EXPERIENCING DEFICIT: MULTILINGUAL INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS TALK IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT. This article explores the identity-related experiences of three multilingual international students at a university in Canada. Multilingual international students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are traditionally referred to as English as a second language (ESL) students. This ESL identity category can negatively impact the social, psychological, and academic experiences of multilingual EAL international students. The three students' experiences were accessed through in-depth interviews, and insights from post-structuralist theory on identity were drawn on to contextualize them. The findings illustrate that the students experienced a strong sense of deficit on the basis of their positions as ESL students, non-native speakers, and international students. This deficit manifested in experiences of inferiority, otherness, and marginalization.

LES ÉTUDIANTS INTERNATIONAUX MULTILINGUES AU BACCALAURÉAT PARLENT D'IDENTITÉ

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article explore les expériences d'identité de trois étudiants internationaux multilingues dans une université canadienne. Les étudiants internationaux multilingues qui parlent l'anglais comme langue supplémentaire sont appelés des étudiants en anglais langue seconde (ALS). Cette catégorie d'identité ALS peut avoir des impacts négatifs sur les expériences sociales, psychologiques et académiques des étudiants internationaux multilingues. Les expériences des trois étudiants ont été explorées avec des entrevues détaillées, et des perspectives issues de la théorie post-structuraliste sur l'identité ont été utilisées pour les contextualiser. Les résultats montrent que les étudiants ont ressenti un sentiment de déficit en raison de leur statut d'étudiants ALS, de locuteurs non natifs et d'étudiants internationaux. Ce déficit s'est manifesté par des expériences d'infériorité, d'altérité et de marginalisation.

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According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE; 2020), more than 642,000 international students were studying in Canada in 2019. Approximately 498,700 international students studied at the post-secondary level, a figure which represents a 14.5% increase from 2018 (CBIE, 2020). The growth in enrolment in Canada reflects a broader global trend characterized by increased student mobility. In 2015, for example, the number of international students enrolled in institutions of higher education worldwide reached 4.6 million (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017). When juxtaposed with the number of international students in the early years of student mobility characteristic of the late 1970s — in which international students worldwide totalled approximately 0.8 million (OECD, 2017) — the present number points to a rapid and significant increase over the last 50 years, a relatively short period of time. Today, most international students study at English-medium colleges and universities (OECD, 2017; Tan, 2015), and the vast majority constitute what the research literature has traditionally construed as English as a second language (ESL) students (Dewey, 2012).

Analogous to other institutional labels, the ESL categorization holds practical value when the whole multilingual student body is treated as a single group. However, that very same identity categorization can be problematic for the individual multilingual student, for it carries over group identity to at least two separate individual levels of lived experience. First, when the individual multilingual international student is understood simply as an extension of the collective, the categorization obscures individual differences in terms of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Second, institutional identity can then also project unfavourable characteristics associated with the broader group upon the individual member. Because multilingual international students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) have been conventionally compared to the monolingual native speaker in terms of (multi)linguistic proficiency (Cook, 2002), the label "ESL" tends to evoke a strong image of deficit for the individual multilingual student (Marshall, 2009). As a result of this categorization, local students who are native speakers of English are generally considered better students, just on the basis of language proficiency alone. Language proficiency, when taken as a singular measure of success, can lead multilingual (international) students to doubt their own abilities and potentially prevent them from reaching their academic and professional goals.

This article seeks to better understand the impact of an (imposed) "ESL identity" on multilingual international students' lived experiences.

Designed as a case study, this exploration is guided by the following question: How do multilingual international students conceptualize their own identities in light of their positioning as "ESL students"? To help explore this question, the article foregrounds the voices of three students, drawn from the multilingual international population at a large, research-oriented university in Canada. The article begins with a critical discussion centred on the implications of being categorized as an ESL student (as an institutional category) on the lived experiences of multilingual students. It then presents a post-structuralist view of identity that helps illuminate identity-related issues in the context of second language (L2) education. The article concludes with recommendations for English-medium academic institutions, understood as institutions of higher education where English is the language of academic activities, such as instruction and research, and therefore where the ESL student categorization may come into place.

