Entering the Circle: Mexican Graduate Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Language, Identity and New Discourses in U.S. Universities[1]

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Abstract

The authors argue that international graduate students (nonnative English speakers) are able to develop multiple identities in order to function in their new and challenging cultural worlds (Zou, 2002). An interpretive qualitative study of four Mexican graduate students in U.S. universities reveals that part of their legitimization experience as scholars also entailed the mastery of the English language. Factors such as accent and standard usage of the English language were perceived as gatekeeping devices in the forging of an international academic identity. The participants described strategies of linguistic survival, resistance and appropriation as ways to negotiate their own identities as Mexican scholars-in-the-making. Using data collected from Gutiérrez Estrada (2005), the authors will provide an overview of the perceptions and experiences of a group of Mexican instructors completing their graduate degrees in the United States with respect to how well they were prepared for the language, cultural and social immersion they were facing.

Introduction

In the last twenty years, several granting agencies in Mexico (e.g. see the Appendix for a brief description of the main scholarships), along with the National Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública -- SEP), have provided Mexican instructors with the opportunity to achieve academic growth and development by pursuing a graduate degree abroad. The goal of the Ministry of Education, as well as the other granting agencies, is that the recipients of these scholarships will be able to: carry out research projects in their particular fields, publish articles in recognized scholarly journals, present at conferences, and accomplish other tasks that academic faculty around the world are required and expected to perform. However, as recipients of such scholarships, these non-English speaking international students face many challenges in their path towards obtaining a graduate degree as well as trying to accomplish these tasks. As a result of this, the topic of this study originated as a Master's thesis (Gutiérrez Estrada, 2005) in which eight Mexican university instructors, completing graduate degrees in the United States, were invited to participate in a basic *interpretive qualitative research* (Merriam, 2002). The study explored the

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participants' experiences and perceptions with respect to how well they were prepared for the language, culture and social immersion they were facing. Issues of how identity and power relations are interwoven with the experience of living abroad and coping with the academic, social, and cultural demands of a new culture were also explored. The present study focuses on one particular representation of the complex relationship between language, power and identity -- that is, how language learning, language use and accent play an intrinsic role in the make-up of identity and participation as Mexican graduate students in U.S. universities.

Participants and methodology

The participants in the original study (Gutiérrez Estrada, 2005) were eight; all the participants are Mexican citizens; Spanish is their first language and at the time the study took place, they were all graduate students in different universities in the U.S. For the purpose of this particular paper, we will focus on the findings of four participants; two women, Choffis and María; and two men, Baali jeeka and Ernesto. Pseudonyms are used to protect the confidentiality of the participants, as well as any information revealing their location. The pseudonyms were chosen by the participants. All the participants have worked as university instructors at a public university for periods ranging from one to twenty-five years. The participants shared the following characteristics: 1) they learned English (EFL) in Mexico; 2) they had experience teaching at a Mexican public university; and 3) they had received funding from a granting agency in Mexico. We will now provide a brief profile of these participants' backgrounds.

Participant Profiles

The Women

Choffis is in her early thirties; she had been living in the northeastern part of the United States for about six years prior to her participation in this study where she had completed both a Masters and a Doctoral program in Linguistics. Choffis had worked as an undergraduate Linguistics instructor for two years in Mexico. She learned English as a Foreign Language in Mexico, as did most of the other participants in the original study, starting at the junior high school level and later taking additional courses during her undergraduate program. However, Choffis had read an important amount of academic texts in English prior to the start of her graduate program, which made her more confident about her reading and writing skills, but not her listening and speaking skills. Choffis is currently working as a full-time professor in Mexico.

María is in her late forties; she has completed her coursework in a doctoral program in Public Health in a southwestern university where she lived for three years. María has taught at the university level for twenty-five years. She is a psychologist and completed her M.A. in Mexico. María has learned English "all her

life" and, like Choffis, believes that it was her discipline and the amount of reading in English she had to do during her academic career that motivated her to learn more English. María is currently finishing her doctoral thesis and is back in Mexico.

