

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Language Ideologies in ESL Class and International Students' Critical Language Awareness*

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Kim, Jung Sook. 2020. A critical analysis of language ideologies in ESL class and international students' critical language awareness. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 20, 801–828. Although diversity is promoted on campuses, international students in higher education have been negatively perceived in terms of their cultural and linguistic difference. The ambivalence of diversity discourse merits a more nuanced exploration of ideologies that entail various forms of discrimination and inequality. Informed by critical discourse studies, this article investigates the manifestation of raciolinguistic ideologies in an English as a second language classroom at a university and illuminates how those ideologies influence international students' identities. The findings of this study relate to moments of discursive conflict involving the use of a discursive device, *language disclaimer*. The language disclaimer represents a critical juncture at which the subtle workings of raciolinguistic ideologies are made visible by the international students' critical language awareness of those ideologies. This article highlights the students' critical reflexivity and the discursive strategies they deployed for identity negotiation in opposition to dominant ideologies. In doing so, it aims to challenge and change the raciolinguistic ideologies permeating all layers of society.

Keywords: language ideologies, critical language awareness, critical discourse analysis, language disclaimer, identity negotiation

1. Introduction

Multilingualism and multiculturalism have been celebrated as rich cultural and linguistic resources in increasingly globalized societies. However, a strong tendency to homogenize differences in society and to consider diversity as a barrier to social cohesion can also be

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observed. In effect, while acknowledging cultural and linguistic diversity as added value, both nationalist language ideology and normative pedagogical practice tend to consequently suppress linguistic diversity in educational settings (Hornberger and Johnson 2007). The ambivalent diversity discourses relate to an interesting conundrum about how international students are to be represented in higher education (HE). On the one hand, there is a celebratory discourse of diversity, but on the other hand there is a long-standing negative perception of international students on American campuses. The negative attitudes toward international students are often attributed to the students' proficiency in English, cultural difference, and pedagogical experience in American HE. In general, an appropriate degree of proficiency in English and cultural fluency is assumed as a necessity for international students to be successful in their new cultural environment. However, the linguistic necessity should neither be necessarily taken for granted, nor should it override other complex and significant aspects of language learning, particularly given the ideological baggage of the English language (Pennycook 2001, Shohamy 2014).

The perceived negative attitudes toward international students may not be merely due to their linguistic and cultural differences. Rubin's early study (1992) demonstrates well that non-language factors, such as ethnicity and race, affected U.S. undergraduates' reactions to international students. Lippi-Green (1987) scrutinizes American attitudes towards English with an accent, discussing the ways in which accent-based discrimination operates to reinforce and perpetuate social inequality. Flores and Rosa (2015) assert that the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations may be perceived in racialized ways by White 'listening subjects.' In the same vein, Shohamy (2014) pointedly notes the ideological workings of high-stakes English language assessment which concentrates on native speaker standards and plays a role of a gatekeeper as part of the social selection mechanism. As such, those linguistic discriminations and negative language attitudes relate more to the social structure and power relation than to actual linguistic or cultural difference.

In fact, language supporting programs provided for international students have been criticized in that their pedagogical practices are remedial in nature and undergirded by a deficit language ideology of ESL learners (Flores and Rosa 2015, Kim 2017). The primary concern of existing approaches to international students has been with how to improve the effectiveness of the language programs and to generalize standardized models as solutions for '*the international student problem*' (Ashavskaya 2015, Gorsuch 2012, LeGros and Faez 2012). As international students' proficiency in English and foreign accents are often alleged to cause intercultural tensions on campus, the students are likely to be placed in

ESL programs that primarily focus on accent reduction and pronunciation drill. In contradiction to their seemingly supportive purpose, in effect, ESL classrooms are conventionally assumed to be a space of conformity and assimilation (Olivo 2003) in which the international students' linguistic and cultural differences are treated as deviations or deficits in relation to established American cultural and linguistic norms. Preece (2016, p. 377) argues that such institutional language prejudice, whereby linguistic and cultural diversity is considered a problem to be fixed rather than an asset, results in "the ascription of a remedial English language learner identity and the erasure of the participants' multilingual capital in the institution".

The ambivalence of diversity discourses is evidence of the subtle workings of raciolinguistic ideologies entailing varied, complex forms of discrimination and inequality. This is a crucial issue which merits a more nuanced critical exploration. Still, the previous studies tend to focus on the matter of perception and attitude toward international students and how to improve the international students' English proficiency. What is absent or otherwise is less attended to in the existing research is the particularity of the ideological workings of discourse in language class in which international students are likely to encounter the dominant discourses about themselves and may exercise their agency and voice to negotiate their own identities. Thus, in line with the critical scholarly perspective that concerns the complexity and ideological significance of language learning, this study sets out to explore particularities of how ideological aspects of discourse are practiced and influence international students' identity construction. More specifically, this study draws on critical discourse studies to investigate how raciolinguistic ideologies have influenced international students' identities in a spoken English classroom at a university, U.S. The research questions that guided the study are as follows:

1. How are linguistic ideologies practiced in ESL class provided for international students?
2. How do the international students experience such ideologies in terms of their identity negotiation?

