The Modern Language Journal

# Translingual Identity as Pedagogy: International Teaching Assistants of English in College Composition Classrooms

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The article aims to expand the scope of research on international teaching assistants (ITAs) by foregrounding identities as pedagogical resources. Employing an ethnographic multiple case study approach, the study examined the experiences of 2 English department ITAs in learning to teach College Composition classes at a public university in the United States. Guided by Morgan's (2004) "identity as pedagogy" and Canagarajah's (2013) conceptualization of "translingualism," the study found that the ITAs' becoming of translingual teachers was constrained by their perceived linguistic membership and competence, which intersected with other identity categories such as accent, nationality, ethnicity, and religion. In addition, they adopted different orientations to their multilingualism to manage the challenges of teaching diverse groups of students, and were able to deploy various identities as pedagogy. The findings suggest that the ability to re-imagine oneself as a translingual and to draw on translingual identities to enact a translingual pedagogy should not be taken for granted: Only when the ITAs become aware and critical of the link between identity and pedagogy can they utilize their translingual identity-as-pedagogy more fully in ways that benefit both the teacher and the diverse student body.

*Keywords*: translingual teacher identity; identity as pedagogy; international teaching assistants; college composition

> 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, beginning-of-quarter interview, 03/31/2011

TRAVELING TO THE UNITED STATES FROM China and enrolled in a Ph.D. program in English for the first time, I struggled to find myself professionally as a legitimate English teacher. The promising vocation of being an English teacher as I understood it in China had acquired a different meaning in the United States, particularly for nonnative-speaking teachers. The first reaction from my students in the United States tended to be skepticism: "Isn't she Chinese? Can she teach us English?" When I first became an international teaching assistant (ITA) for English Composition, the idea of teaching English to American first-year college students was simply daunting. What could I, a foreigner who had never taken a Composition course in the United States, offer to the domestic students who grew up in the country and had spoken English all their lives?

I gained confidence through real teaching practices while learning more about the academic field and my students. My 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 bilingual, bicultural identities as

*The Modern Language Journal*, 101 (Supplement 2017)
DOI: 10.1111/modl.12373
0026-7902/17/29–44 $1.50/0

resources. In doing so, I was able to envision a career where teaching English literacy became an important source of competence and confidence.

By talking to and observing the other ITAs of English, I discovered that my experience was not unique. We shared similar struggles initially in envisioning a composition classroom where we could look beyond our nonnative/foreign identity and claim expertise. But we were also different. Our history, feelings, use, and identifications with the multiple languages we speak in our teaching contexts were different. This phenomenon in turn raised the following questions: How do ITAs of English succeed in internalizing a professional identity as an English teacher? Are their multilingual identities a pedagogical resource for them? While these two burning questions were personal, they are also relevant for all ITAs whose professional identities are evolving.

## ITA IDENTITY RESEARCH

Although international students are generally welcomed by host universities for the cultural diversity and economic benefits they bring, when some of them are appointed as teaching assistants (TAs), their multicultural and multilingual background is not often seen as an asset. Starting in the mid-1980s, ITAs' spoken English, pedagogical, and classroom management problems, and even their foreign appearance have been criticized consistently (Fitch & Morgan, 2003). In addressing the complaints of the foreign TA problem, early studies on ITAs in the 1980s and 1990s predominantly focused on developing programs that could improve ITAs' English proficiency and communicative competence (Bailey, 1984). Those programs, usually housed within departments of English as a second language (ESL), tended to use native-speaker proficiency as the model for learning (Hoekje & Williams, 1992). However, as English is spoken globally, studies that map varieties of world Englishes (Kachru, 1982) and research on language attitudes (Jenkins, 2009) have challenged the notion of *speech intelligibility* and *teaching effectiveness.* Numerous studies have shown that what students believed to be "incomprehensible speech" was based on linguistic and racial prejudice (Rubin, 1992). Nonnative English speaking teachers (NNESTs), in particular, despite their professional training, are often marginalized in the profession by the *native speaker fallacy*; that is, an idealization of the native speaker as the best teacher of English (Phillipson, 1992).

Despite recent advances in ITA programs (Pae, 2001) based on an understanding of linguistic reality and mutual accommodation (Lippi–Green, 2012) in intercultural communication, the development of ITAs' professional identities remains unexplored. Although there are studies that have examined the specific interactional behaviors that make the ITAs more teacher-like (Rine & Hall, 2011), becoming a teacher is more than performing a teacher's role, because a teacher identity involves inner commitment (Britzman, 1994) and is metacognitive and holistic (Alsup, 2006). Working as TAs constitutes an important part of many international graduate students' academic lives and is viewed as an integral activity for their academic professionalization. Within education, the recent focus on the sociocultural and sociopolitical dimensions of teaching (Norton, 2013) has highlighted the importance of understanding teachers' multiple identities in order to enhance teaching and learning. Within second language acquisition (SLA), even though the social and political nature of the native speaker (NS)/nonnative speaker (NNS) dichotomy has been problematized, the impact of the native speaker fallacy on ITAs remains underexplored.

Compared to other disciplines where the number of ITAs in the United States is particularly high, the presence of ITAs in English departments is much smaller. During the academic year 2009–2010, about one third of new TAs teaching first-year Composition (6 out of 20) at my research site were ITAs. However, as novice teachers of College Composition, along with their linguistic and cultural differences, English ITAs may face multiple challenges in positioning themselves as legitimate and competent teachers. At the same time, although most ITA studies generally assume that U.S. undergraduates are native speakers, this is far from the contemporary classroom reality (Matsuda, 2006). For that reason, the changing demographics in both the ITA and undergraduate population can bring positive changes to the experiences of both groups. Recent ITA studies (e.g., Seo, 2009) have documented positive student responses to ITAs' teaching from academic departments where the number of international students is high. In particular, ITAs have been credited for their clarity in verbal communication and teacher-centered approaches.