The Men

Baali jeeka is in his early forties; he completed a Ph.D. in Linguistics in a southern university in the United States where he lived for four years. He taught some undergraduate courses for about a year in a Mexican university. With regards to his experience learning English, Baali jeeka had learned English in Mexico (EFL), but felt that these courses had not helped him much. Baali jeeka and Ernesto were the only participants who took English courses in the United States a few months prior to starting their graduate degrees in order to be fully accepted into their programs. He is also back in Mexico working as a full-time professor.

Ernesto is in his early thirties; he completed a Masters in Applied Physics in the field of Atmospheric Sciences and is currently working towards obtaining his Ph.D. at the same university (located in a southwestern state). He has lived in the U.S. for 5 years. Ernesto has eight years' teaching experience at a public university where he taught undergraduate courses in Physics. Ernesto, as most of the participants, learned English as a Foreign Language in Mexico during junior high school and high school; he also took courses during his undergraduate program. However, just before Ernesto started his M.A. he took two English courses at an American state college. He said he had improved his reading and writing skills with these courses, but not his speaking and listening skills.

Methodology

The data was collected through a 60-90 minute, in-depth, one-on-one, audio taped semi-structured interview with the participants, which mainly focused on: a) the participants' perceived experiences regarding language, culture, and the social aspects of living as graduate students in the U.S. before they moved there; b) whether these perceived experiences were modified and, if so, how they were modified during their stay in the U.S.; c) how these experiences as international students shaped their academic studies; d) the participants' description of their relationship with their advisor/supervisor, professors, and peers; and e) a description of their history as English students prior to their graduate studies. Issues of identity and power relations were addressed in the follow-up questions after the interviews took place.

The methodology chosen for the study was a *Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research*, which focuses mainly on the researchers' interpretation. In a Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study, "… the researcher is interested in understanding

how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument" (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Merriam also states that as researchers, we seek to "… discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p. 6).

Literature Review

International graduate students and their experiences

Previous research has shown that the language difficulties experienced by non-English speaking international students, pursuing graduate degrees in English-speaking countries, may partially stem from the traditional English curriculum which does not provide these students with the necessary tools required for graduate study abroad (Braine, 2002; Cotterall, 2000; McClure, 2001; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Swales, 1997). In the specific case of Mexican university instructors, who form the core of the present study, they obtained their English training through EFL courses focusing mainly on general or Standard English. Indeed, there exist few programs in Mexico that prepare these instructors in academic English and fewer -- if any -- which guide them through the multiple variables involved in living in another culture.

Many public universities in Latin America need to grow both in terms of their research output and academic fields. This growth crucially depends on the quantity and quality of publications produced by its faculty. Most universities in the world regard the publication of articles in major scientific journals, and in English, as an important avenue towards faculty development. English has become the major language of publication in the world of research and technology. According to Tardy (2004), in 1995, English made up over 95% of the publications in the *Science Citation Index* (p. 250). However, the number of non-native speakers of English is also growing; therefore, scholars who have learned English as a foreign language and remain in their native countries encounter great challenges in order to be recognized around the world. For Fairclough (2001), citing Bourdieu, this is an illustration of globalization as "a real but incomplete process which benefits some people and hurts others" (p. 207). And while it is true that globalization manifests itself in numerous inequities, countries like Mexico make an effort to provide opportunities for instructors to develop in their areas of expertise and ideally contribute to the country's economic and scientific growth. These opportunities provide Mexican instructors with grants and/or scholarships in order to pursue graduate degrees abroad.

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Entering the Circle/Legitimate Peripheral Participation

The concepts of *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Kachru's *Inner* and *Expanding Circles* (1985) are used throughout this study. These terms will be briefly described in this section.
Tardy (2004) believes that there are co-existing roles of English: one is that it is a necessary tool (e.g. for publication, for accessing information) and the other is the negative consequences that derive from it, mainly because research that is not published in English is often overlooked. "…[I]mportant work situated in Third World countries is essentially becoming 'lost science'" (p. 251). For Tardy, international graduate students offer useful insights regarding English as the International Language of Science (EILS) mainly because they are part of the *Inner Circle* while completing their graduate programs and, later, professionals of the *Expanding Circle* upon their return to their countries. In the present study, the concept of *Inner Circle* scholar refers to academics (native speakers of English) based mostly in the United States, where a large percentage of publications are launched. Therefore, the concept of *Expanding Circle* scholar refers to a nonnative speaker of English academic who does not reside in an English-speaking country. The Expanding Circle consists of those countries that recognize the importance of English as *the* international language but that have not gone through a British colonization experience. English does not serve a specific institutional function but it is learned as a basic foreign language. It predominates in international relations for these countries and it is gradually penetrating in business, media and scientific circles. (See Kachru, 1985 for more on English in the *Inner*, *Outer, and Expanding Circles.)*