This article looks into conflicts between differing ideologies that arose in an ESL class for the international students particularly with regard to *a language disclaimer*. It examines the ramifications of the language disclaimer for the students' positionality, how the students reacted to the resulting discursive positions, and how they exercised their agency to challenge those positions. The article highlights the international students' critical language

awareness, which enabled them to recognize raciolinguistic ideologies and develop their own discursive strategies for identity negotiation. In doing so, it aims to contribute to challenging raciolinguistic ideologies that permeate all layers of society.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Raciolinguistic Ideologies

Language ideologies often intersect with exclusive and repressive ideologies. As outright racism is not acceptable in public domains, racial terms have been replaced with euphemistic terms such as cultural or linguistic difference. The euphemism is based on a color-blind liberal stance that promotes equality, but also marks Others and their cultural practices as too foreign or alien to accept them as the members of the majority community (Blackledge 2005). Shuck (2006) astutely contends that the intersection of language, race, and nationality work recursively to racialize nonnative English speakers in the U.S. In light of the intersectionality of language and race, Subtirelu (2017) examined the language ideology of nativeness by analyzing a sample of U.S. students' evaluations of their Asian instructors. Despite the widespread societal rejection of the ideology of nativeness (Holliday 2017, Jenkins 1998), Subtirelu (2017) found out that the dominant language ideology was apparent in the students' evaluation of their international instructors, subtly reproducing the ideological construction of nonnative English speakers as incomprehensible Others. Flores and Rosa (2015) critique the notions of intelligibility and appropriateness that focus solely on speaking subjects in communication, classing them as "raciolinguistic ideologies." Kubota and Fujimoto (2013) argue that native-speakerness is a proxy for Whiteness, which manifests racial exclusion and othering in complex ways. Linguistic and cultural intolerance resembles racism insofar as it fails to consider and disguise the underlying power relations that legitimate discrimination against the dominated, resulting in linguisticism (Blackledge 2005). This implicit linguisticism is evident in the categorization and representation of international students in higher education through various othering strategies (Kim 2020a). Given the hegemonic nature of raciolinguistic ideology (Flores and Rosa 2015, Vessey 2015, Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), a nuanced critical understanding is needed to reveal its subtle workings and thus to implement changes for greater equality and justice.

2.2 Critical Multiculturalism and Critical Language Awareness

There has been a growing concern with how much multilingualism and multiculturalism have been appreciated in practice not in any restrictive ways. From various critical perspectives, some international scholars working in U.S. colleges and universities have called for greater focus on the pedagogy of cultural wealth when addressing the problematic discourses relating to international students on campuses (Chen 2014, Mutua 2014, Yep 2014). Reflecting on her own experience of being racialized as an Asian in the U.S., Chen (2014) contends that not only international students, but also international scholars and researchers are subjected to negative stereotyping, everyday micro-inequalities, and, in particular, a deficit model that renders invisible the complexity of their identity positions. Chiang (2016) also points out that international teaching assistants' professional identity and expertise has been conflated with the linguistic identity as an English language learner. In recognition of the problems of the remedial ESL pedagogy and the consideration of ideological significance for learners, there have been scholarly efforts among researchers and practitioners to shift the long-standing deficit discourse on English language learner toward more empowering discourse (e.g., Chiang 2019, Kang and Moran 2019). Among many insightful suggestions, it is particularly worth noting interactional approaches to and intercultural perspectives on international student issues which underscore the importance of mutuality and reflexivity. For instance, Kang and Moran (2019) show how structured inter-group interventions can be utilized to alleviate the tensions between American undergraduate students and international teaching assistants. Drawing on Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954), the authors conduct inter-group contact activity research that has constantly resulted in improved attitudes towards the internationals. Chiang's (2019) study, which is about international teaching assistants' challenges in their instructional interactions with U.S. students, highlights the constitutive function of discourse through interaction and reflexivity of participants in intercultural contexts. The author argues for the necessity of situating relevant studies in the large context of intercultural education.