LIVING AN ESL IDENTITY

Research has demonstrated that being positioned as an ESL student is often equated to experiencing a sense of inferiority and otherness. This section contextualizes the psychological and material impact of this identity category at the level of lived experience. To begin with, many multilingual international students who speak English as an additional language report feeling excluded from their academic communities (Fu, 2021; Oropeza et al., 2010; Xing & Bolden, 2021). Issues of exclusion are typically both structural and interpersonal, as multilingual international students are actively streamed into different paths early in their academic journeys. For instance, structural issues originate when international students are required to attend orientation events in isolation from their local peers, but they also arise throughout their academic journeys when available support services are remedial, lacking, and marked specifically for ESL students (Tavares, 2022). Marginalization materializes not only on the basis of language proficiency, but as an integrally interwoven aspect of students' foreignized status — in other words, their nationality (Du, 2019).

Support services designed for multilingual international students tend to be marked broadly under the umbrella of "ESL services." Indeed, Marshall (2009) has shown that such marked services can perpetuate feelings of otherness, despite students' effort to reject marked identities. In his study with multilingual undergraduate students who had completed ESL courses in high school in Canada, Marshall found that many of these students were forced to embody the ESL student identity again when they were required to take English language literacy courses upon admission into

their Canadian university. For some of the students, acceptance into a university program was supposed to afford them the opportunity to enact a new identity. However, many found that the language literacy courses only extended their past high school experience, which was characterized by continuous struggle around issues of legitimacy tied to being an ESL speaker.

For students institutionally categorized as ESL, the kind and quality of academic support may be differentiated. When reporting on the academic experiences of multilingual, minority-language students at a university in the United States, Oropeza et al. (2010) highlighted instances in which certain academic services, otherwise available for native speaker students, were not extended to minority-language students, this based on their ESL student status, which had been assigned by the institution. The minority-language students resisted exclusion through a number of strategies, including refusing the ESL-specific service in place for them. Oropeza et al. concluded that "services that construct students in what are perceived to be deficit labels may end up leading students to resist such labels, thus excluding the very students they wish to serve" (p. 228).

Yet, the feeling of otherness in being an ESL student is not caused or amplified only by the structural configuration of Western institutions of higher education. Interpersonal interaction between local students and multilingual international students — particularly those from the Global South — may involve discrimination rooted in racism and xenophobia. In their investigation with multilingual, racialized international students in Canada, Houshmand et al. (2014) explained that the students felt as if "their domestic White peers did not care about or want their presence on campus" (p. 381). The international students attributed such attitudes to the perceived inferiority which they believed was associated with being a multilingual international student of a racialized background. A similar experience was found by Fu (2021), who explained that multilingual international students felt intentionally ignored by their local peers when their paths crossed outside the classroom, despite weeks of working closely together within the classroom environment.

An imposed ESL identity can also prove detrimental in the extent to which multilingual students effortfully conceal aspects of their selves that point to their membership to this group. Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) found that fear of being singled out as the ESL speakerin a native-speaking environment led some multilingual undergraduate students in her study to avoid discussing their cultural and linguistic backgrounds more openly. In the past, some students experienced feelings of segregation and

difference, especially in high school, when the language-related aspects of their identities were shared. In exploring the experiences of multilingual international students from China at a Canadian university, Xing and Bolden (2021) found that the students experienced social exclusion primarily because their language proficiency was not sufficiently native-like. The students reported that local peers were not patient or interested enough in their foreignized contributions. Increased social exclusion led the students to psychological challenges, such as loneliness and depression.

Experiences of marginalization and discrimination pose major barriers to multilingual international students' success and well-being. Encounters with marginalization and discrimination may involve:

- covert / overt exclusion from group work because non-native proficiency may be viewed as a hindrance to group success by native-speaker students (Wei & Bunjun, 2021),
- verbal or physical aggressions seemingly justified to preserve cultural and national "superiority" (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 389), and/or
- multilingual international students' home countries being portrayed as "backward" in the curriculum (Guo & Guo, 2017, p. 860).

Although such experiences tend to transpire in the academic environment, they also affect multilingual international students in domains of lived experience outside the university. These experiences point to the need to reform the current (neoliberal) framework of internationalization, which touts the promoting of equity, diversity, and inclusion (Tavares, 2021a).

IDENTITY AS A WHOLE

In the context of early research on L2 education, L2 learner identity was always seen as singular and fixed. As Pavlenko (2002) has argued, the whole multilingual individual — who was also, but not only, an L2 learner — was viewed overwhelmingly as an ESL learner. Considering that most early L2 research transpired in Anglophone contexts, the native/non-native dichotomy was employed to categorize learners (and teachers) as two distinct groups. Such a limited and limiting perspective on identity has emerged largely under the influence of research in sociology, which shaped the theoretical foundation of L2 education with respect to theorizations on identity (Norton, 2013). Consequently, the identity of the L2 learner

was often approached as something well-organized, straightforward, and static, in which several identity variables were examined apart from the sociocultural context. In Canada, for instance, such research on bilingualism considered identity as "the degree or strength of ethnic or linguistic identification with one's own (L1) group in relation to other groups" (Duff, 2012, p. 411).

