A TALE OF TWO PLACEMENTS: INFLUENCES OF ESL DESIGNATION ON THE IDENTITIES OF TWO LINGUISTIC MINORITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

Jennifer Maloy*
Queensborough Community College
City University of New York (CUNY)

This article draws upon interviews with two Generation 1.5 students at an urban community college with a large multilingual student population, demonstrating the ways in which ESL designation and writing placement affect students' constructions of identity. It compares and contrasts the experiences of one student who is placed into an ESL-designated developmental writing course and one student who is placed into a developmental writing course for native English speakers (NES), exploring the extent to which this placement validates and/or challenges their self-conceptions as students and writers. It also promotes investigation of placement procedures that perpetuate divisions between ESL and NES writing courses.

Keywords: community college, developmental writing, English language learners, Generation 1.5, identity, writing placement

This article describes the placement of two non-U.S.-born linguistic minority students into non-credit-bearing English as a second language (ESL) and Native English speaker (NES) developmental writing courses at a large, urban two-year college. I present the data I gathered through extended interviews with two Generation 1.5 students, comparing and contrasting the experiences of Joyce, who was placed into an ESL writing course, and Jan, who was placed into an NES developmental/remedial[1] writing course, both within the community college's Developmental Education Department.[2] I discuss the extent to which these placements reflect, challenge, and/or disrupt the students' cultural, linguistic, and writerly identities. Using Donna LeCourt's (2004) discussion of students' conceptions of identity within the writing classroom, I explore how these students are able to construct identities within a program that divides students into ESL and NES courses.

Current Scholarship on Multilingual Students

There is a growing surge in scholarship on multilingual students across the fields of teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and composition and rhetoric. While the foci of such scholarship may vary within these fields, and while scholars may struggle to communicate and collaborate across disciplinary divides, a large community of researchers, theorists, and practitioners are working to better understand how to serve multilingual students in their writing classes. Such work revolves around how to identify and classify a wide variety of multilingual students (di Gennaro, 2013; Reid, 1997); how multilingual students are best served within existing programmatic structures (Blumenthal, 2002; Crusan, 2002; Razfar & Simon, 2011); the necessity of creating educational environments that support the heteroglossic complexities of bilingual/multilingual speakers (Garcia, 2009); and the relationship between multilingual students' experiences in their writing classes and their conception of linguistic, cultural, and student identity (Cohen, 2014; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013; Leki, 2007). Likewise, in the field of composition, a more theoretical approach has been taken by scholars such as Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu (2013), who argue for a translingual approach to teaching writing in order to better serve multilingual students, disrupt English-only policy, and actively engage in cross-language exploration and investigation of world Englishes.

As such research often reveals, the issues of linguistic classification, identity, academic success, and programmatic design easily become intertwined, particularly within writing programs that commonly present

English as the one and only dominant language of the writing classroom. For example, in her 2007 *Undergraduates in a Second Language,* Ilona Leki (2007) details the experiences of four multilingual college students over the course of five years, demonstrating the ways in which language development is intricately interwoven with students' development of educational support networks and friendships, out-of-school responsibilities, educational backgrounds, and conceptions of identity. In "English May Be My Second Language, but I'm Not 'ESL,' " Christina Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) interviews three multilingual students about their educational experiences, demonstrating the ways in which linguistic labeling does not necessarily reflect individual students' unique conceptions of identity and understanding of their own linguistic identities. Likewise, the recent collection, *Linguistic Minority Students Go to College,* edited by Yasuko Kanno and Linda Harklau (2012), adopts the term *linguistic minority* to refer to multilingual students who are in the process of learning academic English (p.13), demonstrating the diversity of students who fit within this category, the varied—and at times problematic— academic preparation this group of students receives prior to college, as well as issues connected to access and retention once students enter college. While such scholarship increasingly reveals the complexities of the identities and lived realities of multilingual students, writing program administrators in both the fields of ESL and composition are faced with the need to adjust the structure of their programs to address these concerns and issues.

Currently, 20% of children of K–12 age are linguistic minorities (Kanno & Harklau, 2012), and the population of multilingual students in higher education has been growing and surely will continue to grow, particularly at two-year colleges. While the exact number of linguistic minority students at community colleges is not known, George Bunch and Ann Endris (2012) argue there is evidence that linguistic minority immigrant students are more likely to attend community college than U.S.-born monolingual students. Likewise, international students often make up a small fraction of linguistic minority students on community college campuses, which suggests that the majority of linguistic minority students are U.S.-born or immigrated to the United States for purposes other than education. Despite the vast and increasing diversity of community college populations in regard to linguistic, educational, and cultural background—as well as growing scholarship that argues the diversity of English language learners (ELLs) on college campuses—the structure of writing programs and ESL placement in community colleges often depends upon binaristic divisions between ESL and NES writing courses. An essential question that arises from these issues, then, is how are linguistic minority students, in consideration of their complex construction of cultural and linguistic identities, placed within structures that clearly distinguish between NES and ESL populations?