Critical scholarship underscores significance of critical language awareness and the agency of the linguistically minoritized in challenging the dominant ideologies (Achugar 2015, Chun 2016, Mosley Wetzel and Rodgers 2015). Critical language awareness can be seen as emerging from the lived experiences of those who are marginalized due to linguistic and cultural difference. It enables the minoritized to negotiate their own identities by exerting their agency. Some scholars, from their own lived experience of being

marginalized in terms of race, class and gender, suggest the marginality and the power of self-disclosure can be tapped into as pedagogical practice empowering the minoritized (Kerschbaum 2014, Kubota 2002, Mortha and Varshese 2018). Kubota (2002), for instance, as a woman faculty and woman of color, argues for the marginality as an asset for diversity, suggesting the previously marginalized identity can be utilized for counterhegemonic pedagogy. In this way, those scholars argue, an identity previously marginalized or largely seen as deficit becomes repositioned as a form of invaluable resources to empower both instructors and students. The clash between differing ideologies is likely to be apparent in intercultural contexts, since people from diverse backgrounds bring with them the different norms and expectations of their own culture. Individuals in such a transnational contact zone may be forced to become aware of divergent ideologies, negotiate their identities with heightened intercultural sensitivity, and challenge essentialist approaches to diversity. In the case of international students crossing linguistic and cultural borders, their intercultural sensitivity may enable them to develop keen insights into how they can negotiate their identities among differing ideologies relating to power (Kim 2017, Kim and Richardson 2018). Through critical reflection upon power issues in discourse, the transnationals may explore possible ways to take action in response to various situations and perform multiple identities in different contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The current study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the analytical framework to explore the linkages between local, institutional and societal level of discourse (Fairclough 1995, 2003) with respect to language ideologies and identity negotiation. Fairclough's (1992) notion of *crucibles*, which refer to points of discursive conflict, is used to select the samples of discourse for detailed analysis. In certain social contexts, particular discursive practices are used, and such practices may naturalize social relations in terms of power and domination. For instance, "Classroom teaching articulates together particular ways of using language . . . with particular forms of action and interaction, the social relations and persons of the classroom, and structuring and use of classroom space" (Rodgers 2011, p. 121). At some moments, then, the naturalized dominant discursive practices may be

disrupted by differing or possibly opposing practices, thereby entailing tension and potential or active conflict. Fairclough (1992) conceptualizes such moments of tension or crisis in discourse practices as “cruces”. These cruces may imply that *things are changing*. Thus, instances of cruces can be useful as entry points for the investigation, analysis, and critique of discourse practice to identify “shifts in hegemonic articulation” (Rodgers 2011, p. 76). In the present study, the discursive conflict relates to the use of a *language disclaimer* in spoken English classes and the struggle for identity negotiation against dominant ideologies that emerged in the cruces points. These points serve as a focus for examining how different language ideologies manifested in the ESL classroom and how they affected the identity negotiation of the participants. The material presented in this article is part of a larger ethnographic study on language ideologies and international students' identity that was conducted in ESL classrooms at a university in the U.S. The data corpus for this study consisted of relevant classroom discourse events, descriptions of interactions from field notes, interview transcripts, and documents.

As for my positionality, I take on an explicit critical perspective in doing this study on language ideology and identity since the study is informed by critical discourse studies to investigate ideological effects of discourse particularly entailing social inequality. Besides, I adopt a reflexive approach and recognize that “educational research cannot be value-free” (Greenbank 2003). While researchers' assumption or bias is not necessarily viewed as problematic in qualitative social research (Hatch, 2002, Maxwell 2012), particularly, in critical discourse studies (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), I strive to continually engage in reflexivity about the influence of my own assumptions and beliefs on the research development and the interpretation of data in an effort to avoid inadvertently reifying the data, thereby maintaining the complexity of the social phenomenon under investigation.

3.2 Context of the Research

As of the time of data collection, according to an annual enrollment report released by the university, international students made up about 10.7% of the student body in that semester and about 86% of them came from Asian countries. According to the mission statement on the university's website, the establishment of a spoken English program (SEP) was required by the Council of Deans mandate and the state law. A state bill was enacted in 1985 to ensure the English oral proficiency of “all teaching assistants (TAs)” working in state-supported colleges and universities. The SEP drew on the bill in stating that the mandate required the screening and training of international teaching assistants

whose first language was not English. Accordingly, prospective international TAs at the university were required to take an oral proficiency test to be certified to teach. If they failed the test, they would be placed in the SEP.

