

“I’m Still Angry!” A Korean Student’s Self-Negotiation in her Canadian Classroom

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Abstract

Grounded in poststructuralist understandings of language and identity and Davies and Harré’s (1990) positioning theory, this paper explores one South Korean student’s educational experiences in her English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, specifically related to subject positions and identity construction pertaining to language. Using a researcher diary, semi-structured interviews, and dialogue journals with one Korean university student, this paper reports findings from a qualitative study. The findings suggest a critical awareness of the effects of positioning on language learning experiences. The results indicate that although a student may exercise agency to take up or resist subject positions, this positioning is part of a greater discourse, generally outside the control of the student, that constructs identity through particular social experiences. The results of this study will be of interest to researchers in the areas of language identity, second language learning, and higher education in the 21st century.

Keywords: power; positioning; subject positions; identity; English language; discourse; international students



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Welcome to Canada! You have just arrived safely. A bit jet-lagged perhaps, but here you are, both feet planted on foreign soil, ready (or not!) for your new adventure. Congratulations! By making this journey, you are one among thousands from around the world who have chosen, or maybe have been forced, to come to Canada to pursue your studies. There is a special word for you; we call you international. And it is people like you (yes you!) that contribute to the growth of international students on campus, making classrooms increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse. So, welcome to Canada and good-luck in your studies!

I position you, the reader, as an international student—a creative way to draw you into the paper, I think!

I show this paragraph to my “international” friend—a brown-skinned PhD candidate from Bangladesh.

She reads aloud and responds, “How do you know I am safe? Congratulations, what? Did I win the lottery? Oh, international? Is it special? Maybe for you, but not for me! Jennifer, this is insulting to me!”

I sit uncomfortably, fidgeting in my seat. My heart is racing. I am mad at my friend who is pointing out my privilege, “You are very much White. You will not get it right now.” I sit silently and listen:

“I have to hide my degree if I want to work here,” she says. “It’s in Canada that I first realized that I’m not good at language, language is my identity, so not good at language, that means my...ok, I used to hear that if you go to an English speaking country your language will improve, go to North America, okay I will learn English, my spoken English will get better, I believed the system blindly, but in reality I became less confident, I lost my self esteem, I stopped talking, withdrew, resisted, all English users made me feel like that, less intelligent, because of my language, my skin colour, my gender, it took me one year to realize what is going on around me.”

Our supervisor pops her head into our office and interrupts our chat. Good! I don’t want to continue this conversation with my friend. I feel violated. I leave the office angry. I want to hide. I’m mostly mad at how uncomfortable she made me feel. I sit silently vulnerable in my discomfort for two days.

Discourse, Power, Positioning, and Identity in Second Language Education (SLE)

In the introduction of this paper, I share the very personal and uncomfortable process of attempting to position you, the reader, as an international student. I wanted to position you as an international student for the following two reasons: first, because the research in this paper focuses on a South Korean international student studying English in Canada, and second, because the analysis of this South Korean student’s experiences is theoretically and analytically grounded in Davies and Harré’s (1990) positioning theory. The goal of this paper is to explore language and power in interactions of one English language learner/speaker in her ESL classroom by looking at how she negotiates her sense of self, her identity. The purpose of this section, then, is to develop an understanding of discourse and positioning grounded theoretically

in poststructuralism and, then, to outline specifics of power positions within discourse and ESL students in particular.

My paper is informed by language theories of poststructuralism. Poststructuralists are interested in the *deconstruction* of texts in order to expose perceptions that we take as “common sense” within our culture—for example, binaries such as male/female, white/black, able/disabled, rich/poor that have become essentialized and taken for granted. Poststructuralists are uncomfortable with such binaries and believe that structures must become unstable or decentered. Poststructuralist scholars (Pennycook, 2010; Canagarajah, 2007; Weedon, 1997) challenge the idea that once students have reached a particular level of English expertise, they should be able to successfully function in any English language environment with little difficulty. Poststructuralists would ask questions such as does the language learner have the ability to *apply* the acquired skills in a variety of cultural contexts? In other words, language is inextricable from the contexts of its use, implying that language proficiency has different meanings within different contexts (Benzie, 2010).