The answer is that placement of such linguistic minority students varies across colleges. While first-year writing courses at community colleges often combine NES and ESL students within the same classroom, developmental courses often divide students into ESL and NES cohorts. The procedures for this division may include identifying whether the student attended high school outside of the United States, asking students to answer questions about language background, or providing students with the option of registering for ESL or developmental writing courses. While both types of courses are designed to prepare students for their first-year composition course, these courses may differ not only in department location but also in the number of credit hours (while many may be non-credit bearing), the number of required courses in the series, as well as the retention rate.

Because linguistic minority students placed in ESL and NES writing courses may have divergent experiences in terms of academic support, interaction with peers, and inclusion into the larger campus community (Bunch & Endris, 2012), it seems essential to examine placement procedures, program design, and departmental divisions that may perpetuate static divisions of ESL and NES despite the multilingual, pluralistic reality of higher education. There is a growing need both to understand the effects of current program design on multilingual students and to conceive of new possibilities. Examples of imperative questions that could support such examination are the following: In an age of multilingual writing classrooms, who belongs in ESL, particularly in community colleges with diverse student bodies? How do the experiences of *linguistic minority students*—i.e., multilingual students for whom English may not be an exclusive, first, or native language—differ from monolingual English speakers in these classrooms? What are their perceptions of placement and how do those perceptions confirm, challenge, or oppose their conceptions of identity?

In order to explore these questions, I interviewed several community-college students who fall into the large, amorphous, diverse, and complex group of linguistic minority students. Specifically, I interviewed students who immigrated to the United States in the midst of their formal primary or secondary schooling. Often referred to as *Generation 1.5*, such linguistic minority students are contrasted with a more traditional conception of an ESL student, an international student who comes to the United States specifically to attend college and who often has

a solid educational foundation in his or her home country. While the term *Generation 1.5* has been critiqued by some scholars as adding another layer of classification to binaristic conceptions of ESL and NES and often denotes a deficit model of language development (Benesch, 2008; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2009), Generation 1.5 students often are described as linguistic minority students whose writing contains unique features and error patterns (di Gennaro, 2013; Doolan & Miller, 2012; Reid, 1997) and who possess hybrid constructions of linguistic and cultural identity (Canagarajah, 2006; Harklau, 2000). I chose to interview students who may be classified as Generation 1.5 in order to investigate a subpopulation of multilingual students who may, depending upon a variety of factors, be placed into ESL or NES writing classes at the community-college level. I sought to find students who had lived in the United States for roughly the same amount of time but who were enrolled in different ESL and NES developmental writing courses. By comparing and contrasting students who were placed into ESL or NES developmental writing courses, I sought to examine how their views of placement and remediation differed, to compare their experiences in their writing classrooms, and to understand how their experiences in such writing classrooms reflected, diverged from, or disrupted their conceptions of linguistic, cultural, and educational identities.

Student Population and Writing Placement at the Research Site

I conducted my research at a diverse community-college campus in the United States that serves over 10,000 students and is part of a large university system consisting of two-year, four-year, and graduate schools. Over a third of the students speak a language other than English at home and about a third were born in countries outside the United States. Approximately one fourth of students take a remedial writing course, any of a series of courses labeled *developmental* or *ESL*, which are non-credit bearing and do not count toward graduation. Within the Developmental Education Department, which is responsible for all developmental reading and writing and ESL classes for incoming students, 50% of students were placed into ESL sections and 50% were placed into NES sections the semester I conducted my research.

The process of student placement into ESL or NES writing sections at this community college entails multiple steps. All incoming students who do not score high enough on a state-wide exam, SAT, or ACT—or who do not take these exams—take a university-wide standardized writing exam that is used to place them into developmental writing courses (with ESL or NES sections) or a first-year writing course. This university writing exam is used by all colleges within the university system to place students into writing courses. It also is administered at the end of developmental and ESL course sequences to determine whether students are prepared to exit remediation. The exam presents students with a short reading passage, and the writing instructions ask students to write an essay responding to the ideas in the passage in 90 minutes. Scorers provide each essay with an ESL designation if they identify common ESL error patterns in a student's writing: examples of such error patterns often relate to sentence structure, verb form or tense, prepositions, and articles. This ESL designation is based on the knowledge of the scorer as well as a short review of ESL error patterns during the scoring training session.

The ESL designation is used to place students into an ESL section. When students meet with their adviser to register for classes, this information is made available to advisers along with information about the country in which the student graduated from high school. Advisers use this information to place students into ESL or NES developmental writing, according to a placement policy set by the college. This policy generally indicates that students who attended high school outside of the United States and/or have received an ESL designation by scorers of their university-wide writing exam be placed in the ESL tract of remedial writing courses. However, there are times when this ESL designation may be missed by advisers, or students may advocate to register for an ESL/NES class depending on their past experiences, scheduling preferences, or even personal preference. There also are times where the ESL designation, or lack of designation, does not accurately reflect the students' linguistic experiences. While the Developmental Education Department maintains common course objectives for both ESL and NES writing courses, and while both courses are non-credit bearing, students may experience such courses differently even though the overall goal of these courses are the same.