According to Hamel (2003), what is most important in Kachru's circles is the future projection of English. Kachru (1985) and Crystal (1997) sustain that the predominant role of English is historically explained by the relationship between the first (Inner) and second (Outer) circle; the future of English as a global language, however, develops in the *Expanding Circle.* If the current trends of English as an expanding language continue, the Expanding Circle will be quantitatively greater, and this, of course, will have yet a greater effect on the effects of English language monopolization in the scientific arenas of these countries.

Therefore, international graduate students will eventually participate actively in developing research, publishing articles or presenting at conferences. In a similar vein, Lave and Wenger (1991) use the term *legitimate peripheral participation*, referring to the "process by which newcomers gradually move toward fuller participation in a given community's activities by interacting with more experienced community members" (Morita, 2004, p. 576). The ultimate goal many instructors in Expanding Circle countries wish to attain one day is to be able not only to consume but also to produce knowledge and research in their fields. Wenger (1998) provides the following example:

Today, doctoral students have professors who give them entry into academic communities. Granting the newcomers legitimacy is important because they are likely to come short of what the community regards as competent engagement. Only with enough legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion(p. 101).

Entry to the academic communities is not a conflict or difficulty-free task; surrounding the entry are power relations that promote, deny, or delay international graduate students access to the academic Circles (either Inner or Expanding). The theoretical contributions of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) have been adapted to research focusing on different academic scenarios involving nonnative speakers of English as graduate students or scholars (Belcher, 1994; Canagarajah, 2003; Flowerdew, 2000; Morita, 2004).

Identity (ies)

The notion and definitions of identity underlying this study fall into the stream of critical approaches, poststructuralism, and sociocultural theory.

Norton (2000) describes identity as a way "to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed over time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 5). Within poststructuralist theory, she goes on to say that the individual is represented as non-unitary, "diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space" (p. 125). The author recognizes the inability among Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theorists to develop:

…a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context … they [SLA theorists] have not questioned how relations of power in the social world impact on social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers (p. 4).

In this vein, Pennycook (2001) conceives the language learner not as an entity with individual dispositions to create a correct utterance in another language that can be tested under rigorous "objective" conditions, but considers factors such as access and content in the learners' social context as more indicative of the learners' ultimate success.

All things are not equal. The learner may already be positioned within a classist division that relegates L2 learners to a secondary status. What access does this language user have to particular uses of a language, how might they be positioned, how might they become more aware of the ways in which they are discriminated against, and

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how then could they find ways to struggle against an inequitable system? (p. 44)

Although most of the literature on identity which was reviewed for this study deals with immigrants and adult learners who will remain in Canada, England, or the United States, the conceptualizations presented by the authors are applicable to international graduate students for mainly two reasons.

The first reason deals with participants' efforts to be recognized in an academic world different from their own and hoping to become, as Tardy (2004) explains, researchers of the Inner Circle. They have struggled to become 'legitimate speakers' (Bourdieu, 1977; Norton, 2000). Underlying this struggle are the notions of power, prestige, and the symbolic capital referring to the participants' status as professionals in their homelands and their search for recognition as they become part of 'mainstream' academia. The second reason deals with the definitions of identity provided by the different authors who view identity as multiple, dynamic, (re)negotiable, contradictory, and changing over historical time and social space (Ivanič, 1998; Marx, 2002; Norton, 1997, 2000; Schecter & Bayley, 1997; Zou, 2002). As described by Norton (1997) in her longitudinal study with five immigrant women in Canada, identity and these women's experiences as second language learners and newcomers to Canada fell into three major themes. (Social) identity was multiple, a site of struggle, and changing over time. The author believes that:

