's obvious native speaker English establishes its own authority, while simultaneously positioning herself and the students as multilingual and bidialectal potentially helps include a range of students' experiences.

### **Orienting to a translingual, transnational identity during the quarter**

Although during the first class, not all students embraced multiple linguistic identities, after they had read Sara's chosen articles on language diversity and identity (see chapter 5) and had various class discussions, they started to realize they all spoke more than one language/dialect, and they wrote about the experiences in their papers. The readings written by bilingual speakers and supporters of bilingual education certainly played a role in the changes in students' positioning, but Sara's translingual, transnational teacher identity also contributed to it.

For instance, Sara sometimes oriented to an Egyptian identity in her teaching. Her performance of this national identity was even evident in her physical appearance such as her outfit.

Other than wearing a veil, one time Sara wore a T-shirt that had “Jan 25” on it, which refers to the Egyptian Revolution. She told me she would not wear it if it had been her first time teaching this class, but now as she was more comfortable in her identity as a Composition teacher, she felt more confident in bringing in her personal side. In Episode 5, she oriented to an Egyptian identity in the classroom discourse.

### **Episode 5: Corvettes**

In this episode, Sara was teaching what is considered a “claim” and how it is different from an opinion. A student had given an example of an opinion: “Corvettes are the best cars,” and the teacher was helping students to change this statement into a claim. Students said that they needed to add reasons why it was the best car and the teacher categorized the reasons into statistics, personal experience, expert opinions, and etc. One student brought up that cars are associated with a certain socioeconomic class. Sara acknowledged it and added that such common knowledge depends on cultural context.

#### **Episode 5: Corvett’s are the best cars (Fieldnotes and class transcription, 04/11/11)**

The teacher has already solicited several bases on which to make an opinion into a claim. She continued to ask.

01 T: What else do we have? (6)

02 S1: (XXX) logic ((short response in really low voice))

03 T: Tell me more.

04 S1: Um...so like if we don’t really have the speaker’s experience we can kind of create a context for the reader...Oh...I am thinking of ‘Corvettes are the best cars’ thing... ((T: Uh-hum.She was nodding.)) Um...so you can say like if you bought this really expensive car like you can maybe put it in a social context ((T: Uh-hum...Um. T seemed to like the point. She nodded and started to write on the transparency)). So like I don’t know if others agree with that...have a Corvette is a symbol of socio-economic status and like class, so you can use it to say Corvettes are really cool because if you own a Corvette you kind of have this image of upper middle class. So even if someone can’t really identify with that...they can say oh yea I see that because my neighbor has it, a really expensive car and

- 05 T: ((interrupts)) So I see what you are doing here. This is also when you are referring to SOMETHING that's common between everyone. What do we call that? ...It's like we would tend to agree that yes a car, an expensive car is a status of social standing. What is that? I mean, do you guys agree or disagree with that?
- 06 Ss: Agree. Agree.
- 07 T: Yea. I mean we can sort of say just general knowledge, or common knowledge ((T wrote on transparency. Students took notes)), but be really careful when you use it, because really depends on your audience, depends on their social standing, especially which country they are coming. ((T started to smile and moved her hands very enthusiastically.)) Cuz like some places like old classic cars are like REALLY popular here, but **back home in Egypt** there are SO many old classic cars but they are just there because they can't afford a new car. And then like I know some of my friends when they come and visit they were asking me do you know the car over there how much it would be sold for? But the person who has it doesn't have it cuz you know they know how expensive it is, like they really can't afford a new car. So it is all about context. Um((T lowered her head and looked down at the transparency))...but nothing have changed though. So yea. Be aware of that point.

In this episode Sara brought up a difference between the U.S. and “back home in Egypt” (turn 07) to emphasize that the common knowledge “an expensive car is a status of social standing” may not be acceptable in a different cultural context. When the student didn't question this common knowledge (they all said “agree” in turn 06), Sara's positioning as a transnational person provided a new perspective. In doing so she made her point that when using common knowledge to support a claim, be aware who the audience is. It was apparent that this was an authentic example, and Sara became very excited when introducing an Egyptian identity to illustrate her point, as seen from her facial impressions and hand gestures in turn 07.

Other than the classroom, Sara also brought in her bilingual identity during a one-on-one conference with a Chinese international student. Her Chinese student had problems finding the most appropriate equivalent English word for her meanings in Chinese. Sara suggested her that she could use English letters to transcribe Chinese words in her draft, as a place holder. She told the student she does that with Arabic sometimes. The Chinese student responded positively to having a bilingual

teacher, as she wrote in the end-of-quarter survey: “I like bilingual teacher. Since I am an international student, and I am very lucky that my teacher of English 131 is a bilingual teacher. She would understand my feelings and meaning in many situation.”

Not only international students, but also American students had responded to Sara’s positioning as a bilingual teacher very positively, as a student wrote in the survey:

I liked this component of the course; it added a high degree of authenticity to a course focused on the relationship between language, identity, and representation. When a course is themed as ‘Language, Identity, and Representation,’ I’d prefer to have a bilingual teacher because she would have a better understanding of the relationship between these three topics. In fact, having a bilingual teacher helps in any course because she’ll have a better grasp on the way people think or process thoughts into word. (End-of-quarter survey)

### **Is “Identity-as-Pedagogy” intentional?**

Although it is difficult to say whether these above episodes are instances where Sara “intentionally” drew on her translingual identity as pedagogy, it is clear that Sara saw her ITA identity as a strength rather than a deficit. In the interview she told me that her positioning as a bilingual teacher made her relate more to those who speak more than one language, and whose first language is not English. She said that being an international student herself made her relate to the struggles these students have:

I do think I have an advantage, especially with my international students, I feel like...when they are in my office hour I would say yea I remember the first time I wrote a paper I was freaking out. My Master’s is a force, but maybe this gave me an advantage when being an

international student, when they are also international students.(Sara, last interview, part 2, p3)

Further, it was not just her personal identity as a bilingual, but her professional identity as a TESOL professional that made her pay special attention to international students in her class. Sara found it disappointing that she only had one or two international students for the two quarters she had taught. She said she hadn't done anything special for them in class, but she was very conscious of the struggles they had (e.g. having difficulty speaking up; understanding cultural references; needing help with grammar, and etc.). Although Sara never had problem with English grammar, her experience working with English language learning (ELL) students and training in TESOL taught her that native-speaker students and ELL students have different grammar issues, and she developed different strategies to address them: for e example, she circled the grammar issues instead of correcting them all for the students; for ELL students, she would point out the error type (e.g., word choice; tense), while for native-speaker students she would just circle because she felt these students just needed to take time and proofread on their own.

Besides these merits that an ITA identity brought to international students, Sara saw her ITA identity as beneficial to all students. Just as in Episode three, Sara found that being someone from outside of the U.S. gave her a perspective different from a typical American perspective. Surprisingly, she also found she was often not the only one that provided a different perspective. She said her open-minded students the quarter I observed were already bringing in those different perspectives to class (1<sup>st</sup> interview, 3/30/11, p16). In many of our interviews she repetitively attributed her smooth teaching that quarter to this group of responsive, open-minded and collaborative students. One might speculate that Sara's work during the first class and beyond at least

helped contribute to creating that stance for her students and herself,

## **6.5 Change in situated identities in Sara's class**

In all of the above episodes Sara had oriented to a transportable identity as a bicultural, bilingual speaker. However, in these episodes there was no change along each of Zimmerman's three dimensions of identities (see chapter 2: "discourse, situated, transportable identities"). Student and teacher identities are omnipresent: "It is the teacher who controls the floor, asks questions, issues instructions, prompts, and evaluates, while the students, addressing their responses to the teacher, respond directly to these turns" (Richards, 2006:61). The classroom discourse followed the IRF pattern found in traditional classrooms (Bellack et al, 1966, Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 2001). It might be because altering the situated identities of teacher and student while orienting to a bilingual speaker identity may have put the teacher in a vulnerable position in this teaching context. That is to say, if such a shift had involved an asymmetry of knowledge (i.e., students knowing more than the teacher), it might have been risky for the ITAs--who already had more difficulties establishing authority than American TAs--to orient to a non-American identity and to acknowledge a lack of knowledge.

All three ITAs expressed concern regarding their lack of knowledge of American culture, especially the popular culture their students were familiar with. They had different strategies when such asymmetry of knowledge showed up in their classes. Ming and Bo simply did not orient to an ITA identity and intentionally avoided evoking it. Sara was the only one that acknowledged she did not know, and was able to use those moments to create classroom conversations. In the following section I am going to analyze episodes in Sara's class which involved asymmetry of cultural

knowledge and changes in discourse and situated identities.

### **Episode 6: Mariners Games**

One thing unique about Sara's class was that she often started her Monday's class checking with students about how their weekends were. Although not part of the formal instruction, Sara's efforts in connecting with students personally this way created a comfortable learning environment. This first part of Monday's class became the site where teacher and students introduced and oriented to transportable identities and where there were the most incidents of changes in discourse and situated identities.

The topic of baseball was something Sara knew little about, and she acknowledged that as her lack of knowledge of "American culture" in the interviews. Episode six is an example of how she dealt with such topics. In Episode four, two students said they had watched a baseball game the past weekend. When the first student said he watched a game on Saturday (turn 02), the teacher simply asked how it was (turn 03) and acknowledged she was not a member of "baseball lovers" by revealing that she did not know the result and apologized: "I should be more up to date." The second student also said she watched the Mariners game. She took the identity of "baseball lovers" by using the definite article "the" when she said "I watched **the** game on Friday" (turn 10), assuming everyone belonged to the group of "baseball lovers" and knew which game she referred to. The teacher who did not share the same knowledge of baseball, however, was not certain if "the game" referred to the Mariners Game, and she became confused why there were two games next to each other (turn 15). Here the teacher took on the situated identity of a "learner" and asked her students who were experts of baseball games to "help (her) out" (turn 15).

By asking students for help in turn 15, the student-teacher relationship was reversed. Interestingly, after that, the classroom discourse was characterized by a high level of student involvement, as seen from many latched turns and overlaps (turn 18, 19, 20). Several students competed with each other to explain to the teacher how the baseball season works. Other Students who did not speak up smiled (turn 15), which suggests they claimed membership in the “baseball lover” category and probably the identity of “young American students,” which is different from the teacher who is not from their culture. When the students helped clarify why there were two games next to each other, in turn 21 the teacher continued to orient to a learner identity by asking who had won and who had lost. The students said they had won and lost to the same team. This answer had apparently surprised the teacher as she flinched (turn 25). As someone unfamiliar with baseball, Sara did not understand why the Mariners would compete with the same team twice. In turns 26 and 27, several students, again, volunteered the answered in a loud, confident voice. The teacher continued being the learner in the end by saying “I now have to read about baseball before I went to class” (turn 28). Students laughed, not to laugh at the teacher’s lack of cultural knowledge, but to show an understanding that it’s ok that the teacher did not know about their culture and especially when she had shown willingness to learn.