When understanding language from a poststructuralist lens, one is able to see that English discourses are embedded in power that is reinforced through the recurrence of ordinary and familiar ways of behaving (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough’s (1989) notion of discourse views language as a social practice. In relation to applied linguistics, Pennycook (1994) explains Fairclough’s use of the term discourse as “chunks of language as its [*sic*] actually used,” language as it relates to other “social practices,” and “socially determined” language practices (p. 121). It is important to note that discourses are not inherently dangerous in and of themselves; however, when discursive practices are repeated they become natural and normal, and they frame what we experience and think of as possible, “rendering some things common sense and other things nonsensical” (Youdell, 2006, p. 35)—herein lies the danger. The notion of discourse is pertinent for understanding how normative views of certain behaviours, and language specifically, are (re)produced (Sterzuk, 2011).

According to Bourdieu (1977), linguistic discourses are intertwined with power; yet, through the recurrence of ordinary and familiar ways of behaving, social language conventions cause relational and power differences to be taken for granted. Bourdieu (1977) draws attention to the importance of power in structuring discourses, with interlocutors rarely sharing equal speaking rights. Drawing on Bourdieu, Bonny Norton’s work with Canadian immigrant women in the late 1990s was important in changing the terrain of identity work in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Her contributions as they relate to power relations in English language learners’ identities will be discussed in further detail below, but first I turn to Davies and Harré’s (1990) theoretical concept of positioning.

The theoretical concept of positioning has its roots in psychology and is used in place of the more static term *role* (Yamakawa, Forman, & Ansell, 2005). The notion of positioning allows researchers to “make sense of the dynamics of evolving social interactions” (Yoon, 2008, p. 498). Positioning can be interactive and reflexive, yet it is not always intentional. *Interactive positioning* is when one person positions another and *reflexive positioning* is when one positions oneself (Davies & Harré, 1990). Positioning is important in the context of language studies because the act of positioning people in particular ways either limits or extends what students and instructors can say and do (Adams & Harré, 2001). For example, positioning students as intelligent may allow them the ability to improve their performance where as positioning them as

deficient may deny them the opportunity to correct their deficiencies (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Though these positionings are named through psychology, they are intended in this paper with a view to their social representations as found in discourses. As such, positioning is not merely an individualized choice taken in advance; these positions do not pre-exist the subject as autonomous positions, or ready-made labels, waiting to be filled; rather, positioning is dependent on the use and recognition of communication, gestures, terms and all other forms of discourse that construct an identity through particular social experiences. This paper examines the social representations of one Korean student in English language classes.

Among students, power differentials impact positioning and relationships within the classroom. Jang and DaSilva Idding's (2010) case study of two Korean adolescents learning ESL provides evidence for the co-regulatory process, which facilitated or inhibited their language use that was mainly dependent on the ways the students positioned themselves or were positioned by the other participants in the interaction. This study found that a social comparison based on English proficiency was taking place between the two Korean students, which created a hierarchical relationship between them. A greater understanding of power differentials among classmates and teacher may be particularly telling in the Korean students' communication experiences in this study as it relates to positioning particularly because power structures shape the way students make choices about how they position themselves and use language (Martin-Beltrán, 2010).

To consider power relations in constructing identities of English language learners, I return to Norton's (2000) identity work in SLA research. For Norton (2013), identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 45). Prior to the 1990s, most research used the psychological construct of *motivation* with learning a language; motivation, therefore, was framed as a fixed characteristic of individual language learners. For Norton, this conceptualization did not account for power relations between language learners and target language speakers. Norton (2000) rejected language learning motivation as a fixed trait and argued, rather, that learners *invest* in the target language at particular time and settings because of the symbolic and material resources it affords them. Examples of symbolic resources include education, language, and friends; material resources include money, real estate, and capital goods. These symbolic and material resources, Norton (2000) says, increase the value of English language learners social power and cultural capital. Hence, students may be highly motivated but lack the investment in a particular language practice in a given classroom. In turn, students may be perceived as unmotivated or poor language learners, negatively positioning them as deficient language speakers (Harklau, 2000). Norton's work informs my understanding of language learning and identity because particular sociocultural discourse patterns, such as silence, may be an active resistance to practices in which these language learners occupy "unequal relations of power vis-à-vis local English speakers" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 421).