Research Design and Methodology

Given the specific placement process at this community college, I sought to gain a greater understanding of the placement and classroom experiences of students who moved to the United States in the midst of their middle school or high school education and are at times referred to as *Generation 1.5*. Therefore, following IRB protocol, I began a semester-long qualitative research study of five Generation 1.5 students—two enrolled in the upper-level

ESL writing course and three enrolled in the upper-level NES writing course—involving a series of one-on-one interviews, collection of writing samples, and examination of scores on the writing exam. The goal of these interviews was to gain a better sense of students' placement processes and to learn more about how these students' placement into ESL or NES sections of developmental writing aligned, challenged, or deviated from their own conceptions of linguistic, cultural, and student identity.

In this article, I focus my data analysis on two Generation 1.5 students: Joyce and Jan. Joyce has lived in the United States since 2006. She grew up in Seoul, South Korea, and moved to New York when she was 13. She had attended the local community college for a year and a half and, the semester I interviewed her, was enrolled in an upper level ESL writing course, which she had taken once before and was required to repeat based on her score on the university-wide writing exam. Jan has lived in the United States since 2003. She grew up in what she described as a "small village" in China and attended high school in the U.S. city in which the community college she attended is located. She started taking classes at the community college in 2007 upon graduating from high school but shortly after joined the U.S. military and ended her studies. She returned to the community college in 2012. The semester I interviewed her, she was enrolled in an upper level NES writing course. I chose to compare and contrast these two students because they both moved to the United States at the beginning of high school and could, depending on a range of factors, have been classified as ESL or NES according to the current procedures in place within the Developmental Education Department.

Over the semester in which I conducted my qualitative research, I talked with each of these students multiple times—three times with Joyce and two times with Jan, for semi-structured interviews. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted approximately 30 minutes, during which I asked the students questions about their linguistic and educational background as well as about their writing class. At each interview, I also spoke with the student about a paper that she was working on in her writing class, and she provided me with a copy of each paper discussed. The first interview focused on placement into the student's present writing class as well as family background, and the final interview focused more on the student's perception of her writing ability and her reflections on the course and taking the university-wide writing exam as an exit from remediation at the end of the semester.

Upon completion of data collection and after the semester officially ended, I transcribed all interviews, and each utterance by the student was coded using a grounded theory approach. I use M. M. Bakhtin's (1986) definition of utterance as "a change of speaking subjects" (p. 71). Thus, a response to a question would be considered an utterance. Two or three responses were joined when one was a continuation of another with only a phrase of reinforcement or single word by the interviewer in between. Two responses also joined when one was a clarification or a single word by the interviewee in regard to an interview question.

To analyze utterances, I first identified and categorized overall themes of discussion and then created subcategorizations. Using Dedoose, I identified the frequency with which themes were discussed in the interviews and also established connections between themes and subcategories by examining co-occurrences. Finally, I compared the frequencies and co-occurrences between interviewees in order to identify emergent patterns of discourse in my interviews. In my data analysis, I discuss the emergent patterns I discovered in the utterances of each interviewee in relation to her placement process as well as both interviewees' perceptions of their writing class. I focus on themes that emerge for Joyce and Jan in relation to the placement process, experiences in the writing classroom, and the writing process. I also discuss how each student fared at the end of the semester in her writing class and what her next step will be. Overall, I focus my data analysis on the relationship between students' placement into their developmental writing course and their conceptions of linguistic, cultural, and student identity.

Joyce and Jan's Writing Placement

Even though Joyce and Jan both attended high school in the United States, Joyce had been placed in an ESL writing course while Jan had been placed in an NES writing course. Because both students attended high school in the United States and were required to take the university-wide writing exam upon entering their community college, their ESL status would have been determined by the scorers of the placement exam. Upon interviewing the students, I came to see that Joyce and Jan had very different placement experiences despite the standardization of the university-wide exam and process of ESL designation. Likewise, our discussion of the placement process also revealed that Joyce and Jan had very distinct views of remediation.

For Joyce, the placement process was relatively straightforward: "I just took the placement test and that was it," she said. Initially, Joyce was placed in the lower level ESL writing course, passed it, and then took the upper level ESL writing course the following semester. She did not pass the university-wide writing exam at the end of the semester, so she was required to re-take the upper level ESL writing course. When asked how she felt about her placement into ESL writing courses, she responded, "Well, I don't feel bad because I know I did, um, my academic skills low, and that's why I end up being here, so I am not regret anything." Joyce saw her placement into non-credit-bearing courses as largely inevitable and appropriate, an initial position at the community college that would prepare her for mainstream writing courses down the line. When I initially asked her about her ESL designation, she said, "Well, I think. I think I need ESL classes cause I need to develop my skills first. Then go to an English class. Cause, I mean, I am far behind, I mean, compared to, you know, like student born here, so. You know, I believe that you have to develop your skills first and then go to English class. You know, it's long process to do it, still, you know." From the beginning of her first interview with me, Joyce positioned herself as separate from U.S.-born native-English-speaking students, claiming that this distinction also positioned her behind such students whose abilities as students she saw as advantages.