> *…every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are … engaged in identity construction and negotiation (p. 410).*

Zou (2002), in her article *Multiple identities of a Chinese immigrant: A story of adaptation and empowerment*, provides a compelling tour of her experience as a Chinese immigrant researcher in the United States and her previous life in China. She states that in the past, psychology referred exclusively to the notion of self-identity "as a rigid and permanent state incompatible with alternative identities" (p. 254). She views multiple identities as "a powerful instrument that facilitates adaptation to new sociocultural environments, new roles, and different circumstances" (p. 251). In light of this, she claims that multiple identities are "a significant new cultural capital" which allows individuals to function in their new and challenging cultural worlds (p. 251). Zou's research focuses on immigrants in academia; its relevance to the present study lies in how the participants, as international students and former instructors, have experienced a transition between their world as legitimate individuals in their culture (using their own language) and their current situation in a new environment.

In her study, Marx (2002) provides a personal account of her experience in Germany as a second language learner. She discusses identities and cultural issues, and in particular the appropriation of accent. Influenced by Kramsch (1997) and Wenger (1998), she affirms that "…identities do not exist alone but are interwoven with other aspects of the self" (Marx, 2002, p. 266). She claims that a person is able to affiliate herself with more than one culture or language; therefore, this person holds multiple identities which are dynamic in nature (p. 266). Marx and Wenger support the notion that we as individuals -- in this case as international graduate students speaking a different language and living in a new environment -- engage in the negotiation and renegotiation of identity and self. Marx's account as a second language learner proves particularly relevant to the experiences of the participants in the present study since she, as they, intended to return to her native country after being in Germany for several years. Finally, an important argument raised by Marx is the notion of 'reconciliation' of identities by means of "uniting past and present into one self" (p. 277), which refers to the learners' ability to function in both contexts (L1/C1[2] and L2/C2) and to achieve academic recognition in both worlds.

Findings

The findings in this paper are distributed in terms of the following themes: the *formation of multiple identities*; *accent as a nonnative English speaker*; and how these factors played an important role in the participants' path on becoming *Inner Circle* scholars.

The present study views identities as multiple, dynamic, diverse, changing over time, contradictory, (re)negotiable, complex, fluid, and as an empowering instrument for adaptation to new environments (Norton, 2000, 1997; Ivanič, 1998; Zou, 2002; Marx, 2002; Schecter & Bayley, 1997). Within this view of identities, the participants, although not consciously, hold multiple identities (Gutiérrez Estrada, 2005). Entangled within this notion of multiple identities are issues regarding ethnic identity, accent, dialect, and power relations. The stories of the participants in the present study have revealed the nature of their identities as multiple and seen through their adaptation to the changes in their environments (Stryker, 1987).

Most of the participants in this study expressed that in one way or another speaking fluently in English, or having a less noticeable "accent" in English, provided them with more opportunities to engage in reciprocal communication with their peers and professors.

> *Q1: Before I started the program, I was afraid that my knowledge and fluency of the language weren't good enough and that I was going to have difficulties taking and passing courses. I was*

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[2] Capital C stands for Culture. L1 and L2 stand for first and second language respectively

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> *extremely worried about my academic performance, and the opinion professors would have of me, I never stopped to think about my performance in everyday things, like to use English to go to the grocery store, to talk to the landlady, to the librarian, etc. (Choffis)*

Choffis explained that reading and writing had not been difficult skills to develop. She also explained that after a while, she had become more relaxed and more fluent in English. She is the only participant who has accomplished more academic work in the Inner Circle due to the fact that she has presented at several prestigious world conferences in her field and has also co-authored (with her former thesis supervisor) several articles in English. However, as reflected in the quote above, at the beginning of her studies she feared that she would not become a 'heard' voice, a *legitimate speaker* (Bourdieu, 1977) in her particular discourse community due to her language proficiency and not her knowledge of her field.

On the other hand, Baali jeeka recalls an incident in which he felt "uncomfortable" and "frustrated" at an international conference where at the beginning of his presentation he apologized for his "bad accent in English". During the presentation Baali jeeka also remembers looking at one of the people in the audience "rolling her eyes" in sign of disapproval. He attributed this sign of "disapproval" to his "bad pronunciation in English."