What these works cited have in common is a Faircloughian and Bourdieuan poststructuralist understanding of the relationships between positioning, power, and identity in SLE research. An understanding of poststructuralist theories of language is necessary background knowledge for my research because it opens possible reasons, besides lack of English proficiency, for communication behaviours among Korean students. This paper's study will add to the conversation of positioning and identity work in SLE research.

Methodology

Drawing from Faircloughian and Bourdieuan poststructuralist understandings of language, this paper presents data from my master's research on the positioning of South Korean students at a Canadian university, guided by these two research questions:

1. What subject positions pertaining to language can be identified in what it is like to be a South Korean student studying in a Canadian university?
2. How are these subject positions used in the negotiation of student identities?

Within a discourse there are given *subject positions* that are available for people to draw on since “every discourse has implicit within it a number of such ‘subject positions’” (Burr, 1995, p. 141) and institutional settings, such as the university, offer subject positions to students (Blunden, 2005). Institutional settings operate to transform specific sets of ideas into dominant ways of thinking (Fairclough, 1989). An example of a subject position as it relates to my research could be this student is a *poor English speaker*. Subject positions provide us with particular ways in which to act, behave, think, and do. Therefore, when a student is positioned as being poor at speaking because of their pronunciation, they may not claim the right to speak in class and this may lead to misunderstandings and stereotyping, for example. Davis and Harré (1990) refer to subject positions as a “structure of rights,” which provides limitations on, and possibilities for, what we can or cannot behave, think, or do within a discourse. The relationship between subject positions, discourse, and identity is succinctly explained in the following sentence: Poststructuralists maintain that identity construction “occurs through the identification by the individual with particular subject positions within discourses” (Weedon, 1997, p. 108).

Recruitment and Data Sources

I collected qualitative research data from six South Korean students who met the following criteria: personally identified as Korean, spoke Korean as their first language, were born in Korea, attended high school in Korea, and enrolled either part-time or full-time in a post-secondary education in Canada. Using handpicked sampling (O’Leary, 2016), I approached the first participant to explain my study to him and ask if he would be willing to participate. I handpicked this participant because I knew he was a former ESL student in our program. Once my initial participant agreed to participate in my study, I asked him to identify others who met the criteria for my study. This approach is snowball sampling where existing subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances, which is used when generalizability and representation of results is not the goal of the research (O’Leary, 2016). In total, I had one student from the Faculty of Engineering, one student from the Faculty of Computer Science, and four English as Second Language (ESL) students. For the purpose of this paper, I present the findings and discussion of one participant from my study: a 44-year-old Korean woman, who was in her final semester of the ESL program. I have selected the English pseudonym *Judy* for this participant because the real name Judy has chosen for herself is an English name.

There were three data collection methods used in this study: interviews, dialogue journals, and my researcher diary. The first data source was a series of semistructured interviews, conducted face-to-face individually or in groups of two. I use the term *informal conversational exchanges* in place of semi-structured interviews because it more accurately reflects my perspective of interview in what Talmy (2010) calls “a social practice” (p. 138) orientation,

which places emphasis on the what and how of interviews. My focus was on making the exchanges as natural as possible; I strived to create an authentic conversation such as the kind you would have with a friend in a coffee shop. My goal for these conversations was to go as far as I could go, which was dependent solely on my participants' personalities and the relationship I formed with them.

The second data source was the students' narrative dialogue journals where the participants responded in writing to four written questions. The rationale for this approach was to provide the participants with another platform to talk about their language experiences. The dialogue journal provided the participants with time to recall their experiences and reply at their own pace, which perhaps decreased the pressure they might have experienced in our informal conversational exchanges. The narrative dialogue journals were essentially conversations on paper and were exchanged back and forth several times. The informal conversational exchanges and narrative dialogue journals co-occurred over the course of 6 months (from February to July 2015) and were both conducted in English because this is the language the participants are expected to use in the university setting.