Identity was therefore understood primarily in relation to the groups with which the L2 learner was associated. The groups of most interest were the L2 learner's linguistic and ethnic ones, this along with their relationship to the dominant groups within the L2 learner's new environment. As a result, L2 learner identity tended to be the product of comparisons between the learner's L1 and L2 as well as between the dominant ethnic group and other ethnic groups (Cruz-Ferreira, 2010). Research from a generation later, however, brought growing criticism toward the rigidity of the construct of L2 learner identity. For instance, Harrison (1990) explained that "what we do in the language classroom is affected by who we are, the views we hold, and the societies we are part of" (p. 1). In a similar vein, Cook (2002) argued that "looking only at the L2 parts of the L2 user is inadequate; they are complete people, some of whose parts are played in one language or the other, some in both at once" (p. 275).

Such arguments critique an absolutist conceptualization of identity, which came under fire as post-structuralist perspectives were on the rise in the social sciences. Post-structuralism challenges grand narratives. Identities do not exist objectively or outside of their social and cultural systems (Baxter, 2016). Post-structuralism rejects the idea that every individual has a pre-existing essence, "which is unique, fixed and coherent, and which makes a person recognisably possess a character or personality" (Baxter, 2016, p. 37). Key to a post-structuralist view of identity is the role played by language: language as a descriptor and language in social interaction. Being categorized as an ESL speaker, for example, carries certain assumptions about the L2 individual which are, as a further example, different from being a multilingual or plurilingual speaker of English (see Duff, 2012).

An essentialist construction of being an L2 learner is considered problematic because identity is construed as unchangeable. Even when L2 learners achieve native-like proficiency, they tend to still be regarded as ESL speakers. This fixity excludes the other identities they possess as well as disregards the sociocultural movement they have made, both of which challenge the use of, and assumptions behind, such a label (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). Baxter (2016) has specified that identity construction,

from a post-structuralist perspective, is "a continuous process, accomplished through actions and words rather than through some fundamental essence of character" (p. 38). The multiple subject positions L2 learners occupy, through (sometimes conflicting) discourses, continuously shape their identities. Identity is therefore always in process and in construction.

The identity of the individual using an L2 is thus more complex and multidimensional than conventionally assumed. Further, the role of being an L2 learner is only one of many others. The other roles of the multilingual individual are also acknowledged as (they are) interrelated, therefore contributing to an understanding of the multilingual individual as a whole person whose identity is dynamic. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) clarify that identity is "a dynamic and shifting nexus of multiple subject positions, or identity options, such as mother, accountant, heterosexual, or Latina" (p. 35). Understood as such, identity can change across time and space. Norton Peirce (1995; Norton, 2013) illustrated possible changes by focusing on the experiences of multilingual immigrant learners in Canada. In the study, the English language learners discursively reconstructed their identities through negotiation and resistance to marginalization which they faced based on their language proficiency, immigrant status, age, and gender in their new sociocultural environments.

A post-structuralist approach considers discourse in social interaction fundamental for the analysis of identity construction. An attention to discourse in context helps reveal the ways by which the individual positions the self, or is positioned by (the discourse of) the other, often conversationally bringing to the surface positions that are seen to be in conflict, especially those seen as dichotomous (Baxter, 2016). However, post-structuralist scholars disagree with respect to material reality — more specifically, how it exists and the role it plays in influencing identity construction. When arguing against a purely discursive nature of identity construction, Block (2013) has spoken of the impact of individual psychological characteristics, such as the emotional dispositions and states of individuals. In the present study, the focus lies in how multilingual international students discursively and varyingly position themselves in relation to their experiences with, and perceptions of, an imposed ESL identity.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study took place at Palm University, the pseudonym for a large, research-focused university in Canada. Approximately 52,000 full-time and part-time students attended Palm University at the time of the study. Palm University is known for its multicultural and multilingual campus, and for its prominent international student population. According to its website, the university offered over 160 undergraduate programs, hosted more than 6,000 international students from over 150 countries, and had exchange agreements with over 80 international partner universities in the academic year of 2019. Moreover, at that time, there were 300 active student clubs and associations which organized weekly events and activities on and off campus. The university also hosted a language institute that offered pre-admission academic ESL courses.