Jan, on the other hand, did not accept non-credit-bearing ESL courses as an inevitable part of her studies at the community college. She told me that when she first attended the college in 2007, she had been placed into ESL writing courses. However, when she returned to the college after spending time in the armed forces, she was given the option of taking ESL or NES writing courses when she registered for classes at the Veteran's Affairs Office on campus. She says that her adviser told her, "[Y]ou can be in a regular class if you want to or can be in [an ESL class]." Jan chose to enroll in an NES writing course because, she says of the ESL class, "it's all Chinese, all different countries' peoples." She sees this as a disadvantage because the students "still speak the same language anyway," referring to their first language as opposed to English. Jan wanted to practice her English, she claimed, and she saw the best place for doing this to be the NES writing class.

To a certain extent, it seemed as though Jan considered her enrollment in the NES writing class to be a statement of her view of language politics: "I don't like people to judge since I've [come to the United States] 10 years already," she said. For Jan, language development was personal and happened uniquely for each individual. She also pointed out that there may be people who have lived in the United States longer than she has but who may not have progressed as much as she has. Ultimately, her position on those who may judge her language abilities was, "I'm trying to get better not just sound like wanna hear your suggestion or your judgment. No, just get the hell out of my face." Jan's visceral frustration about being labeled as ESL and subsequently having her language abilities scrutinized, possibly by instructors, readers of placement exams, and even other students, seemed in part to have fueled her decision to enroll in an NES writing course upon returning to community college. For Jan, it did not seem to be the business of others to judge, or even suggest, what would be the best path for her in regard to language development. Instead, she found a way to do what she deemed best for herself. While Jan was able to find some agency in her placement in an NES writing class, she still felt stuck in her remedial coursework. Her remedial status on campus kept her from taking some of the classes she wanted to take, which, she said, "sucks" as she shrugged her shoulders and smirked.

Language Learning and Experiences in the Writing Classroom

As I interviewed Jan and Joyce about their experiences in their developmental writing class, patterns clearly emerged in the way in which each student conceived of her experiences. For Joyce, her conception of cultural identity was revealed in her discussions of the writing classroom both at the college and high-school level. Out of 130 utterances coded in my interviews with Joyce, 30 mentioned culture, her most frequent topic of discussion. In contrast, Jan conceptualized her experiences in the classroom through a discussion of language, her most frequent topic of discussion, which she mentioned in 13 out of 138 utterances.

Joyce's experiences in her family, in high school, and in her ESL writing class at the community college revolved around her cultural identity. When I asked her about the term *Generation 1.5* and whether she identified with the term, she told me that she had heard of the term before, but she thought of her younger sister as Generation 1.5 and herself as a first-generation immigrant. Joyce talked about how her sister "forgot her background" and speaks English at home, while Joyce and her parents speak Korean. Her sister is like a sponge, Joyce said, wanting to absorb American culture and "observe everything." She mentioned culture in relation to her family eight times in

our interviews, positioning herself as "traditional" like her parents, as they preserve Korean customs, while her sister is eager to adopt American customs.

Joyce spoke only briefly about her high school experiences, but she did mention that students who were labeled as ESL and identified as culturally different often faced discrimination. She said, "Even though they understand we are from different, like, we are from other countries, well some people might hate us because we don't share any similarity." She noted that this type of discrimination is not as common at the community college as it was at her high school and that she had met many students she identified as "native" students who have been supportive to her: "But yeah there's certain people who try to help me, I mean help us, and there are certain people that hate people who are, you know, from different countries. Yeah, so, well we have do deal with it. What can we do, you know?" She explained to me that this type of "racism" is part of human nature and something that ESL students as well as students from other countries have to learn to deal with.

Joyce's experiences in her ESL writing class were defined by cultural, rather than linguistic, experiences. She described how students in her ESL writing class often divided themselves along cultural or national lines. In her class, she said, a majority of the students were from China, and they tended to sit and work together. She even described her experience with her teacher in cultural terms. She commended her teacher for taking a contrastive rhetorical approach with students in class lessons and in essay feedback, as the teacher often took time to explain how different cultures have different conventions for academic writing. She said this was "very helpful" because "I think in, like, Korean culture, you know," she laughed. However, she also felt as though the teacher talked a lot with Chinese students about their "background" and what they should and should not do in their writing. She said, "I mean, you know, they share same idea, but other people don't. So [the others] don't know what they're talking about." She believed that the lack of cross-cultural interaction between students she had observed could be addressed through more group work, which is something she suggested to her instructor. She said, "I was like, oh you should do more group work cause we, as I said, you know, we are from different country and we share different cultures, so if we were doing group work, we might share different ideas and things like that." Because Joyce noticed the lack of intercultural socialization in her ESL writing class, I asked her whether she thought that this could be promoted through integrating ESL and NES writing classes at the community college. She responded by saying there are differences between these two groups of students:

> Well, they're born here, so they have like more um I guess they're they have like higher levels, I guess. Yeah, I think I should put it that way because they were born here and raised here, so they must have really good, you know, sentence structures or ideas, or they could understand more better.

While she initially saw cultural differences that position NES students at an advantage due to their familiarity with academic conventions, she also stated that cross-cultural interactions in the classroom could offer benefits to all students:

> I mean, I don't know, like I see mixed up like native and ESL students, then we might get better, you know. Cause they could help us, and we could help them. Cause we, obviously we have totally different cultures . . . and even though it's like we have to follow their ideas, still, though, they could learn from us. Yeah, so I think that it's, like, good to mix up classes.

