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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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, 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.