The findings in this article stem from semester-long case studies with three multilingual international students in the winter of 2019. Following ethics approval by the institution, the participants were recruited by an email invitation distributed with the assistance of international student associations and clubs on campus. Participants were recruited based on the following criteria: (a) being an undergraduate student on a study visa and (b) studying in English as an additional language. Information about the three participants is provided in Table 1. Prior to admission into Palm University, all participants had written and passed either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), as required by the university. A case study approach was chosen as the means to explore subjective experience in detail within its social environment (Creswell, 2013).

To understand the students' experiences, a descriptive case study design was employed. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) explain that "descriptive designs attempt to present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context" (p. 33). A descriptive design does not focus on building or testing theory. Four in-depth semi-instructed interviews were conducted with each student (Richards, 2009). In harmony with the themes identified in the process of reviewing the literature, the semi-structured interviews covered topics related to academic study, language learning, cross-cultural knowledge, work experience, socialization, and adjustment. Initial interviews provided direction for subsequent interviews based on the answers shared by the students and the recurrent topics identified while discussing their individual experiences.

TABLE 1. *Participant profiles*

	Keng	Ziqi	Filipe
Sex and age	Male, 22 years old	Female, 33 years old	Male, 22 years old
Program of study	English language and literature, 3rd year	Psychology, 5th year	Criminology, 4th year
Place of origin	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Colombia
Student status	Exchange student for one academic term	International student, full degree	International student, full degree
Multilingual repertoire	English, Cantonese, Mandarin	English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka	English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, ASL

Note. All participant names are pseudonyms.

The interviews were conceptualized as a social practice through which new meanings were co-produced in situated interactions. A social practice conception reflects interviews as sites where, as Talmy (2010) explains, the data shared by participants is collaboratively and continuously (re)shaped in interaction to produce "accounts of phenomena" (p. 139), rather than an objective report of a (subjective) experience. In the process of producing an account of a particular event experienced by the self, participants (sub)consciously speak from different / multiple positions, such as student or interviewee, which reveals how conceptualizations of past experiences are reinterpreted through present knowledge. Equally important, larger discourses then become relevant based on how participants choose to present themselves to the researcher given the time, place, and the surrounding social context.

As with any social interaction, power is also manifest in the act of interviewing. Although I did not know any of the participants prior to the interview, I held more power simply by being in the position of researcher. The role of researcher enabled me to decide what, when, and how questions should be asked, reflecting the ways in which my interests and concerns were framed within the study. Additionally, interviews were socially and locally contextualized. In this sense, participants' responses were influenced by the context, such as the time of the day when questions were asked or who was in close proximity / listening within the same space. Therefore, the responses provided by the participants may be considered to stem from evolving interpretations, subject to new meanings as a result of lived experience and acquired knowledge.

A discourse analytic (DA) approach was employed to analyze the transcribed interview text. While DA conceptualizes linguistic performances as following a logical, meaningful, and orderly system, its key feature is the "recognition of the variability in and the context dependence of participants' discourse" (Baxter, 2010, p. 240). DA considers language as variable (changing according to purpose and audience, for example), constructive (constructing versions of reality based on the context), and interpretive (drawing on existing linguistic systems for describing subjective accounts; Baxter, 2010). DA as a method departs from the understanding that social realities are constructed by language. In the analysis, words, phrases, and sentences were analyzed for the situated meanings they revealed and how identities were enacted in context (Gee, 2004).

DA also examines how situated discourses are embedded within larger social, cultural, and institutional discourses. As such, situated discourses perpetuate (or confront) grand narratives about social reality. To demonstrate the circular interaction between situated and larger discourses, I present extracts from the interviews to highlight the participants' experiences and the ways in which their language use frames, and therefore reinforces, their perceived or lived social positionings. The participants' experiences are organized under broad categories to help illustrate not only the prevalence of common discourses, but also how the impact of such discursively created identities manifested in the students' experiences.

FINDINGS

The first section demonstrates the ways in which being an ESL student or non-native speaker of English was experienced as, or equated to, being in deficit. The second section illustrates experiences of inferiority in light of local forms of social and academic engagement being considered the ideal, therefore positioning international students as the other.