The third data collection method was my researcher diary, which I used as a platform to make sense of my research process. My researcher diary was a safe place to express myself, to write about how I felt before, during, and after the interview. I wrote about the details of each conversation that I could not catch in the audio recording of the informal conversational exchanges. These details included emotions and feelings of the participant and myself. Introspection throughout my research process was crucial; because a large part of qualitative research speaks about reflexivity (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), my researcher diary was an exercise in reflexivity. One important observation I made in regards to my position as an ESL teacher, (and formerly an ESL teacher to some of the participants in this study) was that I found myself slipping into this teacher position at times when I corrected my participants' grammar or vocabulary. I had to silently remind myself that I was there to listen to their stories and not be their teacher—There was nothing wrong in the way they spoke to me that warranted any correction from me. Being cognizant of my positioning as an ESL teacher and the possible impact it could have on my research is one way to ensure the credibility of my study (Josselson, 2013).

Transparency in Participant Relationships

I take this space now to share how I cultivated relationships with the participants in this study. I used my 5-year experience as an educator and student in Korea to help me establish relationships with the Korean participants in this research. I drew upon my experiences in Korea as a way to connect with my participants: I had lived in Korea, eaten Korean food, and experienced Korean life. While my experiences in Korea would certainly be much different from the experiences of my participants, I used my personal experience in Korea as one way to connect to the participants. Judy writes in her narrative dialogue journal:

To be honest, I was really glad to see her [Jennifer] because she has lived in Korea before and she knew Korean culture and Korean language a little bit.

Relationship building was of utmost importance to me. I had a genuine interest in the lives of my participants, which was reflected back to me when Judy had this to say about her experience:

I know that she [Jennifer] likes to meet me, but I hope our relationship will last longer.

However, in building relationships I struggled with how much of my personal self to disclose to my participants. For example, as they asked questions about my language experiences with my Korean husband, I wasn't sure if I should tell them I was no longer with my husband. The following excerpt from my researcher diary show my confusion:

I'm separated from my husband. We don't live together anymore. Do I tell my participants the details of my personal life? How can I dodge these questions? Should I pretend I'm not separated?

In the end, I decided to be transparent. After all, if I wanted my participants to share their experiences candidly, then how could I expect to build trusting relationships with them if I was not honest and upfront myself? The decision to open up my vulnerabilities meant that some of the participants felt safe enough to share some of their struggles and secrets.

Analysis

My analysis focused on the ways in which language is used to structure a particular social world for the participants, to provide meaning to events, and to suggest certain subject positions for South Korean international students to take up or resist (Cameron, 2001). There was no specific beginning or end point to the data analysis process. Rather, I moved in a somewhat cyclical manner between the transcriptions, audio recordings, literature, and conversations with the participants.

I purged, coded, and analyzed the data (Gagnon, 2010) as follows: As I read through the transcripts the first few times, I identified sections of the text where participants were speaking about their language experiences; I purged the remainder—the parts of the text that were not related to the participants' language experiences. I began the coding process by highlighting parts of the text where I observed positioning occurring and asked myself these three questions: "What is the positioning?," "Who is creating the positioning?," and "How is this positioning related to the creation of their identity?" Much later into my analysis process, in the interpretation of my participant's experiences, a committee member (thankfully!) called out my tendency to create ready-made subject positions that appeared as standalone categories created ahead of the subject. This committee member encouraged me to show, not tell, or interpret, what I found from my data. I returned to my data. I asked much broader questions, such as the following: "What is happening here?" and "What is this participant telling me?" Instead of identifying subject positions, a better question was to ask how discourses construct identities. The support from my supervisor and committee members was crucial in making me more conscious of my positivist tendency to gravitate to a categorical system that assigned fixed traits or subject positions to participants.

Findings

This section provides an analysis and discussion of one participant's voice as it relates to positionings, power, and identity. Since the four informal conversational exchanges selected for this paper take on a rather "common sense status of the kinds of positionings that were achieved" (E. R. Miller, 2009, p. 340), it is even more important to gaze critically at dominant discourses that reinforce and normalize particular ways of being and doing. The dominant discourses

present in the examples are as follows: ESL students cannot challenge a native teacher's English grammar knowledge, teachers are in positions of power, teachers are the gatekeepers in deciding who is or is not a good English student, and teachers and students reinforce proper and improper ways of speaking English based on a model of *native speakerism*.