The participants of the current study were international students in an SEP course. There were fourteen students in the class, and all were from Asian countries. The participants said that they thought the label *international students*, in effect, were equated to Asian students. This implies that the students' ethnic origins were conflated with the category of *international*. Among the students in the class, three focal participants, Leo, Kun, and Han (all names in this article are pseudonyms), are highlighted in this article. Unlike the other students mostly complying with the dominant discourse practices taking place in the language class, those three students were frequently observed to explicitly or implicitly challenge hegemonic practices, some details of which will be illustrated in the subsequent analysis of the data. Leo was a doctoral student from Taiwan, majoring in industrial engineering. He had prior teaching experience as a TA in a university in the southwest, where he had received his masters' degree. Leo had been placed in the SEP class because his oral English proficiency test score was a little short of the cut-off point. Leo had initially resisted being placed in the SEP and tried to negotiate with the ESL program coordinator. However, the university's rigid language policy left no room for such resistance, contestation, or self-positioning on the part of the international student. Kun, another focal student, was from mainland China. He was in the first year of his Ph.D. in economics after finishing his master's degree at a different university in the US. He had earned a fellowship for that academic year but was required to pass a mock teaching test to be qualified for teaching assistantship in the following year. Finally, Han, a Ph.D. student in mathematics, was from China. He had received his bachelor's degree in engineering in China, and his master's degree in mathematics from a different university in the US. Whereas Leo was explicitly critical of his experience of the placement test and the SEP, both Kun and Han conceded, albeit unwillingly, that it was simply the way a policy worked, saying "*policy is policy*".

When I visited the classroom for the first observation at the beginning of the semester, students were engaged in a discussion about issues facing international TAs after reading an old news article on the conflict between foreign TAs and American undergraduates. The news article described the conflict as a "*culture shock*", and quoted U.S. undergraduates who complained about their foreign TAs, attributing the issues to the foreign TAs' English language proficiency and cultural differences. The class discussion was framed within the dichotomous cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980), which have been criticized for their

stereotyping of certain cultures and people (McSweeney 2002). The international students' racial identities were discursively constructed through the discussion of differences between American culture and the cultures of origin of the students. Cultural differences regarding views of knowledge and the relationship between teachers and students were compared, contrasted, and evaluated. Such contrastive discussions often resulted in the construction of the academic culture of international TAs from Asian countries as non-democratic and irrational, education as knowledge transmission, teachers as authoritarians, and students as passive learners. The corresponding American culture and classroom environment were idealized as democratic and rational, characterized by the co-construction of knowledge and the active participation of students in class. The contrastive approach appeared to reproduce and reinforce an essentialist understanding of Others and their culture, thereby perpetuating inequality along a rigid boundary line between *Us* and *Them*.

In the SEP class, accent reduction and correct pronunciation drills were observed as routine instructional practices. A great deal of class time, sometimes even more than half a session, was spent on rule learning followed by long pronunciation drills. Students were primarily engaged in class activities involving mechanical pronunciation drills with long lists of words and dictation in decontextualized situations. As illustrated above, it was also commonplace for discussions of culture to be structured into the dichotomy of American culture and the cultures of origin of the international students. What's more, despite the increasing percentage of international students in the whole student body at this university, it was evident from the class observations that, in the course material and classroom discourse, American undergraduate students were homogenized and essentialized as native speakers of English whereas an increasing number of international students were ignored and marginalized. The discursive strategy of foregrounding cultural differences and marginalizing the sociolinguistic Others could be seen as an instance of new racism (Barker 1981), which involves the description of Others in cultural terms instead of explicitly racial terms. In what follows, I shall examine in detail how those raciolinguistic ideologies became apparent through a language disclaimer and how the international students experienced and responded to those ideologies.

4. Findings

4.1 Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Othering

Cruces points relating to a language disclaimer formed the starting point for the analysis of this study, since it was at the moments that salient disfluencies were observed and the dissonance between differing ideologies manifested. The language disclaimer was one of the discursive devices proffered in the English language class to help international TAs avoid the perceived complaint and conflict when they teach U.S. undergraduates. In contradiction to its seemingly well-meaning purpose, however, the language disclaimer appeared to be undergirded by raciolinguistic ideologies of native-speaker superiority and Otherness. The following excerpt is from the description of the language disclaimer in the course materials.

Make a “language disclaimer”:

By explicitly acknowledging that you’re a non-native speaker, you can lower any perceived “barrier” with your students. This is an excellent way for you to begin to establish rapport with your students by declaring your commitment to them and their success in the course, while also giving them some of the responsibility for successful communication. You want them to feel comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification when they need it.

(From the teaching material of The First Day of Class SELF-INTRODUCTION)

The word “*barrier*” is emphasized on the surface by the double quotation mark, and thereby the text itself takes a position to directly report the supposedly prevalent discourse about the “*barrier*” surrounding a non-native speaker. The initial clause of the text urges international TAs to acknowledge that they are *nonnative speakers*, but it does not specify of which language the international student may be a nonnative speaker. Even when not mentioned at all, it is presupposed that English is *The* language. The presupposition implies the ideological exclusion of the possibilities that the international TAs are also native speakers of their own mother tongue. In the subsequent sentences, the barrier becomes associated with the establishment of rapport and successful communication with the U.S. students. It could be inferred from the text that an international TA’s status as a nonnative speaker of English is the cause of the perceived barrier since nonnative-

speakerness indexes ethnolinguistic differences and foreignness. What is at issue here is not just the TAs' English proficiency, but the fact that they are *Others* and, as such, are different from *Us*. With their nonnative–speakerness foregrounded, the international TAs are represented as English language learners, while their other possible identities, such as identities as instructors, novice researchers with expertise, or transnational multilinguals, come to get backgrounded. Such a discursive construction of international TAs as nonnative speakers indicates that the international students' identity is already politicized as well as racialized.