As Pavlenko (2000) contends, access to linguistic resources, in particular to interactional opportunities, may be mediated by linguistic identities of the speakers and, more generally, by non-native speaker status of the L2 users. On many occasions, there may be unwillingness on behalf of the native speaker to interact with the non-native speaker or to listen to them as competent members of a community. Lippi-Green (1997) writes extensively about American attitudes towards "English with an accent," unraveling how power relations and social discrimination can be based on accents that are deviant from the standard and denying competent members access to certain interactional opportunities because of their accents.

Lippi-Green (1997) explains how accent has played a powerful role in access to education, employment, and in general as a first point of gatekeeping. In a country such as the United States, where all the participants were residing at the time of the study, all other indicators that index difference, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or socioeconomic background, are legally and socially forbidden as discriminating factors. Yet accent is not a discriminating factor, because there is nothing said about its use as "…an excuse to turn away, to refuse to recognize the other" (Lippi-Green, 1997. p. 64). In providing a theoretical framework to understand how the standardizing process is grounded in our culture, Lippi-Green (1997) recurs to ideology studies, more specifically to standard language ideology (SLI) defined as "a bias toward an abstracted,

idealized, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class" (p. 64). In Foucaultian terms, discourse is replete with power, power which is to be struggled for and which is to be seized (Foucault, 1972).

Language is not exclusively an instrument of communication; it is also an instrument of power (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648). In this paper, Bourdieu's notion of *legitimate speaker* is viewed not only as the ability to command a listener, but also as the means with which international graduate students search and struggle for recognition as they attempt to access symbolic and material resources in order to be recognized and achieve the prestige so necessary in their particular academic discourse communities.

This notion of *legitimate speaker* is revealed in the following quotes from the participants:

> *Q2: I was worried also about the possible evaluation/opinion of my professors, that they would think that I wasn't smart or intelligent enough to have been accepted in the program because I couldn't express myself fluently …I feel Americans evaluate my intelligence connected to my fluency in the language (Choffis).*

> *Q3: The perception of 'intelligence' that a culture has, if you have an adequate mastery of the language, I think they (native speakers of English) believe they are among equals and they feel free to discuss anything without the barrier of 'cautiousness' in order not to offend 'those who don't know (nonnative speakers)' (María).*

These quotes are clearly linked to the participants' accent as nonnative speakers of English and the role of accent in access to discourses of intelligence, worthiness and credibility as academics. Both María and Choffis acknowledge that native English speakers' perceptions of them and their intelligence has much to do with their accent as foreign speakers of English, and more so, because their particular accent as native Mexican Spanish speakers is heavily stigmatized in the U.S. As Lippi-Green (1997) states: the degree of accent is irrelevant when the focus is not on content, but on form. Stereotypes of Mexicans and Latinos are usually negative, the more stereotypical the role --   a paisano, a mojado or a bandido -- the more extreme the features of a 'typical Mexican accent' (Penfield and Ornstein-Galicia, 1985, as cited by Lippi-Green, 1997). It is evident that students pursuing entrance into Inner circle academic arenas must make an effort to acquire an "acceptable" accent that conveys fluidity in English.

During the interview (Gutiérrez Estrada, 2005), María spoke about improving her academic status if she spoke English "correctly" (with no "accent"). She provided the following example of her experience in the classroom:

Q4:…In classroom interaction there are noticeable signs of disapproval when a nonnative speaker of English participates because s/he has difficulties expressing her/himself. During my stay I have had experiences with people who show their rejection towards Hispanos or foreigners in general. I have been able to notice how upset they get if you obtain a good grade or a good comment (María).

Accent is one of those discourses which empower or disempower, depending on which accent is being used. According to Lippi-Green (1997), a standard language ideology proposes that an idealized nation-state has one perfect, homogeneous language and not being a possessor of that idealized language denies individuals access to that particular community. Likewise, some of the participants in this study perceived such limited access to engaging more with their peers or professors who were conscious of their difficulties as EFL learners. Lippi-Green (ibid) explains how access to education is controlled in part on the basis of variety and accent. For international students who are entering an English-speaking university setting, similar expectations with regards to their language use are daily experiences. Class participation and peer interaction is often limited, not because of a lack of proficiency, but because of a fear of not being understood because of a "thick accent," as Baali Jeeka and María contended.