The informal conversational exchanges below are useful in understanding how Judy positions herself and her ESL teacher, which provides insights into understanding how she negotiates her sense of self in her Canadian English language classroom. The italicized text beginning with Judy represents the participant's voice and the text beginning with Jennifer represents my voice. I use **bold-faced** words for emphasis and in [brackets] are my added explanations.

In the excerpt that follows, Judy describes a situation of being frustrated and angry with her ESL teacher Mark for not providing any feedback on her writing. What is interesting to note in this exchange is that even though Mark positions Judy as a grammatically competent student, she rejects this subject position because if she really were grammatically competent surely that would be reflected in her grades:

Judy: I experienced a weird, something weird, when I got my essay Pride and Prejudice, my core teacher didn't correct, mark any mistakes, just my essay score part score so when I asked my teacher, I want to know my mistakes, he said to me, your grammar is good, so you can find your mistake, so embarrassed, I know, last semester I asked some grammar questions to my teacher, so it make him feel bad

Jennifer: because you knew the grammar?

Judy: Yah, sometimes he talked about grammar spoken, not in textbook, so the day before our grammar test he told us, just you have to study your English grammar in your textbook, not what I taught you, just focus on grammar book...when I read another classmate essay, I was angry because his [another student's] grammar score was 4, sentence structure was 4, but my score was 3.5, 3.5, but I just made some mistakes, 4 or 5, but he [the other student], the first page, in half the page I found 7 or 8 mistakes, so at that time I realized the score affect on teacher [not based on the grading rubric]

Jennifer: Did you talk to the teacher about that?

Judy: No, because I thought, if I told him, if I had told him, for another student's essay, he probably would have had lower grade

Jennifer: Okay so you were worried about that?

Judy: Yah, sometimes, even though I know it's unfair, I cannot do anything

In the dialogue above, Mark interactively positions Judy as a competent language learner: “*Your grammar is good, so you can find your mistake.*” Judy is embarrassed. She recalls a time from the previous semester when she challenged Mark's grammar knowledge in front of the class. Mark is a native-English speaker and instead of admitting his grammar error when Judy challenged him, he told the class he is teaching “*grammar spoken,*” but that the students should

study their grammar in their textbook by themselves for their grammar test the next day and not the “*spoken*” grammar. Judy cannot challenge her native English teacher’s grammar knowledge. When she challenges her teacher, her teacher positions her as grammatically competent.

Even though Mark positioned Judy as competent and skilled at grammar, she resisted this positioning and became angry with him; when Mark told her to figure out her own mistakes, she compared her writing to another classmate. She did this and became upset when within the first page, she could find seven or eight grammatical errors in her classmate’s writing, yet he scored higher than she did. Here, Judy is powerless against this grading injustice: “*Even though I know it’s unfair, I cannot do anything.*” She does not want to bring up this injustice to her teacher because she fears that he will exercise his power and authority and lower her classmate’s score. What is important, here, is that Mark may think he is positively positioning his student as grammatically competent, when in fact, this positioning makes Judy embarrassed and angry.

In the exchange below, Judy positions her teacher as an “*authority*” with “*power*” and makes a connection between the teacher’s power and the relationship to students’ language desires. This is important because “*power relationships influence who can [and cannot] speak*” (Ryan & Viete, 2009, p. 307):

Judy: Just I sometimes, I feel teacher’s authority, power.

Jennifer: Tell me about that. What do you mean?

Judy: Some, just my opinion, some teachers ignore the international students English, so, yah, I know...some students who are poor at English, don’t make efforts, but some students still making efforts, their efforts, but some teachers don’t know that,...so and I heard many times this, about this, [imitates teacher] “you are poor at English, that’s why you came here, so your pronunciation, your reading skills, your speaking skills are like 020 [beginner level], you have to go down to 020 [beginner level]” sometimes it can hurt students’ desire to study English, or, they, after they are hurt that their motivation to study English will go down.