Here again Joyce distinguished between her conception of native English speakers and ESL students along the lines of culture. Within the developmental writing classroom, she privileged NES students, whom she saw as possessing the ideas and skills necessary to succeed at college-level writing, despite their similar position in non-credit-bearing developmental courses within the Developmental Education Department; however, she also argued that ESL students, who represent a variety of different cultures, could help NES students. Again, this reaffirms her understanding of placement as an extension of cultural identity, as she claimed that students in NES classes were more acclimated to the written conventions of U.S. academic discourse while ESL students offered cross-cultural perspectives that could benefit NES students.

In contrast to Joyce, Jan described her writing classroom experiences in terms of language. She only mentioned culture six times in her interview, and when she talked about her cultural background, she did so in terms of language, talking to me about speaking multiple languages as a child: "So, my main language would be my own dialect and Mandarin, and if you want to you can learn Cantonese which I understand when they speak whatever, but I have a problem to talk, like to communicate with [Cantonese speakers]," she told me when I asked her to tell me about her cultural background. She explained to me that Mandarin was the language that she spoke at school,

but at home she spoke her own dialect. For Jan, her description of identity seems deeply rooted in the languages she speaks and the discourse communities to which she belongs. It appears that Jan grew up in a multilingual environment in which different languages were used for different purposes and thus *translanguaging*, drawing upon and across multiple discourses (Garcia, 2009), was a part of Jan's daily life since childhood. Jan's innate understanding of this concept, of thinking and communicating across multiple languages depending upon the communicative situation, informed her perspective on her position in the writing classroom.

Just as she described her cultural background in terms of language, she also described her experiences in the writing classroom in terms of language. She talked about staying quiet in her NES writing class and her desire to not interact with other students. While some of this may be because Jan is a bit older and more mature than some of her classmates and has little interest in their topics of conversation—or their tendency to chat to one another during class time—it also appears to be a strategy she designed to keep others from judging her linguistic abilities in English. Jan did not want others to pass judgment on the way she spoke English, so she didn't interact much with her classmates; however, she also believed that being in an NES class would help her to improve her English abilities because she would be surrounded by English speakers, in contrast to being in an ESL writing class in which, she argued, students often speak to one another in common languages other than English, which limits their exposure to the language.

Jan described her experiences in her high school ESL program to support this view. She told me her high school experience was one of linguistic segregation. Throughout high school, Jan was part of a bilingual program at her school. She explained that much of her curriculum was presented in Mandarin except in her English and ESL classes. She also described an ESL course that she took, which she claimed did not help her to progress in English because "we had a teacher who speak different language anyway, so you would . . . at some point if you don't know how to translate it into English, he will speak in Chinese for us to understand." She goes on to say, "But my question was, if you speak in Chinese then how are we gonna write [it] in English, and you're gonna say it in Chinese? Ah, that's an interesting question." She attributed her lack of exposure to English in high school as one of the reasons she was placed into developmental reading and writing courses at the community college. While she may have done well in subjects where material was presented in Mandarin, she struggled in her English class. "Since I got here," she told me, "I didn't know none of those ABCD whatever, so I had to start from scratch. Ok. That is the problem that keep me down there, so I didn't do well on my SAT too."

It was not until Jan was in the military, she claimed, that she began to learn and practice English. Jan often discussed her life beyond community college, telling me about how she was able to learn vernacular English by interacting with fellow soldiers while in the military. She also discussed her plans to attend boot camp after the end of the semester. Indeed, many of her formative literacy experiences were connected to her career pursuits and took place outside of the context of the college.

When I asked her thoughts in general about ESL programs, she responded in terms of language:

> I mean it's good for some people who just got into this country, but we live in this land. . . . You gotta survive in this country. That's not gonna make any sense if you keep talking in Mandarin or Cantonese. Or Korean or Japanese or whatever. That doesn't make any sense to me.

For Jan, there was a basic need for those who live in an English-speaking community to learn English in order to "survive" in that community. She explained this on purely linguistic terms, separating this need from issues of cultural assimilation. Based on her experiences in high school and in college, Jan seemed to believe that the ESL programs she had been part of have not facilitated such language acquisition successfully for her. This, of course, may account for her deciding on NES writing courses upon returning from her time in the military, a time during which she exclusively spoke in English to other speakers of English. This also reflects an important position that Jan takes in the writing placement process as she rejects the ESL label. While English is not the first language that Jan spoke, it is not the second, either. As a multilingual student who understands communicating across multiple language systems, Jan seemed, consciously or not, to reject the writing program's binaristic structure of "native" and "ESL" students, one that, as Garcia (2009) mentions, relies upon an assumption that most language users are monolingual and that one language—in this situation, English—is more important than other languages that a speaker may use. Ultimately, Jan declared her position as an English speaker—and challenged the adjective *native* by choosing to take NES writing classes.

When I asked her, then, what she thinks of integrating ESL and NES students in developmental writing classrooms, she said, "If you counted back it would be great for the students who are trying to learn, especially so

they can talk the other language." Upon reflection, Jan believed that more integration of students in ESL and NES programs would promote the use of English among students who were trying to learn.