However, resistance is also a possibility, as happens with many speakers who purposefully and consciously use non-standard English accents to express who they are. Ernesto, for example, claimed that he purposely speaks "English like Spanish" (i.e. with a Mexican pronunciation of English phonemes) in order to be identified as Mexican. This rejection can be thought of as transforming one's self and one's ethnic identity through becoming "Anglicized" and hence relinquishing one's accent. A clear example of Ernesto's rejection towards American culture was his perception of life in the U.S. before he moved there:

Q5:…I believed that the culture of the U.S. was the culture of McDonald's, junk food, the culture of the uncultured … no roots … everything light, very ignorant Americans (Ernesto).

Ernesto's perceptions were somewhat modified through interaction with Americans:

*Q6: My perception hasn't changed much; however, I can say that I have seen differences, I have seen very interesting people, not everything is the culture of McDonald's, although the big majority is … but something I have learned to value in the U.S. is not the cultural richness, but the richness in cultures … that you probably won't find anywhere in the world**.…** The U.S. is probably one of the*

countries where you can find a big number of cultures together, more people from everywhere…and the way each of these cultures manifests their traditions, although lighter than the original culture, but it's there (Ernesto).

Ernesto's multicultural surroundings have opened his eyes; he favors interaction with international students over "average Americans," although his American friends have lived abroad. He views this experience as enriching. Ernesto is experiencing a transition to his new environment, adapting to new roles, and challenging these cultural worlds (Zou, 2002). In doing so, he has developed multiple identities which "constitute the richness and the dilemmas of [his] sense of self" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 11). In Ernesto's search to unite and reconcile both worlds, he recognizes that being bicultural represents a struggle if he feels his Mexican-ness is at stake or that he is entering the "McDonald's" culture as he termed it.

Several times during the interview, Baali jeeka, like Ernesto, asserted his rejection of the U.S. culture which according to him obstructed his language-learning process. This was not only something that he felt, but was also perceived by some of his international classmates (e.g. an Argentinean friend told him about it). With regards to language learning he stated:

Q7:…I have seen that people learn a language not because it's convenient to them…but because they like the language and they like the culture where the language is spoken (Baali jeeka).

Baali jeeka claimed that he had little interaction with the culture outside of academia, which in his view, limited his language ability even more.

Q8:…an important thing is how immersed you are in the culture when you are doing a Ph.D. I didn't have much practice talking to others, maybe at lunchtime, but everybody works independently, and when in class you are talking about certain topics…so you are immersed only in the academic culture (Baali jeeka).

Baali jeeka compared his language experiences to those of other classmates and thought that a lot had to do with how you perceive or feel about the culture where you will be living, which impacts the way you become part of it or remain outside, a foreigner.

Q9:…I feel it has to do with personality…and if beforehand you have a rejection towards the culture, it doesn't help…but I saw other classmates who were very "Americanized" …they wanted to stay in the U.S. and they were living the "American life"…they are Americans before they arrive (Baali jeeka).

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In his perception of peers who "adapted better," he believes it was their effort to remain in the U.S. that facilitated their immersion in the culture as well as their language ability. However, Baali jeeka's experiences during his Ph.D. were also evidence of his struggle and contradictions with regards to language and identities:

> Q10: My identity never changed while living in the U.S., but I never adapted well. I didn't socialize outside my study group and even with them my ability to express myself in English was always limited. As a reactionary response if I had the chance to speak Spanish I would do so and I didn't care, even if there was only one person in the whole group who was able to understand me (Baali jeeka).