I would like to stress the powerful role teachers play when they position their students as “competent” or “incompetent” language learners. In the above excerpt, Judy describes a teacher interactively positioning all students as *poor at English*, which “*can hurt students desire to study English.*” Based on in-class student performance, it may not always be clear to the teacher whether the student is making efforts. In other words, a student may be trying very hard but their efforts may go unnoticed by the teacher. When teachers make blanket statements to an entire class and position all the student as *poor at English*, for example, this is insulting to students who are struggling but trying their best. A teacher’s positioning greatly affects the students’ learning process.

The above exchange leads me to consider the very important and personal role a teacher plays in a student’s learning process, specifically reflected in terms of how students regard their English competence:

Judy: Good teacher means that they lead student to improve their English, it means they lead students to be interested and enjoy English, not just their realistic goal to pass ESL, just the focus is to pass ESL is sad...poor, I want to enjoy studying English with my teachers with my friends, with my Canadian friends, like you, but you know, studying

*English here is similar to that of Korea, **just good grades**, some students said to me, some teacher like their students who get good grades after their exams, when...**we can feel teacher interest***

Jennifer: bias?

Judy: bias!

Jennifer: Was there a time when you felt you were biased or favoured?

*Judy: Uh-huh, **yup**...all the students except for me still read [their class presentations], so far I've never seen some students not to use a cue card, and when we were in a group and one student had to give a speech, she gave her speech, she just read and she didn't know the **pronunciation so I corrected her many times**, the next day when that student was absent my core teacher said to us, "yesterday Susan was **the best student** because she **spoke English clearly, not too fast, yah she praised her**," in my mind, **she read, she didn't know any words**. So what is her [the teacher's] **standard for her good student or bad student?** [Judy questions]*

Jennifer: What is yours?

*Judy: I think still some students who tried to do their best, I know teachers **can know, teachers can feel**.*

Teacher positioning creates a hierarchy among language learners. As such, when the teacher positions one student as "*the best student*" in front of the other classmates, this constructs a benchmark for English performance. Judy is angry that her classmate is being praised and she is not. Students should not be measuring their language abilities against one another because this can reinforce a correct and proper way to speak English that may not be achievable for all students. Not all students are the same. Thus, not all students speak in the same way. Judy acknowledges that students may feel discrimination based on the way they speak:

*Judy: I see and hear, in class, you know some students, I don't know why their **pronunciation is weird, strange or not good**, probably it is related to their mother-tongue, but some students are degraded.*

Jennifer: degraded?

*Judy: Yah, yah, yah, I think, they **feel discriminated against** [because of the way they speak]*

The way in which students speak English, which is influenced by their mother tongue, has consequences for how they are treated by others. Students whose pronunciation is "*weird, strange or not good*" may "*feel discriminated against*." As such, English language learners may even be fluent speakers but still face discrimination because of how they speak, their pronunciation. The findings presented above suggest a critical awareness of the effects of positioning on language learning experiences. These findings will be discussed in more detail below.

Discussion and Implications

Guided by the following two research questions, the goal of this paper is to look at language and power in educational interactions of a Korean international student in her ESL classroom:

1. What subject positions pertaining to language can be identified in what it is like to be a South Korean student studying in a Canadian university?
2. How are these subject positions used in the negotiation of student identities?

As previously mentioned, subject positions do not pre-exist the subject as labels waiting to be filled. Therefore, in this section, I discuss positioning in relation to other forms of discourse that construct identity by looking at the social experiences of Judy.

The findings from my study point to the complexity around positioning students as competent English language learners. Yoon's (2007) study on classroom teachers' positioning and its effects on students' identities shows that when students are positioned by their teachers as "resourceful and intellectual instead of powerless and inferior" (p. 221) there is an increase in the language learners' interaction with peers. Similarly, in a study by J. Miller (2007) that focused on English learning and the social identity of 10 newly arrived ESL high school students in Australia, one student participant by the name of Song, by using her knowledge of basic grammar rules and vocabulary, managed to be positioned in relatively powerful ways, as a competent language learner. However, Judy's experience was much different despite her teacher Mark positioning her as a grammatically competent student.