In light of this demographic shift, the growing student heterogeneity at U.S. universities has resulted in the need to openly negotiate linguistic and cultural differences. The attitude toward linguistic diversity in College Composition studies has undergone a *translingual* turn that views

language difference as a resource for meaning-making (Horner et al., 2011). However, although a growing number of studies have highlighted the multilingual experiences of student writers in Composition classes (e.g., Canagarajah, 2006), the experiences of ITAs, whose translingual identities are potential pedagogical resources, have been underexamined. This conceptual and practical gap can be addressed through the recent transdisciplinary framework put forward by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), which maintains that language learning and teaching is also identity work.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Connecting Personal and Professional Identities*

In general, a teacher's identity can be understood as "how teachers learn to teach, how they teach, and who they are as individuals and professionals" (Varghese, 2008, p. 287). Compared with a student's identity, a teacher's identity is unique because it is often a combination of the personal and the professional (Danielewicz, 2001). For some teacher candidates, such a merging of identities may be relatively simple because their sense of self is more in sync with what is culturally accepted of a teacher. In English language teaching, that identity is generally aligned with being a white, heterosexual native speaker (Simon–Maeda, 2004). However, for teachers whose personal identity is different from a culturally defined professional role, their integration of the personal with the professional can be a struggle.

Similar to studies on second language (L2) learner identities, language teacher identity (LTI) research that investigated how teachers' multiple personal identity categories such as race, gender, nationality, and class intersect with the development of their professional identities have often found that teachers' identity constructions are inscribed by gendered and sociocultural inequities (Pavlenko, 2004). For instance, "a white native speaker" bias (Simon–Maeda, 2004, p. 430) was found to be deeply rooted in society and represented in the discourse on linguistic competence that associates teacher competence with being a white native speaker. However, rather than being totally determined by social structures and discourses, these studies also documented the strategies teachers employed to resist undesirable identities, which show promisingly that "individuals are agentive beings who are constantly in search of new social and linguistic resources" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 27).

LTI research has also called for teacher training programs to reimagine a curriculum: one that supports teacher candidates to become aware and critical of the links between their personal beliefs, professional identities and teaching practices, and discourses that open up identity options and professional possibilities for them. For example, by incorporating into coursework Cook's (1992) concept of multi-competence, Pavlenko (2003) found that her new curriculum opened up an alternative imagined community where some teachers were able to see themselves as multicompetent, bilingual speakers instead of failed native speakers. Such an appreciation of the multilingual repertoires of ITAs may improve their instruction in the long term.

### *Translingualism*

Within Composition pedagogy, scholars have recently called for a paradigm shift from a monolingual orientation to a translingual one. Distancing itself from monolingual assumptions, this latter orientation to language and literacy views language difference as a resource for meaning-making (Horner et al., 2011). In distinguishing multilingualism from translingualism, Canagarajah (2013) noted that:

> While the term *multilingual* perceives the relationship between languages in an additive manner (i.e., combination of separate languages), *translingual* addresses the synergy, treating languages as always in contact and mutually influencing each other, with emergent meanings and grammars. (p. 41; italics in original)

It is now understood that multilingual speakers do not simply add up their multiple languages and use each language separately; rather, they are viewed as being able to "shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system" (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). This ability to shuttle between languages is referred to as "translanguaging" (García & Sylvan, 2011, p. 389); it views language as an activity and highlights the discursive practices teachers and students engage in to make sense of their linguistically diverse classroom.

While there has been a healthy interest in theorizing translingualism, relatively fewer studies have looked at its pedagogical realizations (for a notable exception, see García & Kleyn, 2016). As observed by Canagarajah (2011),

because translingual competence "arises from the socialization of multilinguals in contact situations … practice is necessary for the development of competence" (p. 402). In his second language writing class, for example, Canagarajah (2013) used a "serially drafted and peer-reviewed literacy autobiography assignment" to help students develop a reflective awareness of their translanguaging strategies (p. 47). Elaborating on the importance of translingual pedagogy, he also emphasized the need for teachers to facilitate and nurture students' translingual abilities, a point to which I will return later in this article.

### *Translingual Identity as Pedagogy*

As a result of these developments, I argue that the linguistic identities of ITAs are potential resources for their teacher identity construction and pedagogy. In order to study how ITAs in College Composition become aware of the link between their identities and teaching practices, Morgan's (2004) notion of "identity as pedagogy" is particularly useful because it foregrounds teachers' identities as pedagogical resources. Drawing on poststructural notions of discourse and identities,[1] Morgan (2004) pointed out that, by becoming aware that the identity one performs in the classroom is determined by the subject positions offered in the broader educational discourse, teachers can explore other ways to project their professional identities with a view to change conventional educational practices. Specifically, following Simon's (1995) perspective on identity, he called for a move from simply describing differences (e.g., of NNESTs) to utilizing differences: "… we move beyond descriptions/explanations of difference and inequality to a sense of 'how that difference will be deployed, rendered and positioned in regard to both the substance and process of learning'" (Morgan, 2004, p. 178, citing Smith, 1995, p. 90). This culminates in Morgan's notion of "teacher identity as pedagogy" (2004, p. 178).

TESOL teacher educators such as Motha, Jain, and Tecle (2012) have advocated the use of Morgan's concept to support language teachers with translinguistic experiences. Such experiences are characterized by (a) conceptual fluency (Pavlenko, 2003), (b) a meta-awareness of their language learning process, and (c) an empathy for difference. Furthermore, they noted that, if language teachers are supported to consciously think about how identities are constructed, they could deploy their complex translingual identities to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

### *Situating the Translingual Teacher in This Study*

In line with the earlier literature, a "translingual teacher" in this study is defined as someone who is able to embrace and integrate his/her multiple linguistic identities as he/she becomes a teacher. In other words, a translingual teacher is different from a bilingual teacher in that his/her multiple linguistic identities are integrated, instead of separated, in ways that create a synergy. Compared to an NNEST, a translingual teacher highlights the translingual resources she brings to the profession. The term therefore reflects more closely the diverse linguistic reality of the world and is more aligned with the Douglas Fir Group's conceptualization of language competencies as being "complex, dynamic, and holistic" (2016, p. 26).

A translingual teacher also has the potential to draw on his/her translingual identities to adopt a translingual pedagogy but may not necessarily do so. Simply labeling NNESTs translingual teachers does not guarantee their success in developing translingual identities, nor does the labeling automatically lead to a nuanced understanding of the link between identity and pedagogy. In other words, the transformation from a NNEST to a translingual teacher may not happen if ITAs' translingual identities are not supported by those who influence their professional development, such as teacher educators, the program they work in, their students, and society at large. As aptly pointed out by Motha et al. (2012), without critical reflection on the relationship between one's identity and pedagogy, identity-as-pedagogy can actually "serve to reinforce patterns of inequality" (p. 18).