Writing Process

In addition to their differing constructions of identity inside the writing (and ESL) classroom, Joyce and Jan also differed in terms of their discussion of writing process. As the students discussed the essays they were writing for their classes, their differing views on composing and revision emerged. For both students, such perspectives seemed to connect to their conceptions of the writing classroom as a space of cultural vs. linguistic exchange. Each student seemed to gravitate toward one of the domains in the university-wide writing exam scoring rubric used by scorers to assess exit exam essays—and also discussed with students in both ESL and NES developmental writing classes—in order to help students focus on different aspects of their writing and prepare to take the exit exam.

Joyce tended to focus on issues connected to the scoring domain involving idea development when talking about her writing. While she did at times discuss the need to work on grammar and sentence structure in her writing, she more frequently described her struggles with fully developing the ideas and arguments she presented in her writing. In her first interview, Joyce was not confident about how to approach idea development in her essay. Joyce described possessing a lack of confidence in developing ideas, which inhibits her abilities as a writer. She said that her teacher provided helpful feedback about her writing, encouraging her to quote, provide additional analysis, and connect ideas. She described this as "going deeper," which is one of the aspects of development that she identified as a struggle.

Joyce's struggles with development appear connected to her cultural construction of identity within the writing classroom. She tells me that her instructor's feedback was incredibly helpful because, she says, "I know that, like, I think in, like, Korean culture." Writing essays for Joyce seemed to be a struggle, in part, because she lacked the confidence to write in a way that was in line with what she saw as American culture. She also often drew upon examples to discuss in her writing that provided a cross-cultural comparison. For example, in one essay in which she discussed possibilities for engaging middle and high school students in the classroom, Joyce wrote a comparative essay in which she explored the similarities and differences between American and Korean systems of education.

For Jan, on the other hand, the writing process focused much more on grammar. During our first interview, Jan identified grammar—her sentence structure and punctuation—as the aspect of writing she most needed to work on. Working on grammar is something that Jan said she has always needed to do because it is "all jacked up" in her writing, and she implied that she has had this view of her writing since high school. She said that her teacher identified Jan's grammar errors early on in the semester, and she instructed Jan and other students in the class to work on grammar with a tutor in the learning center. Jan went to the learning center, as advised by her teacher, to work on grammar on a regular basis. Attending tutoring is something that Jan also did during high school to work on her grammar, and it is something that she associated with helping to improve her writing. She admitted that she often does not reread what she writes, and she needed an outside reader to help her with editing: "I can just do everything but when people read on it, yes you will find a lot of grammar on it. If I read on it, I will find something, too, but I'm just like, I can't," she told me, expressing her inability to identify errors in her own work. Jan's reliance upon the learning center was also reinforced by her teacher's feedback, which Jan said often pointed to grammatical errors and advised Jan to visit the learning center.

When Jan was assessing her own writing, she often focused on issues of language, in terms of grammar, spelling, and, to a lesser extent, sentence structure, as well as on the subject matter in the reading passage that she was asked to respond to in her essay. When I asked her what she did well in one of her revisions, she told me that she thought she did well on the grammar, which could have been a result of the emphasis put on language issues by her teacher and in her tutoring sessions. When I asked her whether she felt ready to take the university-wide writing exam at the end of the semester, she told me she was apprehensive because of her grammar issues.

How Students Fared

Both students took the standardized writing exam at the end of the spring semester, and neither received passing scores on the exam. While both Joyce and Jan progressed in the area they identified as important in our interviews—Joyce in development and Jan in reading comprehension and grammar—this, unfortunately, was not enough to allow them to exit remediation. In the end, both students were required to take additional remedial

writing courses. For Jan, this meant taking the same NES developmental writing course again in the fall. As Joyce was repeating her ESL developmental writing course for the second time, a college policy required her to register for a summer test-prep workshop rather than taking the ESL writing course again in the fall. During her last interview with me, Joyce was visibly upset about her position at the end of the semester. She was incredibly disappointed with herself that she had failed and worried that she would not be able to find a workshop that accommodated her schedule at her full-time job. While I did not talk to Jan after she received her score on the writing exam and grade in her NES developmental writing course, she told me in our last interview that her focus was on her summer boot camp and that she had no plans to take classes over the summer.

Emergent Identities

In order to understand the significance of Joyce and Jan's responses, I turn to identity theory to examine how these two students' descriptions of and experiences in their developmental writing class contributed to their larger conceptions of linguistic, cultural, and writerly identity. I wanted to explore why Jan focused on issues of language and her identity as multilingual when talking about her experiences in writing classes and how that connected to her self-directed placement in NES writing courses. Likewise, I also wanted to examine how Joyce's strong sense of cultural identity influenced and/or reflected her placement into ESL courses. Being able to answer such questions not only has the potential to support individual students in their developmental writing courses but also has the potential to influence revision of the programmatic structures of writing programs at a variety of types of educational institutions, but particularly at two-year colleges that house a large—and growing—population of linguistic minority students.