#### Episode 6: Mariners Game (Fieldnotes and class transcription, 04/25/11)

01 T:	So. First of all, how was your weekend? Now I know we had a sunny Saturday so I hope someone did something on Saturday.
02 S1:	I watched Mariners game.
03 T:	Ok. How was it?
04 S1:	It was Good...
05 T:	Alright. Had we won?
06 S1:	No.
07 T:	No? ((both hands touched head, sighed and smiled)) I should be more up to date.

08 Ss:	((laughed))
09 T:	Did anyone else do anything fun? That was fun. ((Another student raised her hand)) Yea.
10 S2:	I watched <b>the</b> game on Friday.
11 T:	Mariners as well?
12 S2:	Yea.
13 T:	Okay. ((T seemed to be in disbelief ))
14 S2:	It was good. We won.
15 T:	((head moved to the left, hands moved around)) <b>Ok...Help me out here. Why are there two games, right next to each other?</b> ((Students in the front row smiled))
16 S3:	Cuz one was yesterday one was Friday.
17 T:	Is it..What was going on?
18 S4:	(overlaps) It was a series...
19 S5:	(overlaps) Baseballs, play games on Saturday.
20 S4:	Yea. It's 162 games so....different places...
21 T:	<b>Haha Ok! So there was one on Friday and one on Saturday (Ss: Yea). Who did they lose to?</b>
22 S6:	(XXXX)
23 T:	and win to?
24 S7:	Same
25 T:	<b>((looked surprised and flinched))</b>
26 S8:	(in loud voice) They play the same...
27 S9 and S10:	(overlaps) Yea they play the same game... ((Ss in the front row turned around to the students speaking in the back and smiled))
28 T	<b>I now have to read about baseball before I went to class (Ss laughed).</b> I will tell you when I do. Did anyone else do something?

### Episode 7: MTV sucks

Some may argue that the beginning part of a class isn't really instructional, and therefore reversing the student-teacher relationship at this time may have a limited effect in the classroom although the balance of this class suggests that before-class interactions can certainly set a participatory tone. But Sara oriented to a learner identity not only in the beginning part of the class, but also while she was teaching the main content..

In Episode 7, Sara and the students continued to discuss what's considered a claim. An example in the textbook said "MTV's popularity is waning because it no longer plays music videos."

The teacher asked “anyone here likes MTV?” assuming this example would relate to this young audience. However, the students responded with blank faces and Sara realized they might not even watch MTV any more. So she reworded her question: “Do you guys watch MTV?” The students immediately rejected this “MTV watcher” identity and seemed to view MTV as old fashioned. They claimed an identity as an insider of popular culture and their laughs put the teacher as an outsider (turn 03). Instead of reclaiming her authority, in turn 04 the teacher oriented to the outsider identity assigned by the students and invited the students to update her knowledge of what young people watch these days, thus reversing the normal student/teacher relationship. The teacher’s question “When does it stop being popular” showed the teacher’s willingness to take on the situated identity of “learner.” This shift away from the situated identities of the classroom and the asymmetries associated with them created a more equal encounter where, as Sara intentionally advocates, students depend on each other as experts instead of turning to the teacher as the “sole credible reference”(Sara, teaching philosophy, 2010).

#### Episode 7: MTV sucks (Fieldnotes and class transcription, 04/11/11)

Student 1 was reading the definition of a claim from the OHP.

- 01 S1: ...A claim is specific. Makes focus of your argument “MTV’s popularity is waning because it no longer plays music videos” rather than a general one “MTV sucks.”
- 02 T: Great. So... ((T paused and wrote on transparency. Then she suddenly raised her head and looked at the students.)) Anyone here likes MTV? ((T looked around and seemed surprised.)) Do you guys watch MTV?
- 03 S2: No. ((Ss laughed.)) Not any more.
- 04 T: ((T seemed surprised by opening her mouth and sighed)) **When does it stop being popular?**
- 05 S2: Now it became ALL, pretty much ALL reality TV shows.
- 06 T: Ok. I used to watch it a while ago, but...so...anyway. ((T flipped through her handouts. A student in the front row smiled)). So I you are going to say MTV sucks, that’s your opinion. But if you wanna say MTV’s popularity is waning because it no longer plays music videos, then we are getting into a discussion. You are telling me why you would disagree.

#### Discussion

In both episodes, Sara had oriented to the identity of an outsider to the students' culture. Compared to the previous episodes where Sara had explicitly positioned herself as a translingual, transcultural, it is difficult to claim that these two episodes were also where an ITA identity was evoked. American teachers may also position themselves as outsiders to students' culture. Nevertheless, these two episodes are important because they show the potential of orienting to an outsider identity while also benefiting students' learning. As observed from Sara' students' enthusiastic responses to claim the insider status of their culture, such positioning altered the traditional teaching talk (although it maintained the IRF pattern), and made a different kind of classroom conversation possible. It has shown that revealing one's personal self can be a useful strategy for ITAs who worry about the cultural gap between them and the students, if they use the opportunity to make their students cultural informants.

Indeed, teacher's self-revelation may be objected to by many teachers who prefer to maintain professional detachment such as Ming and Bo (also see Richards, 2006, p.73). Bo had objected to it because he "wanted to keep a distance between (himself) and the subject, otherwise (he was) too much involved" (Bo, last interview, 6/13/11). Ming had objected to personal involvement because she believed that in a Composition class where "really the methodology of argument should be taught, it is selfish to force someone's belief onto the class" (Ming, interview, 4/27/12). From observing their classrooms for the whole quarter, I understood why revealing personal selves were difficult for them, and suppressing translingual, transnational identities instead of directly addressing students' prejudice may also be an effective strategy for ITAs to establish professionalism. Nevertheless, from seeing Sara's comfortable, rapport-building, and collaborative classroom, I

believed that by sharing information about ourselves we develop trust and make learning authentic. As Black said in “Conversation, Teaching, and Points in Between,” in revealing ourselves in conversation “we become responsible for each other’s revelation and stories, and that fosters an attitude that makes us responsible for each other’s learning” (1998:37).