In identifying English ITAs' challenges and successes in learning to teach Composition, my study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1. To what extent and how do English department ITAs draw on their translingual identities as pedagogical resources in their College Composition classrooms?

RQ2. To what extent and how do the ITAs draw on their translingual identities to enact a translingual pedagogy in their Composition classrooms?

## METHODOLOGY

To address the general call for longitudinal ethnographic studies on NNESTs as they may

"reveal the apprenticeship of NNESTs [and] the day-to-day challenges they face as users and teachers of English" (Braine, 2010, p. 88), this article is part of a larger ethnographic multiple case study that sought to understand holistically ITAs' translingual identities and identity-as-pedagogy. Instead of a long-term full-fledged ethnography, I adopted ethnographic tools (Green & Bloome, 1997) such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews to focus on the "particularity and complexity" (Stake, 1995, p. xi) of the cases: ITAs in the English writing program. I recruited three ITAs who had full responsibility as instructors for teaching English 105—*Composition: Exposition.* 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, p. 8). I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2001) in selecting participants to include different perspectives; apart from being born and raised outside of the United States, the participants varied in age, gender, languages used, professional expertise, and teaching experience.

Since a typical complete unit of a College Composition class lasted one quarter (10 weeks), I conducted all the interviews and class observations during the 2011 spring quarter. In observing the classes I took a peripheral membership role (Adler & Adler, 1994); that is, I established membership in the classroom by attending, observing, taking field notes, and video recording every week. I did not, however, participate in class activities. The interviews were semi-structured: I started from a set of open-ended interview questions and asked follow-up questions when interesting points emerged. Those interviews over lunch or coffee often became the most elaborated conversations. In the following quarter, I reacquainted myself with these ITAs through interview or email in order to clarify anything that seemed to be unclear in the data. To triangulate the data, surveys were administered and other course-related documents were collected (see Table 1).

After the data collection process was over, video-recordings, documents, and interviews were transcribed and coded. I read transcriptions of interviews and conducted initial open coding to generate a list of topics. The related topics were then grouped into emergent categories that corresponded to my research questions. This article focuses on the findings from two ITAs, Ming and Sara, whose experiences were chosen for contrastive purposes. Both of them were able to become highly effective Composition teachers, but differed in the extent to which they developed a translingual teacher identity and used identity-as-pedagogy in their classroom.

TABLE 1
Data Sources of the Study

| Data Source | Content |
|---|---|
| Interviews | Beginning-of-quarter interview (1.5–2 hours)<br>End-of-quarter interview (1.5–2 hours)<br>After-class interview (20 min–1 hour/week, 10 weeks) |
| Participant observation | Weekly class observations (50 min/week, 10 weeks) |
| Survey | End-of-quarter survey of student feedback |
| Course-related documents | Course syllabi, class handouts, writing assignments, student papers, teaching evaluations |

### *The Research Site*

The study was carried out in a public university, named Evergreen University (EU) for the purposes of this study, in the northwest United States. EU's student population was one of the most diverse in the country. In the fall of 2011, international students comprised 18% of its incoming first-year class, with top source countries being China, Korea, India, and Canada. EU's diversity was also reflected in its appointment of TAs. Approximately 15% of the TAs were ITAs, with around 140 new ITAs appointed each year. The TAs were assigned to a variety of roles including grading, holding office hours, tutoring, leading quiz sections, conducting labs, and lecturing. The TAs in the College Composition program in the English Department were fully responsible for their own classes, which is not uncommon for U.S. English writing programs.

All 100-level Composition courses in EU's writing program were designed to prepare students to read, think, and write academically as required by the university. In this respect, the program's goals were similar to those of academic literacy courses in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. As one of the few mandatory courses on campus, more than 4,000 students each year took 100-level Composition, of which English 151, *Composition: Exposition* was the most popular. Class size was capped to 22 students, most of whom were first-year students. The Composition courses were taught almost exclusively by graduate student TAs in the English department, who had participated in 2 weeks of intensive orientation

before teaching and had taken a graduate seminar *Composition Pedagogy*.

### *The Participants*

As mentioned, this article focuses on two ITAs: Ming and Sara.

*Ming.* Ming was born and grew up in West China. Wearing a short bob haircut and dark-colored outfit, she described herself as "*yu zhong bu tong*"(*与众不同*, "different from the crowd"). After Ming received her bachelor's and master's degrees in chemistry from a university in her hometown, she became a faculty member in the chemistry department there. She came to EU in 1997 as a visiting scholar, stayed, and received her doctorate from the chemistry program at EU in 2005. Then she made a drastic change in her academic career and started another PhD program in language and rhetoric in the English department, because she liked English. At the time of this study, Ming had been in the English PhD program for 5 years and had already taught Composition for eight quarters. Nominated for teaching awards, she was the only recipient of an interdisciplinary dissertation writing fellowship at EU. In short, Ming was a successful PhD student. She was also a confident Composition teacher and evaluated herself as being effective.

*Sara.* Born to a British mother and an Egyptian father in England, Sara grew up in Egypt with an English-medium education, and was seen by many as an English–Arabic bilingual. English was her passion, and she majored in English in an English-medium university in Cairo. After graduating from college and working as an English teacher for 2 years, Sara applied to and was admitted into the MATESOL program at EU, when her Egyptian husband accepted a job offer at a major technical company in the city. Sara started her teaching career after she graduated from college by teaching academic English to English language learners (ELLs) at a private university in Egypt. The teaching experiences made her sense that her pedagogical choices needed theoretical backing, which would in turn help her become more confident and aware of her teaching methods. At the time of this research, Sara had just ended her first year in the PhD program and had taught Composition for two quarters. She identified this as a transition in her career from being an ELL teacher to an English Composition teacher. Sara always seemed comfortable in her class, be it ESL or Composition. Having high expectations of herself as a teacher, she did not want to be just any English TA and sought to be more creative and make the class more engaging. However, she felt that something was missing. By the end of the study Sara had become the new ELL consultant for the writing program, a position that was created as part of a new department initiative to support the increasing number of international students.

