Abstract:

Within an English-speaking cosmopolitan context, the hybrid identity negotiations of 12 international people were examined. The purpose was to view the processes that influence participants' perceptions and the positive attributes they associate with being in a *third space*. The understandings were organized under the categories: language, culture and identity. The most salient theory utilized is from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. Central texts include Canagarajah, Myhill, Bourdieu and Schecter among others. Analyses revealed that respondents' ability to flexibly compartmentalize elements of diversity in language and culture allowed them to maintain a strong core identity. Findings elucidate the importance of choice in participants' navigation of their third space identity, by using characteristics of hybridity to their advantage. By analyzing successful third space engagements, it may be possible to transfer elements of individuals' traverse to immigrant and refugee high school students struggling with acculturation.

Keywords: identity, language, culture, hybridity, ESL

Title: The Native Speaker as an Othering Construct: Negotiating a Hybrid Third Space Identity Within a Binary Framework

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Paralleling many immigrants' motivation, my family moved to Toronto, Canada from Greece so that they could provide me with greater opportunities for education and work. Such background facilitates my thesis topic: The native speaker as an othering construct: Negotiating a hybrid, third space identity within a binary framework. Using the theories of Homi Bhabha (1994) and others, I explore how social structures intended for integration simultaneously can be used to position people on the periphery. These imposed barriers rarely allow "outsiders" to successfully integrate into mainstream pathways, often creating a social hierarchy that is perpetuated by schools. As a teacher, it is my calling to identify the institutional rigidities that cause inequity and challenge them through research and, subsequently, actions.

The field of linguistics is wrought with the controversial notion of the native speaker, a difficult concept for learners and teachers of English to comprehend due to its ambiguity. What constitutes a native speaker? What knowledge is inherent in belonging to this category? How are non-native speakers conceptualized as a result of the existence of native speakers (Myhill, 2003, p. 78)? The definitions and uses of the term vary greatly. The scope of this study focuses on the native speaker as a binary framework defined or rejected by participants. Within this technical dichotomy, a third space emerges, one where hybrid identities are negotiated. The concept of a hybrid or third space identity is borrowed from Homi Bhabha (1994). In his book, *The Location of Culture*, he uses camouflage as a simile for hybridity, "hybridity as camouflage, as contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time-lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in between the rules of engagement" (p. 277). Here he explains hybridity as a place, not of compromise, but of shifting tectonic

plates battling one another, constantly changing and morphing depending on the atmospheric pressures among other forces. The variables in this complex space are constantly changing, as are the players. Therefore, the study is intended to be a snapshot in time.

The following selection has been adapted from the findings section of my master's thesis.

The ubiquity of English. English as a second language (ESL) teachers instill the concept of an English proper into their learners. Through instruction, learners believe that with practice and maintenance of proper grammar, native-like fluency is attainable, if not preferable. Associating native speakers with an English proper creates a rigid binary that has the potential to *otherize* those who are not native-speakers of English. The majority of respondents in this study said that grammar was tethered to native speaker status. Respondents rated their own English proficiency highly; yet, they did not consider themselves native speakers of English, despite some having been educated in English-only contexts their entire lives. If participants believe that grammar is the marker of English proper, and that their grammar is above average, then why is the gate to native speaker status still closed to these people?

Canagarajah's (2007) characterization of the English used internationally, lingua franca English (LFE), has not yet trickled down into mainstream classrooms. Instead, many schools function within a paradoxical system; English communication is concurrently a pathway and a gate. It is essential that teachers of English as a second language begin to interrogate the native/non-native speaker dichotomy by

openly discussing the fallacy of such a concept with learners. A major paradigm shift is required to bring lingua franca English to the teaching and learning forefront. The goal of learners and teachers of English as a Second Language should not be native-like fluency; rather it should be effective communication in LFE.

Participants thought that English was the most practical and widely spoken language in the world, concluding that it was the pinnacle of a linguistic hierarchy they were certain existed. Few participants made tacit references to the enormous power that the English language has had over their lives; it appears to be unquestionably ubiquitous. Perhaps, like whiteness for race, English is unmarked.