## **6.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has discussed whether and how the ITAs drew on their translingual, transnational identities as pedagogical resources. Different from what Morgan (2004) advocates, Ming and Bo suppressed such identities even when the situation evoked such positioning and oriented to a professional identity instead, be it scientist, experienced writer, or sophisticated literature scholar. Ming and Bo’s translingual identity had been a pedagogical resource for the international students, although they were not aware of its full potential. Sara, on the other hand, had oriented to a translingual, transnational identity strategically. Such positioning proved to be beneficial and added authenticity to the classroom especially when the class theme was on language, identity, and representation. Further, by orienting to a transportable identity: an outsider to students’ culture, Sara had transformed the traditional teaching talk into classroom conversation where students became cultural informants. Sara’s teaching practices confirmed previous literature on the assets of multilingual teachers: for example, “interculturality”—“an awareness and a respect of difference, as well as the socio-affective capacity to see oneself through the eyes of others” (Kramsch, 2005, p.553). Although the ITAs used different discursive strategies to construct professionalism in their classrooms, I argue that strategic personal disclosure can bring/could have brought benefits to the

classroom. ITA's translingual, transnational identity, which is central to this study, is a potential resource whose value has not been fully realized.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### 7.1. Summary of Findings

In this dissertation, I have examined the professional identity construction and pedagogy of three ITAs in their becoming College Composition teachers and future English professionals. By combining data from multiple sources, this study has found that despite a “native speaker fallacy,” the three ITAs were all able to construct positive professional identities in the community of English scholars, but not all were successful in becoming College Composition teachers. In learning to teach College Composition, the ITAs’ biographical and schooling experiences, previous learning in their disciplinary communities (Science, Literature, and TESOL), national and local discourses and future goals all played a role in shaping who they are as Composition teachers in this context. Ming and Sara were able to utilize their competence in their academic disciplinary communities (Science and TESOL) as an advantage when they joined the new community of Composition teachers, whereas Bo failed to reconcile the conflicts between his imagined community of literature scholars and the community of Composition teachers. Although all three ITA’s translingual identities provided pedagogical resources in their teaching, only Sara intentionally utilized her “identity-as-pedagogy,” which added authenticity in her teaching and transformed classroom talk.

Chapter 4 discussed how the ITAs’ professional identities in the community of English scholars were intertwined with their linguistic positioning. Before the three ITAs entered their Composition classrooms for the first time, they were already aware of what it meant to come from a different culture and speak more than one language in the U.S. Although by definition, the three ITAs were all

“translingual” speakers and teachers, their linguistic identities differed depending on the contexts in which they acquired languages, received education, and practiced teaching. Ming and Bo, who learned English as a foreign language in schools, were seen as long-time learners and less legitimate members of the academic community of English in the U.S., whereas Sara who grew up speaking British English and was educated through an English-medium education could escape a marginalizing status and position her translingual identity as a strength.

Chapter 5 explored the ITAs’ identity construction as Composition teachers. In learning to become competent Composition teachers, initially the ITAs all faced the challenge of participating in the “community of Composition teachers” defined differently by the program, the students, and themselves. Both Ming and Sara were able to utilize their competence in academic disciplinary communities (Science and TESOL) as an advantage when they joined the new community of Composition teachers, whereas Bo failed to reconcile the conflicts between his imagined community of literature scholars and the community of Composition teachers. Specially, both Ming and Sara saw their writing class as truly meaningful in helping students to transit from high school to college. They both believed the goal of College Composition is to teach students to write for their disciplines. Although Ming’s learning experience in the English Department granted her competence in teaching Composition, a perceived “NNEST” identity seemed to confine how she displayed competence in front of her immature students. She had developed various strategies, including constructing an experienced scientist identity, to cope with this challenge. Sara had realized the difference between ESL teaching and Composition teaching and had found ways to incorporate her TESOL expertise as an advantage in the Composition class. Both Ming and Sara imaged teaching Composition as part of

their professional development. Bo, on the other hand, did not see the Composition course as meaningful and made his class into a game of sophisticated thinking and reading of literature. He had trouble designing a curriculum that both fit the program and his specialty and did not find a way to bridge the cultural gap between him and the students. As a novice teacher, Bo was still struggling in finding himself in the classroom.

Chapter 6 discussed whether and how the ITAs drew on their translingual, transnational identities as pedagogical resources. Different from what Morgan (2004) has advocated, Ming and Bo suppressed such an identity even when the situation evoked it and oriented to a professional identity instead, be it scientist, experienced writer, or sophisticated literature scholar. At the same time, Ming and Bo's translingual identity had been a pedagogical resource for the international students, although they were not aware of its full potential. Sara, on the other hand, had oriented to a translingual, transnational identity strategically. Sara's strategic positioning proved to be beneficial and added authenticity to the classroom especially when the class theme was on language, identity, and representation. Further, by orienting to a transportable identity: an outsider to students' culture, Sara had transformed the traditional teaching talk into classroom conversation where students became cultural informants and more highly involved in the class.