Both Ernesto and Baali jeeka's perceptions of the "American culture" have led to a re-affirmation of their identities as Mexican. A strategy against the overpowering image of U.S. culture, iconized by fast food, hamburgers and empty calories, as Ernesto puts it, have led both these participants to use language as a tool against appropriating ideals they actively resist. Ernesto, in his case, consciously resisted adopting what he believed to be "an American accent," because doing so would subtract from his Mexican identity. Thus, even if he was speaking the language of the U.S., his Mexican accent would still serve as an anchor to his national, ethnical, and cultural identity. Baali jeeka also believed that language use was a determinant index of identity, causing him to refuse to speak English even when he was immersed in an English-speaking world. His negative experience, such as the "rolling of the eyes" of a colleague at a conference upon hearing him present in English, was an example of how he felt he was not being heard and was not being perceived by other native English speakers as "worthy of speech" nor much less as "worthy of engagement," as exemplified by Norton in her work with ESL learners of Canada. (Norton, 2000). As a consequence, Baali jeeka overtly rejected the use of the English language in determined circumstances. Experiences such as these led all the participants in this study to be strongly conscious of the social consequences of not speaking English in a predetermined way, especially as aspiring academics.

Implications for further research

An important issue emerging from this research and that requires further exploration is the fact that the two major granting agencies in Mexico (CONACYT and PROMEP) will continue to provide individuals with the opportunity to study abroad. A possibility for these granting agencies would be to create prerequisites for scholarship hopefuls to fulfill: a) EAP courses prior to leaving to study abroad, which would mainly focus on language and academic skills; b) orientation to scholarship candidates regarding the academic and job market in both the Inner and Expanding Circles. This would promote research contextualized in Mexico's current social, educational, and economic issues.

Another area for expanding the issues addressed in this study is the traditional English curriculum still so entrenched across Mexico at several public universities. For most of the participants, this traditional curriculum did not facilitate their immersion into academia, but rather left them feeling inadequately prepared and in need of further English instruction. Baali jeeka and Ernesto are testimony to this situation; they had to take additional English courses to comply with the language requirements set by their particular program of study. A greater focus on English for Academic Purposes curriculum for students preparing for study abroad might help to ease the transition of Mexican instructors studying in an English-speaking context. This particular aspect has become even more apparent in the curriculum renewal process that many public universities across Mexico have undergone. The new curricula present two parallels: on the one hand, English has become a requisite for undergraduate students; on the other hand, current teaching faculty (e.g. Engineering, History, Psychology) at many public universities do not themselves possess the level of proficiency envisioned for students. Therefore, there is an imminent need for EFL instructors to engage in the recognition and implementation of EAP curricula to meet the demands of the existing Expanding Circle scholars (e.g. university faculty) and those of Expanding Circle scholars-to-be (e.g. undergraduate students).

"Will [teachers] construct EAP exclusively as academic and workplace preparation or also as a place where students can shape and transform what is being offered to them?" (Benesch, 2001, p. 136). As a result of this, the present study seeks to raise awareness towards the construction of the latter: a critical EAP program responding to the imminent power relations in academia across the globe. Among the viable solutions for Expanding Circle scholars, Swales (1997) calls for 'rhetorical consciousness-raising' on the part of the [English-speaking] cultures, to promote and accept linguistic diversity (p. 380), whereas Tardy (2004) and Flowerdew (2000) propose collaborative work and mentoring between Inner Circle advisors and their departing students. The promotion of exchange programs at the undergraduate and graduate level among universities in Mexico and other Inner Circle universities would also be a viable solution. Mexican public universities also benefit from the expertise of visiting Inner Circle scholars. These alternatives already occur at many public universities in Mexico, but are not fully exploited. In these alternatives we can find that there would not only be an academic exchange of ideas and expertise, but that cultural, social, and power relations are also encouraged.

It is important to note that the granting agencies that have provided financial support to all the participants and to us would greatly benefit from an understanding and appropriate institutional response to the issues raised in this study. These funding agencies provide these scholarships in the hopes that one day we all become Inner and Expanding Circle scholars, thus strengthening our country's economic and scientific growth. But in order to carry out these solutions, policy makers and language teachers in Mexico (and in the rest of the world) have to be made aware of the effects of globalization in our country (ies).

> …[We] should understand the timeliness of globalization as a theme for sociolinguistics as an internal development, motivated by sociolinguistics' own familiar priorities -- being accountable to language data in social environments, pursuing issues of social value in language variation, and critiquing the linguistic and discursive bases of social inequality (Coupland, 2003, p. 465-466).