The language disclaimer seemingly invokes an egalitarian ideology, in particular, an egalitarian relationship between an instructor and students. However, a closer analysis of the text reveals that the disclaimer strategy is based upon a non=egalitarian ideology. By making the language disclaimer, international TAs are eventually forced to highlight their ethnolinguistic differences by verbalizing the fact that they are not native speakers of English. By that means, the relationship of the international TAs and their U.S. students (i.e., the relationship between the instructor and the students) is framed as a power relation between a nonnative speaker and native speakers of English. This asymmetrical power relation, in turn, would govern the interactions between the international instructors and their U.S. students by controlling the discursive features of their interactions. More details of such a dynamic tension of the power struggle will be illustrated later on in terms of the discursive strategies used by the participants in a mock teaching.

In presenting its case, the text of the language disclaimer above takes on a topos of advantage and usefulness (Reisigl and Wodak 2001), arguing that “something should be done because it would be better for the minority groups” (Blackledge 2005, p. 68). It foregrounds the advantages for international TAs by presenting the language disclaimer as an *excellent* discursive move for establishing a rapport and successfully communicating with U.S. students. The desirability of using a language disclaimer is presupposed by the evaluative adjective *excellent*. Although the text concedes the mutuality for successful communication, the ultimate responsibility is placed upon international TAs. This point is substantiated by the discursive features used to represent the international TAs in the text. In the final sentence, for instance, international TAs are topicalized by being placed in the subject position and being referred to with the second–person pronoun *you*. Even when expressed in the form of a declarative statement, the sentence actually functions as an imperative that commands the international TAs to take responsibility for their communication with American students. The statement can be seen as a form of prescription typically realized in a positive imperative clause (Fairclough 2003), which

demands what is stated in the text and, in this case, specifies the ways in which international TAs should interact with U.S. students.

4.2 Discursive Strategies for Identity Negotiation

The language disclaimer appeared to ideologically function to disempower the international students in the ESL class. The students were implicitly or explicitly aware of the ideological workings of the language disclaimer, which would make them less powerful in relation to U.S. undergraduates. The focal participants in this study said that such a language disclaimer would not be in their interest and would hamper their positive image construction. It was particularly interesting not only that the nature of the ideologies hidden in the disclaimer was revealed through the participants' critical language awareness, but also that the ideologically controlled relation was resisted and challenged by the international students themselves. The instances described below illustrate how the international students responded to the use of a language disclaimer in their mock teaching practice in the spoken English course. The instances turned out to be cruxes points (Fairclough 1992), at which the international students demonstrated their agency and negotiation strategies against the dominant power.

The international students were required to practice their spoken English and teaching skills through a mock teaching assignment. Despite the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of the student body at the university, the potential undergraduates to whom the international TAs would provide the instruction were assumed to be homogeneous in terms of their culture and language, namely native speakers of English. The international TAs were asked to explicitly tell their American students, at the very beginning of the lesson, where they were from and that they were not a native speaker of English, thereby encouraging the American students to ask for clarification when needed. Following is a typical form of the language disclaimer suggested in the English language class (see the appendix for the transcription notation).

Shuo: I am a Ph.D. graduate student in the Department of Chemistry. And **I am from China**. And (0.2) as you know, **I am not a native speaker**. So, **if you have any trouble understanding me**, please feel free to interrupt me.

(From a microteaching session)

In response to the ideologies inherent in the disclaimer, the participants deployed various discursive strategies, including jokes, delays, avoidance, and hedging of their commitment and truth claims through the use of a variety of modalities. Apparent disfluencies were noted in their speech, including hedges, fillers, and pauses. Hesitation, in particular, stood out as a discursive feature, which suggested the international TAs' discomfort with the language disclaimer. In Shuo's language disclaimer above, for instance, a degree of hesitation is evident in the pause and the filler prior to acknowledging him as a nonnative speaker (of English).

Han's language disclaimer below was also peppered with various hedges (*may, a little bit, umm*) and the elongated *so*. The way in which Han identified himself was particularly intriguing:

Han: You know, **I am a Mandarin speaker. So::** my English **may** be **a little bit** different from yours. **So::** if you have any questions, **umm, (0.2)** about understanding what I am saying about, you can just feel free to interrupt me and ask me questions.