Static Identity

As Ortmeier-Hooper (2010) discusses in "The Shifting Nature of Identity: Social Identity, L2 Writers, and High School," institutional structures— be they placement processes, writing program designs, or departmental divisions—often require static identity categories in order to function. This is problematic, however, because all students, and multilingual students in particular, are engaged in an ongoing negotiation of multiple identities. Thus, to classify multilingual students into static categories that may reflect only one or two of their complex and shifting identities is to essentialize students in potentially dangerous ways. She states, "What is striking is how these 'official' institutionalized categories transcend the classroom and move into the corridors, affecting how individuals and peer groups categorize the social identities of their peers and themselves" (p. 11). In other words, when students are classified as ESL or NES in order to fit into a particular writing classroom—or in Ortmeier-Hooper's study a track in high school—the identity classification that students receive does not remain confined to the classroom; instead, it permeates students' lives outside of the classroom. Ultimately, it has the potential to influence how students are perceived by peers and instructors. It also shapes how students see themselves, as my interviews with Joyce and Jan demonstrate.

While Ortmeier-Hooper's study focuses on the effects of ESL tracking in high school, the interviews I present demonstrate how placement of Generation 1.5 students into ESL or NES courses continues to influence students' understanding of themselves as writers as well as students within a college community. As Donna LeCourt (2004) writes in *Identity Matters: Schooling the Student Body in Academic Discourse,* "discursive concepts of selfhood interact with material conditions to incite subjects to construct identity within culturally appropriate ways" (p. 98). Thus, the institutional structure of ESL and NES writing programs at many colleges, including the one that Jan and Joyce attend, offers to students a set of material conditions that project a clear division between native and non-native English speakers. Because students are placed, often with little agency, on one or another side of that dividing line, they are offered only limited possibilities for linguistic and cultural identity construction. While of course students have the agency to reject for themselves the identities that are being prescribed to them through such placement, as we see in the case of Jan, such divisions seem to marginalize and alienate students by only offering certain options to students.

Cohesive Identity

Donna LeCourt is an example of a scholar who urges compositionists to consider the important role that embodied experience plays in a person's understanding of self. LeCourt's goal is "to put the material, embodied experience of culture into constant conversation with our discursively influenced theories about identity and how

it is experienced/enacted" (LeCourt, 2004, p. 11). While LeCourt believes that identity is indeed multiple, she argues that the many identities a person possesses are experienced as a part of their authentic cohesive identity. "We may theorize identities as multiple," she claims, "but our students do not live only in our classrooms. Rather, any attempt to locate agency in difference will be continually affected by our students' interactions in culture as it is *lived* in material interactions with others that may not always be accounted for in our approaches" (p. 20; emphasis in original).

While LeCourt focuses her discussion of student writers on English-dominant graduate students as well as basic writers, I want to argue here that her discussions of student identity are extremely relevant to linguistic minority students as well. For example, we may apply the following concept to an analysis of Jan and Joyce: "While culture may offer a variety of conflicting positions, it also constructs desires for certain modes of being that can make only certain 'choices' for identity construction seem viable ones" (p. 99). Students such as Jan and Joyce work within the identity frameworks of their lived experience to create identities for themselves. They explored their positions within ESL or NES developmental writing to make sense of their marginalized positions as remedial students in non-credit-bearing courses. Indeed, both students were able to construct a cohesive identity for themselves given the viable choices, in LeCourt's terms, that were available to them within the developmental writing program at their community college. This may have given them a certain level of autonomy in the generation of such identities, as we see in the cases of both women as they articulated respective linguistic and cultural identities in their interviews in a way that captured the complexities of their lives. However, the material conditions of these students' lived realities—the programmatic structure imposed upon them in the placement process and in the division of ESL and NES writing course options—required them to choose from static and essentialized linguistic identities.

Conclusion

Ultimately, both students articulated their identities as writers in a way that reflected their linguistic, cultural, and educational experiences. Both students were able to conceive of a cohesive identity—in one case linguistic and in the other case cultural—that aligned with their lived realities of placement, their experiences in the writing classroom, and their understanding of their writing process. However, despite being able to construct an identity that aligned with their placement as NES or ESL, this was not enough to ensure their exit from remediation by the end of the semester. Nor could their articulation of a complex identity ameliorate the alienation that these students felt within the structure of the program.

While an investigation of identity construction in this situation by no means reveals a solution to placement processes or even illuminates what students might have needed to pass their exit exam, it does affirm that the complexities of a growing and diversifying student body are not truly reflected in the programmatic structures of ESL and NES developmental writing that exists at many community colleges. While the students I interviewed were able to make sense of their placement and experiences in their writing classrooms, and while they were even able to conceive of an identity that aligned with this placement, they both grappled with the ESL designation they received first in high school and then in college. They both yearned for more inclusiveness and cross-cultural interaction among students and viewed that as something that could benefit them. While there are no guarantees that such innovations would have ensured the students' passing on a standardized exam, this does reveal the importance of rethinking our placement processes in order to better support both students' writing practices as well as their complex multicultural and translingual experiences. It seemed, to a certain extent, that Jan was able to create more of a space for herself as opposed to Joyce, who seemed isolated by her ESL status. Joyce seemed to internalize her status as ESL more than Jan, who possessed more agency in her position on campus. Perhaps providing students with more agency in the placement process at the community-college level, and ensuring that we promote writing classrooms, ESL and NES alike, as spaces for cross-cultural interaction and identity exploration, could be a start.