As Expanding Circle scholars in-the-making, we strongly support the need for Expanding Circle academics to enter and participate in the 'production' of research in English, as a way to legitimize our work in our areas of expertise (Tardy, 2004), and to be recognized as such in the international circles of academia. However, it is evident that many Expanding Circle scholars may feel more comfortable *reading* rather than *producing* English-language texts; as a result, these scholars are often excluded from participation as central members of the international academic community (Duszak as cited in Tardy, 2004, p. 251). We must not forget that despite the fact that English is an almost universal language in the scientific arena, the growing hegemony of one sole language weakens the principal of language equality. It is necessary for academics who speak languages other than English to validate their own language as another one of the many possible languages for the production of academic discourses. New scholars from the Expanding Circles like us and like the participants in this study also recognize the importance of languages other than English for Academic Purposes; after all, every one of us were active scholars in Mexico in our own native language before becoming apprentice members of the Inner Circle academic contexts. Thus another point on the agenda for our national granting agencies would be to more aggressively support the publication and scientific divulgation of journals and texts written in our own national language by fostering a more defined language policy. Our own academics should promote Spanish as a worthy language of academia, even in international contexts. Policies such as these could very well lead to more democratic participation of all academics, regardless of the language that they choose to use.

Finally, in the creation of a new identity, all of us (participants and researchers) were able to experiment transformations: in how our new language in use not only fulfills our basic communicating needs, but also creates discourses that transform us. Factors such as fluency and accent proved to be indexical in our success and our new perception of ourselves, as well as to how others perceived us. Now the next task is to forge a new discourse of multiple languages, among them Spanish and English, which will surely give way to innovative academic discourses that will be more inclusive to all "newcomers".

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Appendix

Granting Agencies

In this appendix two main scholarships are summarized. We all received at least one of these scholarships or a combination of one of these with another funding agency (either a Mexican university or the host university in the United States). As recipients of these scholarships, we signed an agreement and are therefore required to return to Mexico to work at either a public university or at a research center. The federal government in Mexico has created repatriate programs (as in the case of CONACYT) that provide returnees with jobs in their areas of expertise once they complete their graduate or postgraduate programs.

PROMEP

In 1996, SEP[3] created a national program in Mexico, which allowed most full-time tenure track instructors working at public or technological universities to have access to scholarships that would allow them to complete graduate and postgraduate programs in the Mexican Republic or outside the country. As a result, PROMEP (Programa de Mejoramiento al Profesorado-Development Program for Professors) was created. PROMEP's main objective is to prepare full time instructors to develop expertise in diverse research areas, particularly within public universities. Its goal has been to ensure that all full time tenure track instructors complete at least a Masters program by the year 2006. This goal was established in

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[3] Secretaría de Educación Pública-Ministry of Education in Mexico, at the federal level.

order to enrich the academic and research environment in Mexican public universities. SEP also provides a variety of research grants to those professors who had already completed graduate programs before the creation of PROMEP.

CONACYT

The Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología-CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology), was created in 1970 by the Federal Congress of Mexico. Its objective (as is PROMEP's) has been to facilitate financial support to those individuals interested in pursuing academic and professional development in their areas. As declared in their mission statement, CONACYT wishes to promote and strengthen scientific development and technological modernization in Mexico by providing resources to encourage and sustain specific research projects and the promotion of scientific and technological information (see http://info.main.conacyt.mx/). CONACYT works most of the time in conjunction with public universities and since it was created before PROMEP, it gave instructors - who were not tenure track - the opportunity for academic advancement. CONACYT not only offers full time scholarships, but complementary scholarships to those students who are receiving funding from their host university. I believe that this will somewhat ensure that the scholarship recipients return to Mexico since they have a commitment with a federal institution, as well as a guarantee to be repatriates who will hold a job in a public university or research institute. In order to accomplish and reinforce this, CONACYT created the National System of Science and Technology (SNI initials in Spanish[4]) which offers grants for recognized researchers in Mexico. CONACYT hopes that by the year 2025, Mexico's economic system will be one of the ten strongest in the world.

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[4] The SNI offers grants to Mexican researchers according to certain standards: number of publications, research projects. If granted, SNI offers a monthly complimentary salary to those researchers who maintain the standards established by CONACYT and SNI. For further information, see http://info.main.conacyt.mx/