### *The Researcher–Participant Relationship*

As a Composition ITA and an English PhD student myself, my own experiences had provided me with an insider's perspective and empathy toward ITAs. Since I shared similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with the ITAs from China, I conducted my interviews with Ming in Chinese as it was the language we both felt comfortable speaking to each other. Interviews with Sara, however, were conducted in English. Further, I knew clearly how an imposed NNEST identity could limit the performance of the ITAs, and therefore avoided providing pre-set identity labels to the participants; instead, I waited for the ITAs themselves to describe and interpret their experiences. Meanwhile, I was also aware of how my familiarity with this context might import a bias that could affect how I interpreted their experiences (De Costa, 2016a). To evade this problem, I attempted to reduce my possible presuppositions. For example, I recruited ITAs that I had met before but with whom I was not close friends. Having said this, my relationship with the participants developed as I spent more time observing their classes and listening to their stories. It was both challenging and rewarding to see myself as researcher, colleague, friend, mentor, and mentee with my participants in different contexts.

## FINDINGS

### *Identity as Pedagogy*

This section addresses the extent to which the ITAs made sense of their linguistic identities when they became Composition teachers, and how utilizing identity-as-pedagogy helped them construct positive teacher identities.

*Interdisciplinary Identity-as-Pedagogy: From an ESL Person to an Interdisciplinary Writing Teacher (Ming).* Ming grew up speaking the Kunming dialect and Mandarin Chinese. She started learning English as a foreign language in school in China at age 12. Upon coming to the United States, Ming worked hard at improving her English, especially spoken English: When she failed the

SPEAK test,[2] in order to be awarded a teaching assistantship, she took the required English course for ITAs, and then another spoken English workshop offered by the speech and hearing science department, twice. Those courses, which used the "native speaker" level as the target for learning, were perceived as very useful for Ming because "they corrected [her] any time" on pronunciation and grammar.

Although a fluent speaker of English now, Ming never seemed to view herself as bilingual. Ming's two language worlds seemed to be kept separate at the time of the study: English was associated with her professional identity and Chinese was associated with her personal identity. It was through English that Ming received a graduate education, practiced teaching in the United States, and envisioned herself becoming a future professor of rhetoric at a U.S. university. In a way, English instead of Chinese had become her academic mother tongue. This became apparent during our interviews in Chinese when we code-switched to English naturally when making references to teaching, such as "drop a class," "register," "class website," "seminar," or "argument." On the other hand, Ming identified herself as a "Chinese person" culturally in our interviews, despite having lived in the United States for 14 years and having obtained permanent resident status. She missed home in China and went back to visit her family every summer. Although she held on strongly to her Chinese self in private, she rarely mentioned any experiences related to a Chinese identity in her class, except for having obtained a degree in chemistry in China. She never spoke Chinese to her Chinese students, even after class. She felt that doing so would have been acceptable in her chemistry class, but since now she was teaching English, it would not make sense to use Chinese.

The separation of Ming's two language worlds seemed to come from the "native speaker fallacy" (Phillipson, 1992) she experienced during her graduate studies in the English department. Her legitimacy as a promising English professional was challenged because of an 'ESL person' identity assigned to her. Ming sensed a "subtle prejudice" when she transferred to the English program from the chemistry department; not only was she seen as a non-English major (i.e., "a scientist"), but she was also, in her own words, constructed as an "ESL person." Often her knowledge about English language and literature was not considered legitimate because she was viewed as someone from a non-English-speaking country. In order to gain legitimacy, Ming changed her dissertation topic from "English Irony" to "The Rhetoric of the Sciences" because the latter foregrounded her academic credentials and expertise in science. Even so, when she became an English TA and taught Composition for the first time, Ming still found it challenging to be seen as a legitimate teacher to her students, a feeling she specifically expressed:

> 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 … when I say I am from the chemistry department, it makes things even worse.

As sociolinguists such as Lippi–Green (2012) have shown convincingly, an L2 accent in the United States is often associated with a negative image, and speakers with an L2 accent are considered illegitimate English speakers. Ming's sense of an imposed ESL person identity was linked to a nonnative accent. After taking years of coursework in English, Ming realized that, although she could speak English more fluently after much practice, she could not get rid of her accent. Similar to ITA studies that documented ITAs being used as scapegoats for students' unsatisfactory academic performance (Yamazaki, 2006), Ming's accent became an excuse for students who failed her class. For example, Ming recalled a student comment that she would "remember for her whole life": A student of chemistry once wrote on Ming's teaching evaluation, "Chemistry is hard enough, and Ming's accent makes it even harder." Because of the student prejudice, Ming also had to deal with resistant students who did not seem to have confidence in a NNEST. For instance, when Ming pointed out to a Taiwanese student that she had mixed up different genres in writing, the latter insisted it was Ming who could not see the strengths of her paper.

Similar to NNESTs in previous studies (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) who exercised their agency in actively combating prejudice, Ming also had ways to negotiate the 'ESL person' label. Unlike Motha et al. (2012), who called for teachers to draw on their translingual identities as pedagogy in order to re-script students' "image-texts" (Morgan, 2004) of NNESTs, Ming found other ways to re-script herself. Ming pointed out that the native speaker fallacy was a deeply rooted social phenomenon, not someone's personal fault. To deal with this social prejudice, she learned not to take discrimination personally, but to act professionally from the very beginning. Instead of transforming a NNEST identity to a translingual identity, however, she emphasized her professionalism and performed the identities

of an established scientist and interdisciplinary writing teacher.

Drawing on her scientist identity as a resource, Ming designed her curriculum around the theme of "The Social Effects of the Sciences," and chose readings such as "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male–Female Roles." Students could choose to write on any topic related to this theme. Ming designed the curriculum this way because science was her area of expertise and the topic was open-ended enough to engage students with different interests. Focusing on the topic of science also gave Ming extra confidence in establishing authority in teaching English composition: No matter what topic her students chose to write on, she would more or less know about it.