## **7.2 Theoretical contribution**

This study has utilized the framework of Community of Practices in the context of ITAs' learning of College Composition teaching. The strength of the framework is that it views ITAs' learning in their disciplines and the Composition classroom as a process of becoming instead of

simply improving English proficiency and learning teaching techniques--how it has traditionally been studied. The weakness of it is that as the unit of analysis has traditionally been the group, it is not sufficient in explaining the variations in how the ITAs identified with Composition teaching because of their individual experiences and future goals (also see Varghese et al., 2005, p.30).

Secondly, this study is one of the first to apply Morgan's Identity as Pedagogy framework(2004) in the context of ITAs' identity construction and practices. Based on his own observation and reflections, Morgan as the classroom teacher did not consider how a teacher's multiple identities emerge in the classroom, nor did he examine how students had responded to his self-positioning. Using techniques of classroom discourse analysis (Richards, 2006) to closely examine classroom episodes, this study has addressed this gap. It has found that orienting to transportable identities such as being a translingual, transcultural person has the potential of reversing the student-teacher relationship and could benefit student's learning and facilitate classroom conversation.

Further, although Morgan (2004) and Motha et al. (2011) have proposed that teachers, especially translingual teachers, intentionally draw on their linguistic identities as pedagogical resources to counteract students' stereotypes, this study has found that IaP is not always intentional. That is to say, although the ITAs' translingual background was providing pedagogical resources in the classroom, some of them were not aware of its benefits. The contradictions "that sometimes arose between what the teachers proclaimed about their identities and practices in the interviews...and what actually transpired in class" (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p.472) has suggested the importance of teacher education practices that incorporate individual teachers' meta-awareness (Ramanathan, 2002)

and critical reflexivity (Varghese et al., 2005). The complexity of ITAs' identities as both narrated and practiced found in this study owes to the multiple methods and data sources. By combining both interview data and classroom discourse analysis, contradictions were found between what the participants said about themselves and what they did in the classroom.

## **7.3. Implications**

### **7.3.1 Implications for TA training programs, department and institution**

#### *TA training programs*

The Writing Program at the research site has made great efforts in creating and maintaining a community for TAs by allowing graduate students of different academic interests to take different forms of participation in the community: for instance, the TAs have the freedom to choose course materials and design assignments; there is an online space where TAs share teaching materials; the cohort of new TAs now share the same office space, which facilitates their communication; and TAs have the opportunity to apply for assistant director positions where they train TAs, design textbooks, change curriculum, and manage writing labs. The Writing Program serves as a good model for other TA training programs in these aspects.

The suggestions that can be drawn from this study are for improving the training program to address ITAs' unique needs. Although the ITAs share similar challenges with American TAs who are new to teaching Composition, this study found that (Chapter 5) at least some ITAs (Ming and Bo)

identify themselves as different from American TAs and named their unique challenges in the very beginning of their teaching: 1) they found that the selected teaching materials comprised mostly American-culture oriented readings, and they were not familiar with the movies other American TAs shared as teaching materials 2) the director and the assistant directors in the program were all Americans; the ITAs (Ming and Bo) who held strongly to their established image of “a teacher” developed from their own educational background did not see them as role models. Rarely did they seek the opportunity to become assistant directors, who have the power to change the curriculum, and they remained as classroom teachers. 3) for ITAs like Ming whose English proficiency needed improvement in the beginning, the support they got at the university only focused on linguistic details and communicative strategies, which did not consider the deep social, political, and cultural factors that play into cross-cultural communication (Kang, 2012; Pae, 2001). It didn’t teach teachers like Ming to deal with students’ complaints towards her “accent”, for example.

To really promote diversity as many universities in the U.S. have claimed, programs for training TAs could incorporate more international viewpoints on teaching. Specifically for training Writing TAs, both the selected readings for the training course and the textbook can include arguments in other academic contexts across national borders. Currently at the research site there are already texts written by minority authors within the U.S., but international graduate students who grew up in different cultural contexts may have a different experience than these authors. Although not all TAs would resonate with readings from ITA’s familiar cultural contexts, including these readings might empower the latter by providing them a sense of authority and legitimacy in the community of teachers in the U.S. For instance, although Bo had strongly resisted the theoretical

readings in the training, he was glad to read one article written by Min-Zhan Lu, the only Chinese-named author (interview). Other readings/topics for the training could include intercultural rhetoric, intercultural communication, rhetoric tradition and writing pedagogy in other countries, and etc. Opening up to international perspectives on writing and its pedagogy will not only benefit the ITAs, but help all TAs to address the increasingly diverse student body. Only when an international identity is constructed as positive by the program and the institution will the ITAs be more likely to utilize their translingual, transnational identities as pedagogical resources instead of suppressing them, and will they be more active in seeking leadership in the community of teachers in the U.S.

Secondly, since developing a teacher identity plays an important role in teacher's professional growth, to benefit all TAs the training program could incorporate workshops run by TAs themselves that help raising TA's meta-awareness of the relationship between identities and their teaching practices. It was found in this study that my interviews, especially those that were conducted in informal settings such as coffee shops, became the site the TAs and I jointly reflected on our multiple personal selves and constructed our professional identities. For Sara, her MATESOL training, which emphasized teacher's identities and critical pedagogy, had influenced her teaching the most. Workshops that function as such need to create a safe place for TAs to feel comfortable in their sharing and learning.