Mark, a native-English speaking ESL teacher, positioned Judy as having strong grammatical skills, making her a competent English learner. This competency requires Judy to "find her own mistakes." When Judy compares her writing scores to that of her classmates, she discovers conflicting information: Her grammar score was lower than her classmates' score; she finds more grammatical errors in her classmates' writing, yet she was positioned by her teacher as grammatically competent. This makes Judy feel angry: "*Even though I know it's unfair, I cannot do anything.*" Judy's anger parallels that found in Pavlenko's (2003) study where Korean student Junghee expressed frustration in being "unable to perform the classroom tasks and, as a result, lost the confidence she already possessed" (p. 259). Judy may also be experiencing a lack of confidence in her language learning, which in turn may affect her access to learning opportunities and how she chooses to participate in classroom practices. When negotiating with an authority figure, her teacher Mark, Judy chooses silence as a communication strategy in the face of her personal injustice because she does not want to risk lowering her classmates' score. Judy would rather silently accept the injustice than challenge the authority.

When Judy is explaining her experience as an ESL student in the classroom, she says, "I *feel teacher's authority, power.*" Something about this power makes her uncomfortable, specifically when power and authority are used to unfairly discriminate against a group of language learners by positioning them all as *poor at English*. In this exchange, Judy shows us that her identity as a language learner is dependent on her teacher's perception of her. If her teacher labels her as *poor* then it may affect or hurt her desire to learn English. This example shows the powerful role teachers play in constructing their student's identities as legitimate speakers of English.

International students bring their own culturally and socially constructed world views and styles of communicating into the classroom (Kramsch, 1998). According to Park (2012), Korean students may choose silence as a communication choice in order to maintain harmony in the classroom because this quality is valued in Asian classrooms. Creating spaces for students such as Judy to safely express their concerns without the threat of the impact it may have on other students is one consideration a teacher can make to mitigate power dynamics. What is important to consider is the complexity of positioning in a student's language learning process. In this experience, Mark interactively positioned Judy as a competent student but Judy reflectively positioned herself as incompetent. One way to explain this difference is the grading scheme.

I contribute to this conversation on grading by sharing some insight on the ESL grading system because I am an ESL teacher in this program. The average grades in each level range from 60%-69% with 60% being a pass; administrators tell teachers that if students are scoring in the 80s then they are in the wrong level. One way that Judy is measuring her competence as an English user is by the grades her teacher is assigning her. To Judy, being "good" at grammar might mean getting more than 3.5/5 on her assignment; however, to her teacher, this score falls within the confines of the standardized grading scheme. Poststructuralist scholars (see: Canagarajah, 2007; Pennycook, 2010) would challenge the association of grammatical competence and English language ability by asking whether language learners have the ability to apply their grammatical skills in different contexts.

Judy suggests that this is possible when there is less of an emphasis on "*just good grades.*" Judy rejects the position that a "good" student is a student that receives good grades because different skills and abilities might not be accurately reflected by their test scores. For Judy, a good student is someone who "*tried to do their best.*" Judy thinks that students have different skills and abilities that might not be accurately reflected by their test scores but could be sensed by their teachers which is reflected in her words, "*you know teachers can know, teachers can feel.*" I suggest changing this socially constructed grading system since it can prevent students from positioning themselves in powerful ways that affect their identities as competent language learners.

Judy presents a clear image of what she perceives to be a "good" teacher: that being, a teacher that leads students to be interested in English. She begins to question her teacher's standards when she senses some favouritism by pointing out how one student is positioned as "*the best.*" Judy knows that different students speak with influences from their first language (L1), but she disagrees with how they are being discriminated against because of the way they talk. International students' access to informal and formal learning opportunities can be affected by everyday assumptions about "proper English" and the authority it bestows upon speakers with the "right" accent. The dominant discourse of native-speakerism appears to be circulating in classroom interactions with Judy and her classmates. She senses discrimination, but does not identify as one of the students being discriminated against as having "*strange*" or "*weird*" pronunciation.