Having studied in both the sciences and the humanities, Ming positioned herself as an interdisciplinary writing teacher. Her course goal was to teach students to write for their different disciplines. This goal resonated with scholars studying writing across disciplines (e.g., Tardy, 2004) who emphasized specialized knowledge and abilities of writers in different disciplines and argued for the importance of teaching disciplinary literacy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012) to students. Ming's interdisciplinary learning experience was used as a resource for such a goal: She was able to explain the differences between argumentation in the sciences and in the humanities to the students. For instance, she found the means of entering academic conversations in the sciences and humanities to be different. In her introduction class, she made this distinction clear to her students: "When you form your argument, you need to negotiate with others. In the sciences, usually you do an experiment; in the humanities, you talk with scholars, you develop your thinking and modify your argument." Such comparisons between the sciences and the humanities were common in her teaching.

A second strategy Ming utilized was to use concrete tools to prevent miscommunication with the students: the course website, flow charts, diagrams, and PowerPoint slides. For example, before the quarter started, Ming sent out a link to her class website and a CV to her students. She thought it would keep away students who did not want to be taught English by an "ESL person." One visual tool Ming used in her first class was a figure she invented (Figure 1), in order to explain a major teaching philosophy of the program scaffolding, that is, how the different short paper (SP) and major paper (MP) assignments were

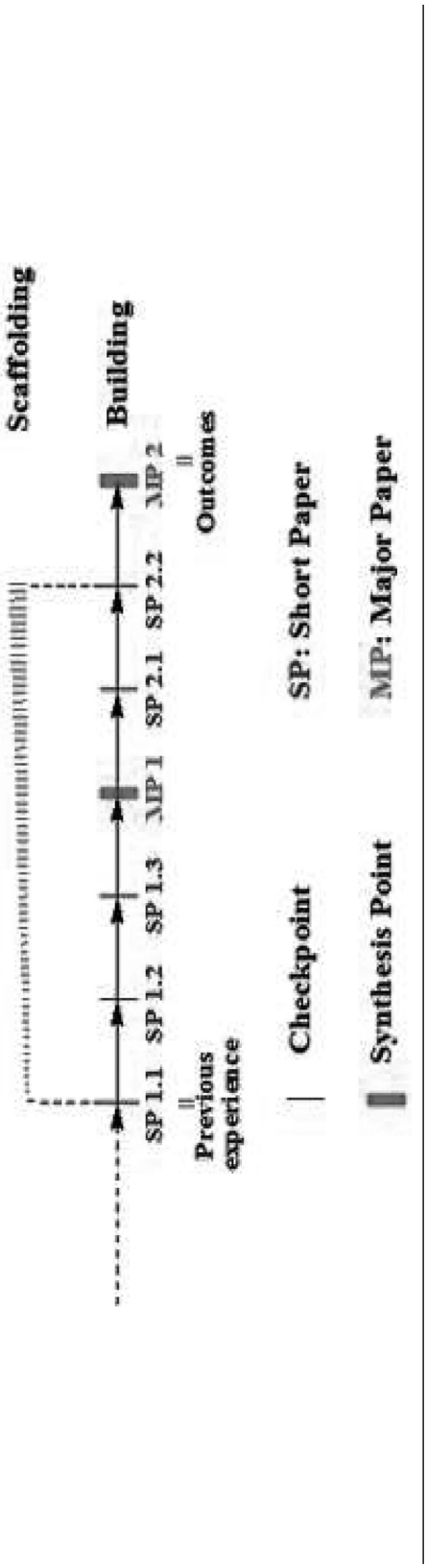


FIGURE 1
Scaffolding Flow Chart From Ming's Course Website

organized to contribute to student learning. By combining key words with arrows, mathematical symbols, and acronyms, Ming expected her students to understand the concept right away.

Afraid that her interlocutors, the native speaker students, were not willing to negotiate meaning with her, Ming used this strategy to prevent potential complaints from the students; as she explained, "just in cases when her accent might get in the way." Ming's use of visual tools seemed to be effective: Clarification questions from her students significantly decreased.

Even though she positioned herself as a competent interdisciplinary writing teacher and deployed translanguaging strategies in her classroom, Ming's nonnativeness did not transform into a translingual identity. Her skillful shuttling between the discourse of the sciences and of the humanities, for example, could be viewed as an important translanguaging act she had demonstrated to the students. In addition, her use of visual tools could also be seen as an interactional strategy, one of several translanguaging strategies identified by Canagarajah (2011); in other words, she knew how to negotiate meaning on an equal footing with their students and help them negotiate effectively through visual tools that were less likely to cause misunderstandings. She was also viewed by her students as an effective English teacher despite her nonnative speaker identity. This identity aspect proved to be empowering for her ESL students, as exemplified by a final survey comment by a Chinese student:

> Because I am also a nonnative 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.

Just as survey research on NNEST (e.g., Tang et al., 2010) has shown that NNESTs are seen by their ESL students as inspiring role models, having ITAs as their teachers arguably opened up new intellectual vistas for international students who might otherwise be alienated in a U.S. culture-dominant Composition classroom.

*Translingual Identity-as-Pedagogy: From a Native-Speaker English Teacher to a Translingual Teacher (Sara).* Similar to Ming, Sara's two languages were not evenly balanced, and were associated with different experiences and feelings. Unlike Ming, Sara's two language worlds seemed to interact more often. Sara was born and lived in England until she was 2. She then moved to Egypt with her family and grew up there. At home, Sara spoke English with her parents, but used Arabic with her Egyptian grandparents. Sara regularly mixed English with Arabic in her daily conversation with her relatives and friends in Egypt. She went to private schools in Egypt, where some of the subjects were taught in English. Because of this English-medium education, Sara had limited Arabic literacy development, and could only read Arabic newspapers, but not academic articles. At age 23 Sara came to the United States. She still used Arabic at home with her husband and with her Egyptian father on the phone. At the same time, Sara continued to learn American English: She noticed she had picked up a lot of expressions in the United States that she had not known before. Sara liked to say that "[her] heart is Egyptian," but from a cultural perspective, Sara felt she was "missing stuff" on both sides.