Lastly, I found several new initiatives bringing undergraduates into TA training programs really promising. As Pae points out, because "a classroom is a dynamic place where quality instruction is largely dependent on mutual interaction between TAs and undergraduates" (2001, p.72), the undergraduates also play an important role in making cross-cultural communication possible. For

instance, in her most recent project addressing students' prejudice against their ITAs, Kang et al. (2012) proposed the notion of "contact" for reducing stereotypes; that is, institutions can create programs that increase opportunities for intercultural encounters. In their piloted TA training program, she and her coauthors have paired up native-speaking undergraduates with ITAs as conversational partners; by the end of the semester the students' attitudes towards ITAs in general became more positive. Although their initiatives seemed to focus more on improving the language and cultural competence of the ITAs, my suggestion is that the activities the ITAs and undergraduates are involved in can incorporate different scenarios that might happen in real teaching contexts (e.g., dealing with a student complaint). Since programs for training new TAs that have the expertise in teaching disciplinary subject matter usually reside in different departments, while ITA training programs that are run by TESOL professionals/educational experts are housed in ESL programs or centers of teaching and learning, collaborations between departments and other units are important.

### ***Departments and graduate programs***

Having been granted a TA-ship, graduate students appreciated the opportunity to practice teaching while receiving full funding for their graduate studies. However, this study found that if the ITAs did not imagine Composition teaching as part of their future professions, they struggled to become a competent Composition teacher. In fact, previous scholars studying graduate programs of English have already pointed out this "organized contradictions," that is, "the discontinuity between what graduate students are being trained to do and what they may end up doing as members of what is, by all accounts, a volatile profession" (Long et al., 1996, p.70). While the TAs themselves were

making efforts to incorporate their expertise and interests in their teaching, it would be more beneficial for them if the department had provided other options of jobs in which they could easily find themselves: administrators, lab collaborators, TAs for a variety of undergraduate/graduate courses: TESOL, English literature, rhetoric, and etc. Having said that, I understand that constrained by a limited university budget, especially for Humanities departments such as English, this proposal may be more ideal than practical. Nevertheless, a variety of options would greatly help graduate students' professional development, decrease job burn-out, and benefit the department in the long run.

### **7.3.2 Implications for translingual teachers**

#### ***Enhance English language proficiency***

This study uses an “NNEST lens” (Mahboob, 2010) to understand “English proficiency.” An “NNEST lens” questions the privileging of native speakers, and is a “lens of multilingualism, multi-nationalism, and multiculturalism that sees *language as a functional entity where successful use of language in context determines the proficiency of a speaker*” (Mahboob, 2010, p.1). In the context of classroom teaching, I understood success as the knowledge and ability a teacher has to negotiate linguistic and cultural differences with the students and to deliver effective teaching. For instance, in order to facilitate communication between her and the students, Ming utilized PowerPoint to visualize words that she found students might have difficulty understanding; Sara acknowledged that she did not know about students' culture (e.g., baseball) and made the students cultural informants. For translingual teachers, no matter what languages they speak, to enhance this

kind of context-dependent “English proficiency” is essential to build confidence and to teach effectively. For writing teachers specifically, English proficiency also includes the teacher’s writing ability. Students have highly emphasized that a competent writing teacher should “write well” (student survey). Composition TAs need to develop their own writing ability not only for academic contexts but also in different genres. Their learning process as writers has proved to be a rich resource when they teach student writers, as found in this study. Lastly, collaboration between ITAs and American TAs will provide both groups perspectives on enhancing intercultural awareness, language proficiency, and teaching effectiveness.

### ***Utilize Translingual Identity as Pedagogy***

Teacher’s translingual, transnational knowledge proved to be teaching resources in this study, but whether and how to use Translingual IaP depends on the teacher and the teaching context. This study has found that strategic personal disclosure such as orienting to translingual, transnational identities could bring benefits to the classroom, especially when the teacher and the students did not share the same culture. But personal disclosure, especially for new ITAs who still struggle to establish authority and to imagine their linguistic identities as resources, can put them at a more vulnerable position.

Secondly, although teachers who know more than one language have rich translingual knowledge that can benefit multilingual students, as Horner et al. (2011, p.303) pointed out, a “translingual pedagogy” that sees “difference in language not as a barrier to overcome...but a resource for producing meaning,” does not have to be practiced only by multilingual teachers:

those identified as “monolingual” might nonetheless take a translingual approach to language

difference, while some identified as “multilingual” might nonetheless take a monolingualist approach to language difference. Knowing more than one language can only benefit teachers of writing who aim to teach a translingual approach (and others). Yet it’s also the case that teachers of writing self-identified as monolingual regularly use a mix of varieties of any one language, and that even ostensibly monolingual texts may be found to be more linguistically heterogeneous than is ordinarily recognized. Teachers can use the actual heterogeneity in genre, register, and language of ostensibly homogeneous texts to explore, with their students, the translingual activity that they and other writers are already engaging in, even when that is not ordinarily acknowledged. And although we recognize the benefit to all of expanding one’s linguistic resources, the issue here is approach to language difference. (2010, p.310.)

This is promising for teachers because instead of investing a long time learning a second language in order to have the insight to teach a diverse student body, it indicates that all teachers, no matter what linguistic background they come from, can adopt a “translingual approach” to value language differences. In this study, it is also found that simply being a translingual speaker did not automatically make the teacher the ideal candidate for teaching linguistically diverse students. Compared with Ming and Bo, Sara’s TESOL training played a more important role in making her know not only how to teach multilingual students, but also become aware and critical in utilizing her translingual background as a resource.