Acknowledgements

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. In C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Eds.), V. W. McGee (Trans.) Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Benesch, S. (2008). "Generation 1.5" and its discourses of partiality: A critical analysis. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 7*(3–4), 294–311.

Blumenthal, A. J. (2002). English as a second language at the community college: An exploration of context and concerns. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *45*, 117.

Bunch, G. C., & Endris, A. K. (2012). Navigating "open access" community colleges: Matriculation policies and practices for U.S.-educated linguistic minority students. In Y. Kanno & L. Harklau (Eds.), *Linguistic minority students go to college*: *Preparation, access, and persistence* (pp. 163–183). New York, NY: Routledge, 163–183.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). Toward a writing pedagogy of shuttling between languages: Learning from multilingual writers. *College English, 68*(6), 589–604.

Cohen, J. (2014). Imaginary community of the mainstream classroom: Adolescent immigrants' perspectives. *Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education, 44*(2), 265–280.

Crusan, D. (2002). An assessment of ESL writing placement assessment. *Assessing Writing, 8*(1), 17.

di Gennaro, K. (2013). How different are they? A comparison of generation 1.5 and international L2 learners' writing ability. *Assessing Writing, 18*(2), 154–172.

Doolan, S. M., & Miller, D. (2012). Generation 1.5 written error patterns: A comparative study. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 21*(1), 1–22.

Harklau, L. (2000). From the "good kids" to the "worst": Representations of English language learners across educational settings. *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(1), 35–67.

Horner, B., & Lu, M. (2013). Translingual literacy, language difference, and matters of agency. *College English, 75*(6), 582–607.

Garcia, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Kanno, Y., & and Harklau, L. (Eds.). (2012). *Linguistic minority students go to college*: *Preparation, access, and persistence.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Kobayashi, H., & Rinnert, C. (2013). L1/L2/L3 Writing development: Longitudinal case study of a Japanese multicompetent writer. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 22*(1), 4–33.

LeCourt, D. (2004). *Identity matters: Schooling the student body in academic discourse.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Leki, I. (2007). *Undergraduates in a second language: Challenges and complexities of academic literacy development.* New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group.

Matsuda, P. K., & Matsuda, A. (2009). The erasure of resident ESL writers. In M. Roberge, M. Siegal, & L. Harklau (Eds.). *Generation 1.5 in college composition* (pp. 50–64). New York, NY: Routledge.

Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (2013). *Factbook*. New York: **** Community College.

Ortmeier-Hooper, C. (2008). English may be my second language, but I'm not 'ESL.' *College Composition and Communication, 59*(3), 389–419.

Ortmeier-Hooper, C. (2010). The shifting nature of identity: Social identity, L2 writers, and high school. In M. Cox, J. Jordan, C. Ortmeier-Hoope, & G. Gray Schwartz (Eds.). *Reinventing identities in second language writing* (pp. 5–28). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Razfar, A., & Simon, J. (2011). Course-taking patterns of Latino ESL students: Mobility and mainstreaming in urban community colleges in the U.S. *TESOL Quarterly: A Journal for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and of Standard English As a Second Dialect, 45*(4), 595–627.

Reid, J. M. (1997). Which non-native speaker? Differences between international students and U.S. resident (language minority students). *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, *70*(17).

Shapiro, S. (2011). Stuck in the remedial rut: Confronting resistance to ESL curriculum reform. *Journal of Basic Writing (CUNY), 30*(2), 24–52.

Soliday, M. (2002). *The politics of remediation: Institutional and student needs in higher education*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Stanley, J. (2010). *The rhetoric of remediation: Negotiating entitlement and access to higher education*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Notes

[1]Here I refer to both developmental and remedial writing courses to denote the non-credit-bearing courses that students who do not pass our university's placement exam are required to take before they are deemed ready for college-level—and credit-bearing—writing courses offered through the English Department. While I refer to *developmental* and *remedial* interchangeably here, both terms are fraught for educators of both ESL and NES students. As scholars such as Mary Soliday (2002) and Jane Stanley (2010) have argued, the term *remedial* has been used throughout the 20th century to stratify students into those who are deemed college material and those who need to hone basic skills of literacy before being fully admitted to college. Oftentimes, the researchers note, the political, racial, and fiscal influences in this process were not acknowledged. As Shawna Shapiro (2011) argues, the idea that students who are not deemed college ready need to "fix" their errors in writing and speech extends to many ESL programs that use a remediation model. While the term *developmental* may replace the term *remedial* in order to suggest that academic literacy is an ongoing, holistic process in both first and second languages, the programmatic structure of remediation may linger in the design of both NES and ESL writing programs. Such a structure of remediation is exemplified in programs that hold students in non-credit courses until they can pass a standardized exam.

[2]Names of participants and academic departments have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the research subjects.

_____

*Corresponding author: jmaloy@qcc.cuny.edu