Similar to Ming, Sara's beliefs about English teachers were also constrained by the native speaker fallacy (Phillipson, 1992), although during our interview she was made more aware of its influence on her. During an interview, Sara caught herself equating being a teacher with being educated through English. At first, Sara informed me that teaching is "highly respected in Egypt and one of the best jobs to have"; the concept of a teacher is "someone who promotes the future by spreading knowledge and helping the next generation." However, Sara differentiated private school teachers from public school teachers. Having received a private education herself, the "good teachers" that had influenced Sara were English-speaking private school teachers. Because Sara found limitations of the public education, she was determined to bring changes to the educational system by becoming a teacher educator.

When asked what images came to mind when hearing the word "teacher" in English and in Arabic, it was shocking to Sara to discover that she ascribed different images to them. In describing a teacher, Sara recalled her high school English teacher who was like a "mother hen": caring, nice, clear, creative, and always smiling. In contrast, she described a *modaresa* (colloquial Egyptian) this way:

> A teacher standing in front of a room with a blackboard behind him or her, with students in rows, a ruler in her hand … it's not a good image. And rote memorization. Audio-lingual methods, grammar–translation … And only talk when you raise your hand.

Sara immediately realized her negative attitudes toward Egyptian *modaresa* and felt bad

about it. Sara confided that she called herself a "teacher," not a "*modaresa*," because, as mentioned, she associated being a teacher with being educated through English.

Our interview was not the first time Sara became aware of the problematic attitudes in associating one's professionalism with English. When she was in the MATESOL program, Sara started to problematize the term NNS, where the readings and the professors made her aware of the political nature of the NS/ NNS dichotomy. She realized that she had an unfair advantage, having been educated in English and having British nationality. In Egypt, where the native-speaker myth (Braine, 2010) was very much alive, Sara was sometimes marked as an international teacher rather than a local Egyptian teacher. She was seen as a native speaker of English by her Egyptian colleagues who would ask her questions about the English language. She felt slightly guilty about having this privilege, especially after reading articles that examined the native-speaker construct in the MATESOL Program. However, Sara never hid her British identity and used it to her advantage.

Like Creese, Blackledge, and Takhi (2014), who pointed out that "the legitimacy of the native speaker is not based purely on the linguistic attributes of individual speakers, as language proficiency interacts with other social, cultural, and political features" (p. 940), Sara's native speaker status was challenged when she came to the United States. When asked about her linguistic identity, she said "I am a native Arabic speaker, and I believe I have the right to call myself a native English speaker because I function pretty well with it." Sara had doubts about her English nativeness during her TA-ship. For example, even though she had grown up speaking English, she had to take the SPEAK test to prove her English proficiency to teach at EU because of her Egyptian passport. Additionally, she had doubts about being seen as a native speaker of American English because she lacked knowledge of American cultural references: Sometimes she did not know the persons or events her students referred to. She also found herself using idioms in British English which sounded archaic to Americans.

While Sara believed her foreignness did not lessen her ability to use English, her confidence in being a legitimate teacher was influenced by her religion. To Sara, her Muslim identity made her feel like "the elephant in the classroom." Sara started to wear a head scarf for religious reasons during Ramadan in the United States, and that had made her more sensitive to possible criticism toward her being a Muslim. Although she had not encountered any actual discrimination because of the "diverse demographics and open attitudes in the city," she shared her concern with me:

> 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 … 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 if 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.

Although Sara's confidence as a legitimate English teacher in the United States was a little lessened by her non-U.S. nationality and religion, she always viewed being bilingual as a clear advantage, especially in the United States, where "knowing two languages is a big deal." Sara noted her gradual development toward being a more effective teacher by drawing on her bilingual identities as advantages, and was aware of how to position herself differently in diverse teaching contexts. Sara first explained how her performance as a teacher related to age and teaching credentials. When she first started teaching in Egypt right after college, she never told her students anything personal, not even that she was half British. She thought this was mainly due to cultural reasons: In Egypt, teachers often did not tell their students much about themselves. Furthermore, since she was young, she was worried that people would think she was a student. So for self-introductions she would "put on the teacher hat" by saying no more than that she was the teacher. Similar to Ming, who never spoke Chinese as an English teacher, Sara never spoke Arabic, as speaking English provided her a feeling of legitimacy.

It was after she became familiar with the culture in her graduate program in the United States that she started to reveal more about herself in her teaching. Again, how she positioned herself depended on the teaching contexts. As she revealed,

> When I was teaching in the U.S., in EU's English language center … I establish my authority by saying that I am also an international student, I am half British, half Egyptian, I have learned languages … by pointing out that I speak two languages, it gives me some legitimacy that way.

Sara had experienced that speaking Arabic in the United States had a real pedagogical

advantage, especially when there were many Saudi students in her class:

> In class they [the Saudi students] will be discussing something and you know they will be speaking in Arabic … 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.

These students appreciated having an English teacher who knew their language and shared their cultural practices, such as fasting during Ramadan. Once a female Saudi student was really excited about this connection with Sara, and even talked to her about her kids in Arabic, which surprised Sara. Similar to Ming who was perceived positively by some international students, Sara's bilingual identity was also well received. For example, a Chinese student commented on Sara in the final survey:

> Since I am an international student, I am very lucky that my teacher of English 151 is a bilingual teacher. She would understand my feelings and meanings in many situations.

As Sara had drawn on her bilingual identity-as-pedagogy more apparently throughout the semester, many students realized the unique strengths bilingual teachers brought to their classrooms. As one student commented in the survey:

> 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.

By the end of the study, although she still restricted her use of Arabic to nonacademic contexts, Sara became more confident and skillful in integrating her multiple linguistic identities to serve the needs of different student groups; in other words, she was becoming a translingual teacher.

### *Enacting a Translingual Pedagogy*

Although both ITAs spoke multiple languages, Ming was not consistent in her approach to differences in language and literacy in her class. She empathized with international students who struggled with English; however, in practice she unwittingly sanctioned a monolingual approach in the classroom. By contrast, Sara consistently drew on her translingual identities to advocate for a translingual pedagogy.