Non-native and ESL speaker as positions of deficit

All three students, openly or covertly, discussed their experiences by positioning themselves as either ESL or non-native speakers of English. Yet, the conflation of such positionings with a deficit view of the self was much more obvious. The ways in which deficit manifested in the students' experiences were complex and diverse. Keng spoke from the first-person subject perspective to signal information which he considered factually correct. He said, for instance, that he had a quiet personality. However, he

positioned the self as the recipient of others' misreading of his quiet personality as meaning low proficiency in the English language.

> I'm an introvert, so I don't talk much. But when English is your second language, people think you don't talk because you don't know English. (Keng)

Therefore, Keng's experience is embedded within the larger institutional discourse that equates the quiet and reflexive behaviour of Asian students, as an imaginary monolithic group, with intellectual inferiority rather than cultural orientations to learning (Yates & Nguyen, 2012; Zhou & Chen, 2020).

For Ziqi, deficit manifested in feelings of self-doubt and perceptions of incapability. In her view, being an ESL speaker meant that she could not attain her professional goals. Unlike Keng, who positioned others as the actors of inferiorization, Ziqi seemed to have internalized the notion of deficit as something immutable that existed materially and needed only be accepted by herself.

> I want to be a psychologist, to be honest, but I don't have the confidence that I can do that because the language demand is very high. I have to admit that to myself. I wanted to do a PhD and become a psychotherapist because most of my interests are focused on therapy and on how to understand people. But like, for writing, I am trying to get rid of the ESL structure, the "ESL bubble," and I'm trying to improve my flow. I want to write from English to English, not from ESL to English. (Ziqi)

Contradictorily, though, she also conceptualized the deficit attached to being an ESL speaker as something that could be removed, albeit partially — that is, when writing in English. On another level, Ziqi's attempt to improve her writing may also be seen as a way to overcome the bias that exists against writing produced by ESL speakers (Reichelt, 2021). As a student of psychology, she spent much of her time writing lab reports for her supervisor and essays for her professors. As such, writing more fluently held more weight than speaking.

In the excerpt below, Ziqi also invoked the native / non-native binary to make sense of her experience. Here, she conceptualized native-speakerism to be tied to the ability to use cultural and everyday forms of the English language, in both of which she considered herself to have a marked ability. Moreover, she explained that her brother spoke English like a native speaker because he moved to Canada at the age of 13. Thus, for her, speaking like a native speaker entailed not having an accent and not using "formal" or ungrammatical language in conversation. Yet, she refused to

position her brother as a native speaker, using the preposition "like," despite him having met the two criteria she identified. Consequently, her explanation of the situation suggests that there is more to be met in order to be accepted fully as a native speaker.

> When I came to Canada, I told people I wanted to learn English better. Because it was a separate subject in Taiwan, and not a language that I was using naturally. My English was very formal and sounded like a textbook-kind-of English. Even today, my brother usually mocks me because he says I talk like if I'm writing an essay. So, the way I talk is not like the way native speakers talk. 'Cause I didn't learn English from conversation. I learned it from the book or TV programs or movies. What's the term you guys use? It's not ... informal enough. My brother says it sounds too technical sometimes, too formal. And sometimes it will be out of syntax, like the way I speak will just not sound right. 'Cause my brother came here when he was 13, so he speaks like a native speaker. (Ziqi)

Among other sociological factors, an additional requirement for native-speaker status could be related to being born in Canada. Indeed, Ziqi attributed her inferior linguistic proficiency (relative to her brother) to two factors. The first was related to not using the language "naturally" and the second to not learning it from conversation, both experiences unavailable to her while growing up in Taiwan. Yet, her account would suggest that her brother did not have access to those experiences for 13 years either, the age at which he moved to Canada. As a result, Ziqi's construction of her positioning (as well as her brother's) suggests the prevalence of early discourses that advanced the myth of being a true native speaker "by virtue of place or country of birth" (Davies, 1991, p. ix). Needless to say, the experiences of Ziqi's brother challenge and reject the myth.

When reflecting on his experience of language development, for his part, Filipe found amusement in the realization that the language boundaries he encountered were imagined. Correspondingly to Ziqi's perception, Filipe also believed that his ESL status prevented him from being able to proofread texts written by native speakers because being an ESL speaker was the marked position of the two, that is, the one carrying a deficit view.