***Utilize disciplinary knowledge as a resource but not be confined by it***

In this study, the major source of confidence for all ITAs came from their academic expertise in their trained disciplines: Science and Composition (Ming), Literature (Bo), and TESOL (Sara). While Ming and Sara were able to incorporate their academic expertise into their Composition teaching, Bo failed to do so. Although there remain differences between disciplines such as Composition and Literature, instead of simply criticizing one another we should ask ourselves what Peter Elbow has asked before (2002): What could we learn from each other? For instance, can people who self-identify as Compositionists or writing instructors use literary genres as texts in their

teaching? Can a “literature person” such as Bo learn from Composition professionals to treat student texts with more care and respect? Can literature and composition people team teach? Those are important questions especially for graduate students when they are still developing a professional identity in the field of English. In an English Writing Program where TAs specialize in a variety of subjects, collaboration rather than separation will only benefit the growth of the community and the TAs.

### ***Balance life with work***

As Ming and many other NNESTs have commented, “being a nonnative speaker you have to work harder” (interview). It is a common theme in the participants’ stories that playing the dual roles of graduate student and teacher (and now for Sara and Bo the third role of being a parent) can be exhausting. When asked what would help improve her teaching, Sara said “after I finish writing the dissertation.” Bo also struggled to concentrate on his dissertation writing after teaching every day. Sara said jokingly that since she wanted to both study hard and to have fun, she ended up “not sleeping much” (interview). Luckily, all three have developed strong minds and optimistic attitudes in this learning process. To balance life with work is an art that takes a lifetime to develop, especially for those who choose to live a professional life.

## **7.4 Limitations of the study and directions for future research**

Although this study is one of the first to explore the construction of ITAs’ professional identities in the context of College Composition classes, due to the nature of qualitative study it has some limitations. Qualitative research methods provided me with a rich, in-depth understanding of

the three ITA's professional development; nevertheless, due to the small number of participants, the study did not provide a comprehensive view of the ITA experience in other disciplines or for those with other nationalities, native languages, ethnicity and etc. And although the participants in my study shared some commonalities in their teaching experiences, the purpose of the study was not to make generalizations of all Composition ITAs. Instead, taking an ethnographic case study approach, I have strived to understand "the particularity and complexity of the single cases...within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995). For future researchers who are interested in a broader view of ITAs' professional development in other contexts, they can expand the sampling of the participants to include ITAs from other disciplines and nationalities, as well as employ mixed methods to integrate the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Other than the sampling size of participants, as the only research instrument in the study—the researcher—my age, gender, language background, years in the program, academic training, and many other variables have brought inevitable influences to the interview and writing process. As an ITA of English myself and sharing the same language and nationality background with two of the ITAs, it might have been easier for me to build rapport with the participants and hear stories from them that might be constructed differently elsewhere. I shared a disciplinary background with the third ITA, which also likely affected the conversations we were able to have.

More importantly, the framing of a study can have important effects. For researchers that claim to study "NNESTs," the study showed that the term "translingual/translinguistic teacher" (Motha et al., 2011) is a powerful alternative that can de-centralize the power of the native speaker construct that is associated with the "NS/NNS" dichotomy. Nevertheless, the teachers themselves

may have different understandings of their linguistic identities and may not recognize themselves as “translingual/translinguistic teachers.” Researchers need to be cautious with what terms they use when they approach participants; in this study, my interview questions that had framed ITAs differently from American TAs may have limited the identity construction of some ITAs: that is, despite of my intention of positioning translingual identities as positive, the study made them highly aware of their nonnative status. For instance, Bo struggled in his self-introduction to present himself as a legitimate English teacher. This leads to an important question for researchers and teacher educators that claim to utilize their research findings to empower “NNESTs”: should we let teachers know about the debate around NS/NNS dichotomy in academia and the discriminatory hiring practices in the English teaching industry, if knowing such discourses may potentially hinder, instead of enhance, some teachers’ professional development?

As the “founding father” of the NNEST movement, Braine has confessed, “the NS-NNS dichotomy can be a highly personal issue for non-native teachers of English” (Braine, 2011). Such studies can be emotionally charged for some, especially new teachers and graduate student researchers. Although I cannot offer a best solution for empowering NNESTs, we can learn and take much from the strengths of my research subjects: personal perseverance from Ming, academic passion from Bo, and a mind of optimism from Sara.

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# APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ITAS

## Interview 1 (beginning of the quarter)

### **Life story**

1. Where are you from?
2. What's your first language? What languages do you speak?
3. What is your educational background before you came to this University?
4. Have you lived (and/or studied) in English-speaking countries other than your current stay in the US? When and for what purpose?
5. How long have you been in the U.S.?
6. Why did you come to the U.S.?
7. Which program are you in at the University? When did you enter the program?
8. How long have you studied English?
9. How did you learn English?
10. How did you learn academic writing in English?
11. How long have you taught before? What subjects? In which contexts?
12. How long have you been teaching in the Writing Program? What courses?
13. What are your academic plans after graduation, and for the future?

### **Non-native-ness and other identities**

1. What challenged you most when your first began teaching college composition (131)? What challenged you in establishing valid teacher identities?
2. Were there challenges specifically related to your identities: age, gender, religion, language, race, country of origin, and academic discipline?
3. How did you deal with those challenges?
4. What do you see are advantages your identities have brought to the classroom? (e.g. student status, speaking multiple languages etc.)
5. To what extent do you think your identities influence your pedagogy?
6. What kinds of experiences did you have when your students found out your first language is not English?
7. What kinds of experiences did you have when your friends/family found out you are teaching this course?
8. Tell me what you think about the term, "non-native speaker?"
9. Do you perceive yourself as a non-native speaker?