When teachers and students favour a particular way of speaking, more often than not this preference is based on a native-speaker norm (Ryan & Viète, 2009). When native-speakers are the benchmark for linguistic performance and success, then this monolingual orientation is "more desirable and superior" (Jain, 2014, p. 492), rendering other English varieties less legitimate. This type of thinking is dangerous because there is no monolingual standard of

English. Judy's comments are similar to the comments of some Japanese and Korean preservice and in-service ESL teachers who spoke about "discourses that validated 'native speakerness' as the only worthwhile form of competence" (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 257). Power dynamics are simultaneously playing out in these informal conversational exchanges as Judy is negotiating her sense of self in her interactions as she questions which English gets counted as desirable and what it means to be a competent English speaker. Teachers and students need to "acknowledge the different Englishes present in their classrooms as valid and valuable" (Jain, 2014, p. 492) and open ESL teachers up to new possibilities for accepting the multilingual capabilities of students.

Language is a vehicle in which speakers express their identity. Identity is important because it affects the way students learn. Scholars who draw on poststructuralism remind us that identities are shifting, contingent, and context-specific. Identity is about belonging (Nunan & Choi, 2010) and involves negotiations with one self, so every time one speaks one is in a process of negotiation. These negotiations are laced with power, ideologies, and politics as well as speakers' views of their own and others' identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Teacher's are in a position of power and authority and can impact language learner perceptions of themselves by the way they directly or indirectly position their students. When a teacher highlights a particular student as "*the best*," this can create resentment among other classmates, as in Judy's experience. When a teacher scolds an entire class based on poor performance of a few students, this positioning may also have a negative impact on a language learner's desire. It is critical, then, that educators create a safe environment where students do not feel threatened or fearful of making mistakes, asking questions, or challenging their teacher. Educators need to foster an environment of shared learning based on the skills and abilities of the students—an environment that makes students feel valued for their differences.

Conclusion

I begin this conclusion by re-approaching the introduction to this paper, this time weaving in my critical analysis:

Welcome to Canada! You have just arrived safely. A bit jet-lagged perhaps, but here you are, both feet planted on foreign soil, ready (or not!) for your new adventure. Congratulations! [I pause.] By making this journey, you are one among thousands from around the world who have chosen, or maybe have been forced, to come to Canada to pursue your studies. There is a special word for you; we call you international. [I become consciously aware that right now I am positioning you as Other. Who am I kidding? "We" means White. "We" means Canadian. "We" means not one of us. You do not fit in. Your English is coloured because I can spot you from afar by your accent. You do not sound like a "Canadian."] And it is people like you (yes you!) that contribute to the growth of international students on campus, making the classrooms increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse. We do not value your difference. We say we do, but our policies and classroom practices tell us that your English is flawed; your English is not legitimate; your English does not count. If you want to be successful, you had better change! Forget what you think about your English language skills before you came to this country. You thought you could speak English, but I will remind you that I do not understand what you say. Oh, and your writing? You probably cannot write in English, either. So, welcome to Canada and good luck in your studies! Ha, I am wishing you good luck. I think you will need it,

given that our educational systems in Canada are much different and better than where you are from. Do not worry; we will expect less from you!

I add in my critical reflection as one way towards understanding and identifying dominant discourses that often go unnoticed and unquestioned. In thinking about dominant discourses, I am reminded of a quote by Chapman (2005):

When you're in it, it's like the sky, it sits over-head and covers everything, darkens and lightens scenery and landscapes, but you don't notice it, no one goes out in the morning and says, Oh, I've got to keep an eye out for the sky today, unless they're sailors or gardeners or hikers. (p. 264)

This quote points to the inherent invisibility of dominant discourses. Said again, identifying dominant discourses proves a difficult task. Take the positioning in this introduction as an example: Simply because I warmly welcomed you as an international student to a Canadian university does not mean your experience here will be positive. One of the significant findings from this study is while interlocutors may exercise their agency to take up or reject particular subject positions, we are all part of a greater system of discourse that regulates and enforces particular ways of being. These discourses may mask themselves as commonsensical, making them easily reproduced without question. When dominant discourses are reproduced, societal inequities may be perpetuated. Identifying and understanding the role of discourses and how they regulate individuals are "important tools in dismantling" (Sterzuk, 2011, p. 47) dominant discourses operating in university institutions that the student Judy experienced in this study. Judy's "*still angry!*"

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