> It's funny 'cause I like to proofread my friends' essays for them because before I would never, 'cause English is not my first language and I would never do that. But now I always love doing it. I really like it, I don't know why. I feel like I'm pretty good at it, I'm not perfect, it's really hard to write perfect [English]. (Filipe)

For all of his time at Palm University, Filipe frequented the writing centre for appointments focused on his writing skills. Gradually, Filipe found

validation in transitioning from "before I would never" to "but now I always love doing it," which could have resulted from the act of simply going to the writing centre (e.g., a kind of performance required for acceptance) or from enhancing his writing skills through his appointments (i.e., a perceived or real change in language).

Local, native-speakerist style of academic engagement as the ideal

The current section considers the students' experiences in light of their institutional status as international students. As will be shown, however, language was still a part of the students' experiences of inferiority. Therefore, when the students mentioned "Canadian students" in the interviews, they were making indirect reference to local and native-speaker students, which is how they imagined the typical Canadian student. Nevertheless, language was not always the primary source for their comparisons. For instance, while Keng did not refer to Canadian students in the excerpt presented below, he drew attention to instructors' favouritism toward Western-centric forms of academic engagement, through the expectation that students participate in class by talking. The disadvantage Keng experienced was associated to his "quiet" form of engagement as an international student who had been educated under a different education system:

> It doesn't help when I'm both quiet and a non-native speaker. They both come across as negative in the seminars where the teacher expects us to talk. (Keng)

The manner in which Keng described his experiences never suggested that he lacked knowledge in relation to the subject matter. Yet, he experienced double deficit from being unlike a local student — that is, being a non-native speaker and embodying quiet behaviour. Oral language is a significant part of classroom participation in Western academia (Thom, 2010; Trahar, 2010). Silence is its opposite, often seen as a form of disengagement and non-participation (Hsieh, 2007), although this view has also been critiqued (Bista, 2012). Some multilingual international students who prefer a more reflexive engagement may still adopt a more vocally active style of participation in class in order to signal participation to their instructors and, by extension, receive participation marks (Takahashi, 2019). Considering the value assigned to oral participation, some multilingual international students may enact a more active style of engagement even when they find the classroom environment unconducive to participation (Marlina, 2009). Multilingual international students also recognize that the oral contributions they make to classroom discussions

do not need to be necessarily meaningful or critical, but rather performative (Tavares, 2021b).

When Filipe revisited his experiences of first year, he described feeling fearful of underperforming because he was an international student. In particular, even without any real knowledge of his peers' linguistic and academic capabilities, and given the very early stages of his academic career, he still believed that Canadian students were superior simply because of their native-speaker status and their familiarity with the education system. In fact, Filipe's preconceived idea that international students were not good students was such that he intentionally presented himself as an international student to peers and instructors in social interaction as a way to justify his (hypothetical) unsatisfactory performance. Therefore, Filipe's self-positioning as a student of inferior capability was created by his situated discourses that perpetuated larger discourses of deficit. With the passing of time, however, his positive performance enabled him to deconstruct his own assumptions and overcome his fear.

> I was scared that I would not be able to keep up with the reading comprehension compared to Canadian students, and writing as well. But I feel like, as years passed, I got to see I'm actually a much better writer than my Canadian friends from what I can see, from the essays, so that made me, like, more relaxed, I was, like, I don't need to tell everyone that I'm an international student just for that [to be excused]. They think that we [international students] just stay in our dorms all day. That, like, we don't know how to do things and be successful just because we're not from here. (Filipe)

The last two sentences in Filipe's excerpt point to experiences of otherness. The "international" qualifier for international students was equated to a social deficit — that is, withdrawal from the community by staying in "dorms all day." Additionally, being an international student was also embedded in a notion of failure. Filipe felt as though he had to find ways to confront such stereotypes, especially considering the ideological impact they would have on his identity as a new member of Palm University's community. One strategy he employed in response was to attend ongoing sessions at the writing centre so as to improve his language skills. On another level, he also began to distance himself more from events planned for, and organizations led by, international students exclusively. He believed that social distance could afford him the space to be seen as someone different, apart from other international students — a group of marked identity.