Having learned English as a foreign language, Ming understood the difficulties her international students had to go through. For example, she was aware that in China, high school writing was still focused on personal essays with moral judgments, and this provided her a plausible interpretation for why students from China struggled with finding evidence to support their argument in her class. She also found it easy to identify problems in her students' writing when they shared the same native language. However, when it came to grammar, Ming seemed to have a contradictory attitude toward English, which was dependent on the teaching context. In the classroom, Ming emphasized logical reasoning over language-related issues, and suggested students go to writing centers to address their grammar issues. However, when responding to international students' papers, Ming seemed to emphasize grammar correctness and was very picky about linguistic details. For instance, she responded to a Chinese student's first draft by meticulously correcting every inappropriate word and writing out comments such as "awkward," "word choice," and "too wordy." In short, she seemed to implement a standard English classroom language policy (De Costa, 2016b).

Another example can be seen in how she dealt with a problem student, Mei, who often missed her class. Mei came to the United States from China and had been in the country for only a year at the time of the study. She therefore struggled to keep up with her academic work. She missed several classes and emailed Ming detailed queries about her key written assignments. Although her message was clear, her emails to Ming were often filled with misspelled words. Ming was very upset with Mei's behavior, and refused to respond to her queries, citing that "the answers are precisely what I've been teaching in the classes of the whole quarter." At the end of her email reply to Mei, Ming started a new line in parentheses picking on a misspelled word: "(By the way, this class is about ARGUMENT not arguement, you should have known better now.)."

Despite her good intentions to push Mei to take responsibility for her learning, Ming unwittingly used grammatical correctness to position Mei as a poor and lazy English language learner. As evidenced in research on model minority

students (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996), teachers can sometimes adopt practices that negatively affect their minority students despite their best intentions; similarly, in dealing with Mei, Ming took a difference as deficiency approach despite her empathy toward students who struggled with language issues. Hence, without critical reflection, Ming's orientation to language diversity ended up reflecting the dominant English monolingual-oriented discourse that favored standard English, much like how Canagarajah (2013) occasionally caught himself taking on punitive measures even though he was committed to translingual pedagogy.

After the quarter ended, Ming received an email from Mei asking for a higher grade. Mei wrote the email in Chinese, attempting to establish ethnic and linguistic solidarity with her Chinese-speaking teacher. However, Ming was very frustrated with Mei at this point and chose not to respond to the email. It was observed that some Chinese students, while struggling with improving their English, chose ITA-taught classes, hoping that ITAs could understand them better. However, without appropriate support, neither the ITA nor the students knew how to build on their linguistic identities to enhance learning.

In contrast to Ming, who seemed to view international students as problems, Sara was very excited about having international students. Confident about her translingual identity, Sara directly utilized it as a resource to enact a translingual pedagogy. In teaching Composition, Sara chose *Language, Identity and Representation* as her course theme, and included readings that covered a wide range of linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and gendered identities so that none of her students would feel left out. Sara explained that she chose the theme because "it relates to [her] master's [degree] and relates to [her]." Being a translingual herself added authenticity to this topic. After all, from the first day of class, Sara introduced herself as a bilingual, bicultural speaker: "I am half British, half Egyptian, born in UK, lived there for a few [years] but mostly lived in Egypt … speak two languages, English and Arabic, which will help talk about this theme."

Most of her students also responded with self-introductions that revealed their multilingual experiences: They spoke Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, French, Hindi, different dialects, and "proper" versus "improper" English.

Sara's approach to language and literacy was consistent with her course theme on diversity, that is, she encouraged translanguaging and created opportunities for students to become aware of their language choices. For example, after a discussion of Gloria Anzaldua's *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* in which the author mixed varieties of English and Spanish, Sara assigned students a reflection paper on their use of languages, using the author's paper as a model. The purpose of the assignment was to give students practice applying a text to analyze their own lives while also helping them to become aware of their language choices. Sara encouraged students to use examples from those languages and to be creative. So when a student wrote "people could tell that I am an avid listener of rap music through the slang-English I speak with my friends," Sara responded: "Can you bring in more examples so that readers can relate to the specific type of language use?"

In contrast to Ming, who often pointed out students' language mistakes and logic fallacies, Sara rarely corrected students' mistakes on their initial drafts. In giving feedback, she took the stance of a reader who stood by her students by providing suggestions and encouraging them to become better writers. For example, a Chinese student wrote about how the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics helped to create a positive image of China. Sara thought this was a personal opinion and needed more evidence, and she responded positively: "Are there any resources to support this view? I am sure there are plenty of articles available that praise China's achievement." Furthermore, Sara often shared her translanguaging strategies with her multilingual students. For example, during an office-hour meeting, a Chinese student told Sara she often had problems finding the most appropriate equivalent English word for a Chinese word. Sara suggested that she could spell out the Chinese words using English letters (i.e., Pinyin) in her draft as a place holder, as she herself often did so with Arabic.

According to Canagarajah (2013), a teacher's own translingual performance can influence students' orientation to translingual literacy. Consistent with this observation, Sara's translingual identity-as-pedagogy was beneficial to both her students and her. First, as a teacher, her translingual, transcultural experiences afforded her the ability to move between languages and a perspective different from a "typical American perspective." Next, for her students, their diverse perspectives and translingual abilities were also valued and developed under the course theme. This, in turn, created a positive cycle: Sara found she was not "the only one that provided a different perspective" because her students also brought in diverse views. She attributed the success of the class

to her responsive, open-minded and collaborative students.

## DISCUSSION

Similar to previous literature on NNEST identities, the study also found that simply categorizing teachers using an NS/NNS dichotomy does not reflect the "dynamic, dialogic, relational, situated, and multiple" nature of one's linguistic identity (Faez, 2011, p. 247). Although Ming and Sara were both speakers and teachers who used more than one language, their linguistic identities differed, depending on the contexts in which they had acquired languages, received education, and practiced teaching. Their linguistic membership and competence also intersected with accent, nationality, ethnicity, and religion. Ming, who learned English as a foreign language in China, sensed others' prejudice with regard to her legitimacy as an English teacher. By contrast, Sara, who grew up speaking British English and was educated through an English-medium education, found her linguistic identity as a bilingual English–Arabic speaker validated in the United States. Her legitimacy as a native speaker of English, however, was reduced by her perceived nationality and religion that were not associated with a "native speaker."