The English language has the potential to be so pervasive that learners cannot separate themselves from the language. Instead of their initial perception of the English language as a tool for their discretionary use, they ultimately become a tool in its proliferation. With the attainment of higher education in English, learners' thoughts become bound to the language and implicit practices contained within its frames of reference. Furthermore, subsequent to many years of academic study in English, participants may have difficulties expressing academic thoughts in their first language at the same level that they can in English. Indeed, some responses indicated participants' detachment from their previous linguistic realities in that they could no longer engage important concepts in their lives (e.g., democracy) in their first language. Their thoughts, especially academic identifications, are no longer at par in their first language. These disparities create discord. Respondents' motivation to move to an English-speaking country for improvement in education and employment is not necessarily seen as progressive within the spaces they formerly occupied.

Identity as liminal. The aforementioned language imbalance ultimately renders participants neither wholly part of either culture; rather, their identities are hybridized. This hybridized third space is wrought with internal and external conflict. While the conditions that cause and, conversely, can prevent first language atrophy are a subject unto themselves, this study demonstrates clearly that learners fundamentally change once they exceed a certain threshold in an English-only environment. Participants acclimatized themselves because they felt that they needed to, in order to survive and ultimately thrive. However, access to the new English-centered society remained elusive to them. If and when respondents returned to their country of birth, many would become alienated for having developed in a way that is different than those who did not leave. Once again, belonging, for international people, is ephemeral. Still, these twelve participants' identities appear to be strong enough to withstand external variability.

Participants had a solid understanding of their core values, which remained unchanged. Upon moving, respondents' social bonds transformed due to distance from familial connections into more friends-based networks. In addition, respondents' answers showed their previously traditional mindset became more liberal. These changes were as a result of new experiences and a multicultural society. Respondents had to expand their knowledge and beliefs in order to acculturate to the new place they were living in and the culture they associated with the language they had now adopted as their primary language. At the same time, participants' responses indicated that they were able to compartmentalize and safeguard elements of core identity that facilitated conscious choices in third space negotiations. More time with these participants would be required to understand

how exactly they made decisions about which aspects of their identities they wish to retain as core and which were open to mutate.

According to participants, assimilation was seen as *integration* and culture clash was viewed as *irreconcilable differences.* Neither practice was seen as unilaterally negative. Rather, participants saw these processes as instruments to opening doors that could be used at their discretion and to their advantage. In viewing third space negotiations as opportunities for growth, development, and diversification, participants were keen to engage, instead of resisting, the flow of their lives in English. Had they perceived these processes as infringements to their fundamental beliefs and identities, they may have been resistant. Resistance would have likely yielded less than favorable results in academia and employment. The elements of choice and agency appear to be essential in the building and maintenance of a core identity, while navigating new cultural and linguistic territory.

It can be concluded that the demarcation between a native speaker and a non-native speaker of English extends beyond an audible dialect. Culturally, participants preferred the company of non-native speakers of English, many of whom were not linguistically similar to themselves. Languages and cultures are deeply connected. Still, many of those on the periphery of the English language are able to relate to one another, just not always to native speakers of English. This would indicate that global awareness and transnationalism are not only competencies essential to those who migrate to English speaking cosmopolitan cities. Transnationalism is necessary for the general population as well, enabling the promotion of equity and achievement in all areas.

Another clear finding is that participants' extensive travel and exposure to diverse cultural situations have helped them to develop the ability to read nuanced cultural behaviors and adjust themselves accordingly.

Although none of the participants identified themselves to be outsiders of the dominant culture, only two tentatively labeled themselves insiders. The other ten, even those who are citizens of Canada or the United States, did not classify themselves as insiders, even though, according to their responses, they had insider knowledge. They seemed to have an aversion to pinning down their status in this manner, preferring to remain in-between. Their hybridity may inhibit pure insider status but it is not what puts them in an in-between state. Participants' concept of belonging is complex; however, it is clear that they see themselves as the purveyors of the parameters of their inclusion. According to their elicitations, aside from lacking birthright, there were times when they did not want to be part of the dominant culture so that they could preserve their own unique cultural identities. They did not equate being an insider with a need to assimilate; instead, they saw the two as separate entities. Notably, they do not feel socially errant, nor that the insider gate is closed off to them; they believe it is a revolving door, one they can walk in and out of by free will. This provision is elemental to discerning how participants can compartmentalize their identity components, to maintain a balance that they are satisfied is authentic. In this manner, international students exert agency and ownership over their nationality; their status is not prescribed *to* them. Thinking that they are not insiders because of a choice they made is qualitatively different from being excluded, especially as concerns the formation and development of a core identity.