### **Teacher training and professional development**

1. How was your previous teaching experience different/similar to your experience in teaching college composition?)

2. What is considered good teaching in general to you?
3. What do you think is a good college composition teacher?
4. How do you see yourself as a college composition teacher?
5. What kind of relationship do you want to develop with your students? Has anything changed since you started teaching?
6. Do you see teaching as part of your future academic aspirations?
8. Have you had training in teaching? How helpful was it?
9. Tell me about the Writing Program as a whole in terms of a support system. How helpful do you find the support from the program, the department, and the university? (e.g. ENGL567, other coursework, TA training, colleagues, etc.)
10. What kind of support do you need the most? (Suggestions for improvement?)

#### **After-class/conference interview:**

1. Overall, how do you feel about your class/conference today?
2. What was successful and what wasn't? Why?
3. How would you describe your interaction with students and students' interaction with one another?
4. Was there anything you planned to do today, but couldn't do? If so, what was it? Why couldn't you do it?
5. Any other comments?
- 6\*. If this is the first class, I will ask: How did you establish your teacher identity for the first day? How did your plan work out?
- 7\*. Depending on what happens in the class, I may ask questions to clarify certain moments I found interesting: *You did X in class today and your student responded X; what do you think of that moment? Why did you do what you did?*

#### **After-quarter interview**

1. Overall, how do you feel about your quarter working as a TA in this particular context?
  - 1.1 How do you feel about teaching the particular course and the particular students you had this quarter?
  - 1.2 How do you feel about your relationship with other TAs, director and ADs of the Writing program?
  - 1.3 Please take a moment to reflect your first quarter this college composition. How was your first quarter? How did you feel about your course, your teaching, your students, your interactions with your students and colleagues (TAs and director in the writing program)?
  - 1.4 Has anything changed? Do you think you are different now from your 1<sup>st</sup> quarter? What are different? What are the same?
2. How do you view yourself as an English teacher now?
  - 2.1 Has your self-image as a composition teacher changed from previous quarters in the

- Writing Program? If so, how? What made you see yourself differently?
- 2.2 Has your self-image as an English teacher changed from your previous teaching experience as an ESL/EFL teacher (or TAs for other courses)? If so, how? What made you see yourself differently?
  - 2.3 What do you think your strengths and weaknesses are as a composition teacher?
  - 2.4 What successes have you had this quarter?
  - 2.5 What are the challenges you had encountered this quarter?
  - 2.6 What do you think would make you a better English teacher?
  - 2.7 Were there any pivotal moments that made you think of yourself as an English teacher differently from before?
3. Classroom practice
- 3.1 I observed you X times this quarter. Do you think the observation classes were typical classes? (in terms of your instruction, students' interactions, and the general atmosphere?)
  - 3.2 Is there anything that you want to change or improve in terms of your instruction (in-class instruction, written feedback, conferences)? What have improved this quarter and what areas do you think you need to keep working on?
  - 3.3 What has it been like teaching this group of students this quarter overall?
  - 3.4 What characteristics (unique to this group) have you noticed among your students?
  - 3.5 I have noticed that you have a diverse group of students (native speakers/non-native speakers, levels of writing, race/ethnicity, and different characteristics). How does the diversity manifest in your class in terms of instruction, classroom management, interaction and general atmosphere?
  - 3.6 What are some successes you have accomplished dealing with this group of students? What are some challenges and difficulties that you have experienced? How did you overcome those challenges?
  - 3.7 [gender] Have you experienced any issues or encountered situations connected to your gender? How do you think your gender manifest itself in your class?
  - 3.8 [age] Have you experienced any issues or encountered situations connected to your age? How do you think your age manifest itself in your class?
  - 3.9 [race] Have you experienced any issues or encountered situations connected to your race/ethnicity? How do you think your race/ethnicity manifest itself in your class?
  - 3.10 [nationality] Have you experienced any issues or encountered situations connected to your nationality? How do you think your nationality manifest itself in your class?
  - 3.11 [educational experience] Have you experienced any issues or encountered situations connected to your previous educational experience (especially in your home country)? How do you think your educational background influenced your teaching?
  - 3.12 [academic discipline] Have you experienced any issues or encountered situations (e.g. developing course materials, developing relationship with your colleagues) because of your academic specialty (e.g. TESOL)?
  - 3.13 [language] How do you think your linguistic ability manifest itself in your work as an

English composition teacher? (in terms of instruction, preparation, teaching style, interaction with students, and overall performance?)

3.14 How do you think your age, gender, race, nationality and linguistic ability are connected to your students' perceptions of you as an English composition teacher?

4. NNEST identities

4.1 Are you aware of the terms, NES and NNEST teachers? How did you get to know these terms?

4.2 How would you define a NNEST teacher and a NES teacher?

4.3 How would you define yourself in light of these terms? (would you want to define yourself based on these terms? If not, how would you describe yourself?)

4.4 How do you think of the differences and similarities between NNESTs and NESs?

4.5 How do you feel about teaching in this particular context as a NNEST?

4.6 What does it mean to you to teach as a NNEST after you get a job here/go back to your home country?

## **APPENDIX B: END-OF-QUARTER SURVEY FOR STUDENTS**

### **Survey with students**

1. Why did you take this writing class, and this specific section?
2. What do you think of your writing class overall?
3. Describe what is an effective writing teacher?
4. What do you think of your English writing teacher overall?
5. How would you describe your teacher? What are some words you would use to describe your teacher? What do you think contributed to how you view your teacher? How did you react to this kind of teacher?
6. How did you feel about taking a composition course from a Non-native speaker English teacher? Did your feelings about that change during the course of the term? If so, in what ways and why? If not, why not?
7. Do you have a preference for an English writing teacher, a Native speaker English teacher or a Non-native speaker English teacher? Why? What about other courses?