Keng also discussed experiences in which he felt othered and marginalized due to his status as an international student. As a newly arrived student unfamiliar with the culture of Palm University, he referenced insufficient opportunities through which he could socialize with local students in university-organized events. Experiences of social exclusion at the structural level are common for international students (Jiang, 2021; Paltridge et al., 2014; Schmitt et al., 2003). International student non-participation in the host environment tends to instead be attributed to an automatic choice made by international students rather than a product of institutional marginalization (Tavares, 2021a). As a multilingual international student who spoke English as an additional language, Keng conceptualized social interaction with local students as essential for the further development of his language proficiency. Overall, Keng's experiences did not support the notion that international students had a natural orientation toward staying with conational peers (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

> There isn't much interaction with Canadian students. I don't want to blame the international student office, but I don't think they give us much opportunity to interact with local students, there aren't many social and cultural events where I can meet them. In terms of the use of English, the experience does not meet my expectations because I don't have a chance to meet and talk in English with Canadian students and this is the biggest thing I wanted to accomplish when I first started planning my exchange. I wanted to learn more about Canadian culture too. (Keng)

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the identity-related experiences of three multilingual international students at a Canadian university, focusing on the ways in which the students conceived of their identities in the assigned or self-assigned institutional positions of: ESL student, non-native speaker, and international student. Overall, the students' conceptions of their experiences reveal that a strong sense of deficit was embedded in how the students understood themselves as (multilingual) individuals. Deficit manifested in experiences characterized by feelings of inferiority, otherness, and marginalization in a number of domains, such as academics, social life, intellectual capability, and professional achievement. In the context of their university, the students' experiences illustrate that being an international student and speaking English as an additional language were experienced as disadvantages in comparison to being a local student and a native speaker of English.

The impact of a deficit identity was such that students questioned their potential to succeed in life. Indeed, the findings from this study align with those of the existing literature in relation to the ideological and material implications of a deficit identity put over upon being a non-native speaker of English (Du, 2019; Marshall, 2009). Ziqi believed that higher positions within the job market were reserved for native speakers only. The linguistic discrimination of which she spoke has, in fact, been previously documented in Canada. Creese (2010) found that adult immigrants who do not speak the local standard of English faced discrimination and otherness in the labour market and were told in implicit and explicit ways to fix their language to speak like native speakers. Creese (2010) has argued that discrimination on the basis of language needs to be legally recognized as such and that employers are in a unique position to confront such ideologies of language by valuing different accents in the workplace.

For Keng, his quiet and thoughtful personality intensified his feeling of otherness as he could not meet the expectations of active oral participation that were in place. He understood that being a native speaker and a local student were more socially and academically advantageous based on how his courses were designed. As a result, he experienced a kind of double deficit. Keng's experiences point to the urgent need for an inclusive and ethical model of internationalization in which diverse forms of academic and cultural engagement are welcomed (Stein et al., 2019). In their study at a Canadian university, Guo and Guo (2017) similarly found that international students experienced a lack of inclusive pedagogy in the (international) classroom. The internationalization of the curriculum in particular should therefore not simply prioritize equipping students for a critical engagement with a fast-changing globalized world, but should also ensure fairness for all in the process of teaching and learning (Haigh, 2002).

Filipe's experiences point to the prevalence of the notion of ownership of the language: A language supposedly belongs to its native speakers. This assumption positions native speakers as more linguistically knowledgeable and non-native speakers as inauthentic (O'Rourke, 2011). Because Filipe was not a native speaker of English, he believed that he lacked the kind of linguistic knowledge necessary to make adequate grammatical judgments on the written works of his peers, who were native speakers. Additionally, for all of first year, being a non-native speaker of English brought about feelings of fear and self-doubt, specifically when it came to reading and writing, as he compared himself to native-speaker students. Nevertheless, Filipe had never received a low grade on any assignment in first year, and despite this, he still opted to attend ESL sessions at the writing centre

regularly. This particular experience suggests that Filipe needed to have his knowledge of English validated by a perceived expert, such as the tutors, rather than to actually improve his reading and writing skills from of a place of lack.

The students' experiences suggest a pervading absence of forms of success built on, or grounded in, cultural and linguistic diversity in the host environment, hence Ziqi's perceptions of the labour market as a place configured by a linguistic hierarchy in which non-native speakers are disadvantaged. To help reverse the impact of such hierarchies on multilingual international students' achievement of success, it is imperative that institutions of higher education adopt a more genuinely multicultural framework of diversity, implementing policies that remove barriers to success for historically marginalized groups. Tamtik and Guenter (2019) have called on Canadian universities to move beyond the rhetoric of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and address structural issues that students regularly face, including multilingual international students, who are not considered an equity-seeking group by many Canadian universities (Tavares, 2021a). Institutions of higher education are in a unique position to model inclusivity by promoting, celebrating, and rewarding cultural difference.