Identity as a vehicle for self-advancement. Functionally, participants'

engagements with identity marked behaviours were in English. This was in stark

contrast to their preference of identification with the language from their country of

birth. Respondents seemed unaware that their perceptions of themselves and their

real-time engagements did not necessarily coincide.

Language and nationality are connected. Yet, participants evince affinity

solely to their country of birth. Why are these connections not negotiated similarly

once English becomes their main language of communication? Participants' self-

identification with nationality and language, regardless of dual citizenship among

other factors, remains with their country of birth. Functionally, the English language

manifests in identity marked instances, but respondents' perceptions are

incongruent with their real lives. Participants did not differentiate their affinity to a

language from the reality of how and when they used the language. Perhaps it was

intentional, or conceivably, they are not cognizant of this imbalance between real-

time language and identity.

By virtue of participants' knowledge about the culture system in which they

currently find themselves, they are able to adjust in order to succeed. The

participants who initially lied to taxi drivers and casual acquaintances about where

they were from to avoid racism, ultimately, preferred to engage in cultural dialogue

over the practice of avoidance. As awkward and difficult as it may be to engage in

intercultural communication, these were not opportunities that participants

abjured, rather they embraced them. Respondents have come to understand that in

areas of divergence exists opportunity for growth. It is these conflicted third spaces

where real hybridity is born; and understandings of how things that are separate occur more readily in a third realm.

Implications for Pedagogic Practice. Deriving the implications of my study's findings for pedagogic practice with respect to immigrant and refugee demographics has been more complex than anticipated, in large part because there exists a discrepancy of power allocations between these two groups and the international students I worked with in this study.

Notwithstanding, when considering Lev Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development* in relation to agency, teachers can accommodate some of the provisions for cultural capital for their learners by enlisting classroom practices that cultivate agency. In their book, *Multilingual Education in Practice: Using Diversity as a Resource,* Sandra R. Schecter and Jim Cummins (2003) illustrate some practices that enable negotiations of connections between language, culture and identity to learners' advantage. These practices allow English language learner (ELL) students a voice in producing their classroom cultures, and in converting these spaces into ones where the omnipresence of English is not taken for granted.

Expanding the corpus of English teaching practices beyond the native/non-native speaker dichotomy to foster third space identity requires privileging praxes of equity from the start of novice teachers' professional careers. Naomi Norquay and Marian Robertson-Baghel (2011) conducted a longitudinal study querying new teachers' inclusion of equity in their teaching practice after having learned about such practices in their pre-service faculty of education programs. The researchers found a direct link between what the teachers had learned in their courses and how that knowledge penetrated their pedagogical actions. Summarizing the link between

the transfer of equitable practices in teacher education and teaching, they conclude by asserting that:

> It was their responses in the everyday work of teaching, informed by their new and evolving pedagogy, rather than ministry mandated policy that shaped their actions. This research reinforces the position that teachers need to, and are able to, see teaching as a pedagogical activity rather than teaching as curriculum delivery. We need to teach teacher candidates to recognize when they are summoned by others to advocate. We need to give them permission to choose to advocate and to be cognizant of the standpoint from which they do so. We recognize the importance of exploring the intricacies of building professional relationships as well as networking and community building skills, so that as beginning teachers they can form alliances that will make their advocacy endeavours less risky and more effective. (p. 80)

> In chameleonic fashion, participants constantly reconfigured themselves depending on their environments, using the elasticity of the relationship between language, culture and identity and language choice itself to inscribe and re-inscribe their hybridized identities. This theoretical finding underscores the crucial role of agency in determining the relationships among these concepts for those who have choice or, more importantly, have the perception of having choice.

*This excerpt from an original thesis that has been modified to fit the requirements of the Quest Journal. Access to the original thesis can be obtained through York University's thesis and dissertation portal within the next few months.

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