(From a microteaching session)

In contrast to the case of Shuo, who identified himself as a *nonnative speaker*, thereby conforming to the suggested language disclaimer, Han represented himself as a *Mandarin speaker*. In other words, he positioned himself as a speaker of a different language than English. By that means, Han framed his interactional relation with American students as a parallel power relation between English language speakers and a speaker of another language, Mandarin, rather than as the asymmetrical power relation between native English speakers and a nonnative English speaker invoked by the typical language disclaimer. This identification as a Mandarin speaker appeared to intersect with Han's social identity, which was informed by the complex sociopolitical and historical situations of China, particularly with respect to its national language ideology and language policy. When asked in an interview later the reason he had identified himself as a Mandarin speaker, Han said that *there was no difference between "I am a Mandarin speaker" and "I am from China"*, implying the nationalist language ideology that equates one nation–state with one language. Han was from a province in China and said that he felt most comfortable with the provincial "*dialect*" (in Han's own term) when interacting with his family at home. He had been educated through the official language, Mandarin, and communicated in the language with his wife, who came from a different province in China. Han's own identification as a

Mandarin speaker, therefore, could be explained with reference to the heterogeneous resources informing Han's identity formation, which cannot be accounted for wholly by the imposed *nonnative English speaker* identity. By identifying himself as a Mandarin speaker in the ideological space of the ESL class, Han seemed to resist being labelled as a *non-native speaker*.

Joke was also noted as a discursive strategy employed by the international students in response to the ideologies embedded in the language disclaimer. In the excerpt below, for instance, Kun made a joke about the English accent of the region where he had stayed for a while before coming to that university.

Kun: I am from China. Before coming to this university, I got my master's degree in Wisconsin–Madison. You know, people from Wisconsin usually have a heavy accent.

The Instructor: ((laugh out loud))

Kun: ((laughing)) so, if you have trouble understanding me, feel free to stop me and ask a question.

(From a microteaching session)

It was the instructor who first recognized the joke and burst out laughing. The laughter functioned to diffuse the potential tension that might be engendered by conflicting ideologies (Norrick and Spitz 2008). Kun's joke on the regional English accent and the instructor's seemingly conceding laughter enabled Kun to avoid mentioning his English, which otherwise would have foregrounded his nonnative–speakerness. That is, the joke enabled Kun to avoid attributing the problem of communication solely to the fact that he was a nonnative English speaker. Kun's discursive move of joking and eliciting laughter denoted his high level of critical language awareness of ideologies relevant to language varieties and differing English language accents across the States.

In a follow-up interview, Kun challenged the necessity of the use of a language disclaimer. As shown in the excerpt below, the multiple uses of the lower-degree modality (*maybe*) were indicative of Kun's hesitancy and uncertainty (*I don't know*) about the disclaimer, which, in effect, would have discursively highlighted his foreignness.

Actually, I haven't met TAs in my classes who had claimed that thing on the first day. So, **I don't know** because nowadays most of TAs are international students. So, **students may be used to these things**. So, they have their expectations for the TAs.

So (0.2), **maybe**, I will make language disclaimer on the first day, **maybe, not necessary. Maybe, I don't know.**

(From an interview with Kun)

Kun's joke about the regional English accent could be interpreted as his agentive work in response to the imposed identity of a *nonnative speaker of English* and *international TA* covertly conveyed through the disclaimer. This implicit exercise of agency to resist raciolinguistic ideologies and imposed identity was more apparently observed in Leo's distinctive reaction to the use of the language disclaimer, which will be detailed in what follows.

Unlike the other international students in the English language class, who mostly began their mock teaching with the language disclaimer, Leo offered no disclaimer about his English at the beginning of the lesson. Instead, he tried to highlight his educational background and research interests as a Ph.D. student. In so doing, Leo attempted to represent himself as a professional with credentials and expertise, who would be qualified enough to teach American undergraduates. Throughout the microteaching, Leo identified himself as an expert with knowledge and authority in his field, instead of positioning himself simply as an international TA, which might be associated with a lack of power in his relationship with U.S. undergraduate students.

Leo: Hi, welcome to ISE 3200. My name is Leo. This course is taught by Dr. SG. And She is travelling right now. My job today is to go over the syllabus. First, let me talk a little bit about myself. I'm originally from Taiwan. I got my bachelor's degree in business there. I got my master's degree in Industrial Engineering from a university in the US. Now I am a Ph.D. student in, also, in Industrial Engineering. I am actually Dr. SG.'s student.

[...] For homework, Dr. SG, she has a very strict policy. So, let's take a look. you have to always work on your own before you consult other references.