To construct a positive teacher identity, Ming separated her professional identity as an English teacher from her Chinese-speaking self and strived to attain professionalism through tapping her interdisciplinary expertise. Although she drew on her interdisciplinary identity instead of a translingual identity, Ming also demonstrated translanguaging strategies by moving between the discourse of the sciences and humanities. However, in positioning herself as a competent professional, Ming inadvertently sanctioned a monolingual approach to language and literacy that reflected the dominant discourse. Sara, on the other hand, was able to deploy a translingual identity that was more fully aligned with a translingual approach in teaching, which in turn benefited both herself and her diverse students. This finding corroborates earlier research (e.g., Faez, 2012), which points out that simply having diversity experiences and empathy toward English language learners alone does not automatically translate into and equate with a translingual pedagogy. Thus, ITAs' translingual identities need to be actively and explicitly supported so that they can mobilize these identity resources and develop sound pedagogy for linguistically diverse students.

Although both were successful teachers, Sara was more aware and was able to articulate the link between her identity, pedagogy, and context. Her highly reflective practice, fluid identity, and teaching practices were shaped to a great extent by the MATESOL program she graduated from that valued reflective pedagogy. Ming's interdisciplinary identity-as-pedagogy was also highly effective, and she was fortunate to have a supportive PhD advisor who helped her develop her academic expertise despite what others thought about NNESTs. He once addressed Ming's concern over her accent: "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." This evaluative comment greatly encouraged Ming and its impact resonates with the Douglas Fir Group's (2016) framework which underscores how individuals' micro-level learning intersects with the meso contexts of sociocultural institutions and communities as well as the macro level of ideological structures; that is, the extent to which Ming became a successful English teacher was related to how much her expertise was valued by the meso-level program at EU and by macro-level mainstream U.S. society. However, if her translingual abilities and intercultural experiences had also been validated and supported as much as her academic expertise, she might have been able to integrate more of her personal identity with her professional one and to help her international students effectively embrace and build on their diversity.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study revealed that the ITAs had adopted different orientations to their multilingualism to manage the challenges of teaching diverse students. Ming maintained a monolingual orientation to language differences while Sara developed a translingual one that views language difference as a resource for meaning making. Despite this difference, they both became successful teachers by drawing on different identities as resources. On a broader note, only when explicitly supported can the ITAs become aware of the link between identity and pedagogy, and utilize a translingual identity-as-pedagogy to more fully benefit themselves and their diverse student body.

Unlike earlier ITA research that often viewed ITAs as a homogenous group, the ITAs in this study, Ming and Sara, actually had very different linguistic identities and were able to draw on their translingual identities to different degrees. The findings suggest that ITAs may come in with

different language histories: Some may need continuing language help with English for academic and nonacademic work, while others may not. Hence, a spoken English test with a native-speaker target may not be the most effective way to screen ITAs; instead, a test or an interview with real communication tasks (e.g., dealing with students' complaints) that they will actually encounter in teaching may reflect the reality more closely. A class on translanguaging strategies similar to Canagarajah's (2011) writing course, which was discussed earlier, would also benefit the ITAs. Maintaining contact with both language worlds (e.g., publishing in both languages) for the ITAs would also facilitate the development of their translingual identities.

Further, the study showed that helping ITAs become aware of the link between identity and pedagogy could have transformative consequences for teaching and learning. In view of this pedagogical reality, TA programs could develop workshops to help TAs become more reflective in their teaching.[3] For example, workshops that cater to the most pressing issues ITAs identify from teaching can be organized every semester; there, TA mentors could provide readings and facilitate group discussions that foster more critical ITA reflection. ITAs could also video-tape their classes when they feel comfortable and watch it together with colleagues they trust and discuss critical incidents with them.

In closing, support for ITAs who are susceptible to the native speaker fallacy is greatly needed. When made aware of this fallacy, some ITAs may experience additional frustration when negotiating the NNEST label. ITA training programs should therefore openly question the native speaker fallacy and provide TAs strategies to address and transcend it, for example, by helping ITAs to explore what aspects of their identities could be utilized as pedagogy and thus help facilitate a translingual identity-as-pedagogy approach. In addition, academic programs can internationalize their curricula, recognize the contributions of ITAs, and organize social activities for them. These activities could help ITAs better appreciate their international experiences and perspectives and create a community where they could continue to seek help if needed. Lastly, as ITAs tend to face initial prejudice from their students because of their nationality, race, or language, institutions could plan workshops that involve undergraduates in order to facilitate mutual understandings between TAs and students. Together, these measures can help foster teacher identity development: The persons who will eventually reap the greatest benefits from these changes will be the students.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Sandra Silberstein at the University of Washington for her generous guidance in completing the dissertation study and her detailed feedback on an initial draft of this article. I want to extend my appreciation to my colleagues at the Institute of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at the School of Foreign Languages, Peking University who supported the writing of this article. I also would like to thank Professors Bonny Norton and Peter De Costa as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their useful suggestions in revising earlier drafts of the article. Lastly, my sincere gratitude goes to the participants in the study whose stories and practices are an inexhaustible source for my own growth as a teacher and scholar.

## NOTES

[1] Citing Foucault (1980, 1982), Butler (1990), Weedon (1987), and Norton (2000), Morgan's (2004) poststructuralist stance viewed discourses as "systems of power/knowledge" (p. 173), and identity as "something complex, often contradictory, and subject to change across time and place" (p. 172). Morgan explained that "discourses *constitute* rather than *determine* a teacher's identity" (p. 173), that is to say, teachers may perform an identity that conforms to what the students expect; however, such conformity can be a precondition for change, when teachers become aware of other ways to rescript themselves.

[2] Other than being evaluated based on their academic potential and quality of an application package, ITAs at EU also needed to satisfy an extra spoken English proficiency requirement by passing (scoring 230 out of 300) the university-administered SPEAK Test. The computer-assisted SPEAK test was similar to the Test of Spoken English administered by the Educational Testing Service, during which the test takers were asked to respond to questions selected randomly from a test item pool and were recorded. The English Department had the highest requirement for ITAs' English proficiency among all departments: 290 or higher on the SPEAK test.

[3] There had been important changes at the writing program of EU. Since Ming started teaching, the program had built up support for international students: It created studios, linked ESL/Composition courses, ELL Composition sections, a Global Classrooms committee, and a Global Classrooms director. It had offered more workshops, including a workshop on teacher persona and authority, and 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 create a community for future ITAs.

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