Key to understanding the students' experiences is the situated nature of identity. As Baxter (2016) and Harrison (1990) have argued, from a post-structuralist perspective, the understanding and presentation of self are socially, culturally, and linguistically influenced. A change of sociocultural environment will result in different, often unexpected, experiences for the individual (Tavares, 2021d). The situated and dynamic quality of selfhood is evident in the students' experiences: As the students moved from one sociocultural setting (home country) to another (Canada), their envisioned identities had to be reconstructed in a process where local forms of power were at play. Despite the multicultural and multilingual environment of Palm University, the students could not position themselves and their multilingual profiles more positively because their university did not approach multilingualism as an asset (Preese, 2019). Being multilingual meant being an ESL or non-native speaker, and as such, the hierarchical relationship between language and identity was maintained.

At the same time, an analysis of language in context helps expose some of the contradictory or blurry aspects of the ESL student identity. While the students positioned themselves as ESL students (or non-native speakers) throughout their experiences, certain discursive spaces afforded the students the opportunity to manipulate facets of the ESL identity. Writing

was arguably the most important skill for Ziqi and Filipe as both were upper-year students. As such, the students focused on improving their writing in order to produce more native-like writing and, thus, better control parts of their identities in presentation to their instructors, who were their interlocutors. In this sense, the enactment of an ESL student identity through writing can occur to different extents: As Ziqi conceptualized it, the identity can be completely ESL (i.e., ungrammatical) on one end and completely native speaker-like on the other. As Li (2007) has argued, "a writer's voice in writing reveals the discourse community to which he or she belongs" (p. 46). For the students, writing "like a native speaker" would signal membership and sameness to the readers, rather than difference, which was seen as inferior.

Over the last two decades, there has been growing investment in, and attention toward, the internationalization of higher education. This is particularly true for Canada as a currently emergent destination, where internationalization has been proposed as a beneficial move for all (Tavares, 2021b). However, the findings of this study demonstrate that the three international students did not experience internationalization in any meaningfully positive way. On the contrary, being an international student, regardless of linguistic profile, was an experience lived within an often-debilitating sense of otherness. The lack of institutionally mediated opportunities to meet local students and acquire new language led Keng to feel unwelcomed and unimportant. Filipe perceived international students as inferior based on discourses he had encountered that positioned international students as withdrawn, passive, and even unsuccessful by nature. If academic success is predicated on the image of the local student as the ideal, international students will continue to feel excluded in their host environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, some recommendations are worth mentioning. However, they should be considered carefully, as the students' experiences cannot be generalized. First, adequate institutional support for inter-group socialization plays a key role for a multilingual international student's overall sense of satisfaction (Arthur, 2017). Therefore, universities should design social initiatives that can meaningfully and systematically bring together the two groups of students. Such initiatives can extend beyond campus to help connect students on the basis of mutual interest, rather than linguistic or cultural associations. As for the impact of an othered identity, international or multilingual faculty can draw on their own experiences to support multilingual international students in challenging

assumptions of an imaginary, monolingual, local-born individual as the ideal student or professional in multilingual and multicultural Canadian society. Discipline-specific language support may be useful for students like Ziqi, who felt prevented from starting a career in her desired field solely on the basis of non-native proficiency. In a similar vein, curricula should be designed with the multilingual international student in mind. The growing number of multilingual international students in Canadian universities supports the need to reconceptualize pedagogy to reflect an ethical and inclusive approach. Faculty and curriculum developers need to be supported in their efforts to internationalize curricula.

As research suggests, local and native-speaker students do not necessarily perform well (or better) academically from being familiar with the local education system or from being native speakers of the language used in the academy. Many undergraduate and graduate students alike lack both basic and advanced learning skills required for academic success, including proficiency in the academic / scientific register of English (Benzie, 2010; Cameron & Rideout, 2022). As Morosanu and colleagues (2010) have explained, [local] students "now come to academia from different backgrounds, have different resources and take different routes" (p. 672). Globalization and transnationalism continue to challenge and diversify the prototypical profile of the modern-day student. Therefore, a view of the local, native-speaker student as the most qualified individual needs to be rejected (Tavares, 2021c).

In conclusion, the academic community needs to continue to engage in critical conversations that challenge the construction of difference as inferior. When difference is not celebrated and integrated into the fabric of the university, the whole academic community loses. Multilingual international students suffer the most: They may avoid engaging in educational experiences designed to help them grow, focus on failure rather than success, believe not all career paths are available to them, and ultimately lose confidence in themselves. Linguistic or academic support alone will not be enough to equip multilingual international students for success if being multilingual and international are both positioned as inferior by the academic institutions and their discourses.

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