If you are going to do[

The instructor: ((**placing his index finger behind his ear**)) **[I don't get that. I have to work on my own before what?**

Leo: ((**turning to the instructor**)) **before you consult other references.**

The instructor: Uh.

Leo: Is that clear?

The instructor: Yeah.

Leo: OK. If you work with your friends or wanna work in a group, always decide (? ?)
[...] ((looking at paper)) There will be some announcements of in-class
exercises. Umm, this is [

The instructor: ((cupping his hand around his ear)) [There'll be some what?

Leo: ((leaning his upper body toward the instructor)) Announcements of in-class
exercises

The instructor: Ok

Leo: ((with a conceding and apologetic smile on his face)) **Sorry about my
pronunciation. As I said, I am from Taiwan. So, if you don't understand me,
please raise your hand and let me know.** And THIS in-class exercise is more
like participation. And the next one is grading. [...]

(From a microteaching session)

Leo deferred a language disclaimer until he was interrupted twice by the instructor, who was in the audience acting as an American undergraduate along with Leo's peers. Up to that point, Leo seemed to be resistant to offering a disclaimer. In response to the first request from the instructor, Leo enunciated with more clarity what he had just said, raising the volume of his voice and delivering it at a slower rate of speech. On the second request for clarification, Leo initially leaned his upper body toward the instructor, repeating what he had said one more time with more clarity, and then, abruptly, with a conceding smile on his face, Leo apologized for his *pronunciation* (*Sorry about my pronunciation*). At that point, in the middle of his teaching, Leo offered a language disclaimer, explicitly acknowledging his nonnative-speakerness (*As I said, I am from Taiwan. So, if you don't understand me, please raise your hand and let me know*). Then, the volume and pitch of his speech changed and became more intense. Later, when offering some comments on Leo's mock teaching, the instructor reiterated what was stated in the description of the language disclaimer text. He reminded his students of the desirability and usefulness of the disclaimer.

The instructor: So, that's a good thing to do if you forget to do, like, doing a language
disclaimer, it's a good time to bring that up so that people know that you don't
mind them asking.

(From a class observation).

However, in the follow-up interviews, the international students expressed different ideas about the language disclaimer. In what follows, I shall examine in detail how the

international students navigated and negotiated their identities in response to language ideologies embedded in the discursive device.

4.3 Critical Agentive Work and Critical Language Awareness

The dominant ideologies, covertly at work through the language disclaimer, appeared to disempower rather than empower the international students in their relation to American students. The instructor's elicitation of a language disclaimer from Leo, in effect, forced Leo to explicitly verbalize his Otherness, and thus stymied Leo's implicit efforts to resist dominant ideologies. The below is an excerpt from an interview in which Leo deployed a range of discursive strategies and developed his own argument in the process of his self-identification.

I don't oppose it, but if I said it at the beginning, I would feel like, umm, **maybe they would be thinking less of me. I should be professional and fluent in the first place.** If they would ask questions, then, maybe I can take a chance to, not just make a disclaimer, but also say, "OK. Sorry. I speak too fast. So, you can let me know."

So, it's not like, **I am not focusing on "I am a foreigner. I am a foreigner. I am sorry if you don't understand me."** ...**I don't wanna just focus on this.** Because **even native speakers** sometimes... you're still confused about what they're saying, right? like, too fast. Some people, just too low, you know, the voice.

So, this is the introduction of the syllabus. So, and, this is the first day of class. **I need to look professional and fluent, to make students feel I am a professional.** [...]

It's no harm to say that, for, other people. **FOR ME↑, I don't know why do this.**

(From an interview with Leo)

Leo's talk was marked by a variety of hedges and modalities. Those linguistic features were noteworthy in terms of how Leo conveyed his own commitment to, or judgment of the truth claims in his speech, and of how he identified himself in relation to others (Halliday 1994). Using various modalities, Leo adjusted the levels of hesitancy, tentativeness, confidence, or assertion about what he was saying. In so doing, he tried to make a positive impression of himself while attempting to challenge the common ideologies being disseminated within and/ or around the ESL class. Leo showed an acute awareness of the dominant ideologies as well as of the identities institutionally imposed on internationals. He appeared to be well aware that the language disclaimer and ideologies implicit in it would

work against his identity negotiation as an international TA and that the ideological effects of such a disclaimer would sabotage his professionalism. Leo asserted that he would not focus on the fact that he was a foreigner and would not apologize for any communicative breakdown or confusion.

By mocking a typical form of the language disclaimer (*I am a foreigner. I am a foreigner. I am sorry if you don't understand me*), Leo implicitly highlighted the apologetic and powerless nature of the disclaimer. He used a modality to set up a hypothetical context (*if I said it at the beginning, I would feel like, umm, maybe they would be thinking less of me*) in stark contrast to the truth claim of the language disclaimer text in the course material, which states that a disclaimer *lower(s) any perceived "barrier" with U.S. students and is an excellent way to establish rapport with them*. The raciolinguistic nature of the ideology, which was disguised in the text's argument regarding 'advantages to you' (Reisigl and Wodak 2001), was rendered explicit by the international student's critical language awareness.

Leo also exhibited his metapragmatic knowledge of the indexical relationship between a way of speaking and a way of being. In the excerpt below, he eloquently juxtaposed one's way of speaking with one's identity through the rhetorical device of the parallelism (*messing up with what he's saying, messing up with what he's teaching*). This points to his awareness of the language ideology that associates how one says something with what or who he or she is (Hymes 1974).

I think, yes, it might, might make some students think less of me. Like, 'OK, **he's an international student. He's an international TA. Maybe, he will, you know, mess up with what he's saying, mess up with what he's teaching.**'

(From an interview with Leo)

Being a professional may represent Leo's personal investment in the character of an academic on which he projects his present and future identity. This self-identification as a potential academic could be seen as an agentive move on the part of Leo to challenge the disempowered identities. His professional identity could be interpreted as a negotiated identity (Blackledge 2005) that overrides the imposed identity of a nonnative English speaker.

Dialogicality is another feature of the participants' discursive strategy for revealing the ideologies hidden within the language disclaimer. As noted in the context section of this article, the class previously engaged in a discussion of international TAs' issues raised by

an old news article in which U.S. students voiced complaints about foreign TAs. Leo's talk in the excerpt above is anchored in intertextually dialogical interactions with the dominant voice surrounding international students (*OK, he's an international student. He's an international TA. Maybe, he will, you know, mess up with what he's saying, mess up with what he's teaching*). The voice of others, particularly, that of U.S. students complaining about international TAs, were revoiced (Bakhtin 1981, Tannen 2007) in the hypothetical context framed by Leo. Simply put, Leo spoke through the voice of U.S. students and, through his revoicing, foregrounded the hidden ideology of the dominant discourse regarding Others. This ventriloquizing strategy was also observed in Han's animation of the voice of U.S. students, challenging the ideological effect of the language disclaimer on his relationship to his students.

Researcher: What did you find language disclaimer? Did you feel comfortable with using the language disclaimer in your class?

Han: I felt not so comfortable. I think the disclaimer separates us from students. This may make students think of that, **'This TA is not from our country. This TA is not a native speaker. Maybe I cannot get close to him.'**

Researcher: Are you gonna use that again?

Han: No. I don't know.

(From an interview with Han)

Han used the voice of the dominant culture, rather than his own voice, to highlight the effects of the language disclaimer in foregrounding his ethnolinguistic differences, which would make his students feel that he would not be approachable. Instead of expressing his own dissent explicitly and directly, Han debunked the truth claim of the disclaimer by ventriloquizing the voice of U.S. students. Again, the voice of U.S. students, revoiced by Han, intertextually echoed the dominant discourse about Others. Thus, the presence of the dominant discourse was projected and disputed in the international TA's words. The discourse inherent in the language disclaimer, whether inadvertently or not, disempowered the international students and, by extension, *Others* who are raciolinguistically different than *Us*. The participants' reluctance to use the language disclaimer indicates their critical awareness of the fact that their identities as internationals in the context are both racialized and politicized.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The language disclaimer illustrated the ways in which language played a profound role in constructing one's identities in terms of power relation and inequality and in which such social inequality was being reproduced and embodied through discourse in local interactional practices. It was one of the discursive mechanisms through which social relations constructed outside the classroom were translated and enacted in the local level practices (Fairclough, 2003, Kim 2020b). The disclaimer was tightly scripted to control interactions by structuring the relationship between international TAs and their American students within the power relations between native- and nonnative English speakers. Under such circumstances, the international students' identities might have become vulnerable to the asymmetrical power relation. For example, Leo's resistance to being placed in the English language class in the first place indicates that the ESL classroom is perceived as a stigmatized space within which the international students are viewed as deficient. The disclaimer might well have been intended to help international students. However, it should be noted that the well-meaning intention could inadvertently marginalize English language learners and their cultures. In effect, despite its seemingly supportive rhetoric, the language disclaimer appeared to disempower rather than empower the international students by engineering ways of speaking, and thus ways of being, within the controlled interaction.

The language disclaimer illustrates a cruce point (Fairclough 1992) at which the subtle workings of the raciolinguistic ideologies were made visible through the critical awareness of the marginalized by the very ideologies (Alim 2005, 2007). The various discursive strategies deployed by the international students in this study constitute substantive evidence that the students were aware of the power relations at play even though the ideologies were not enunciated in the disclaimer itself. The students' discursive tactics, which included joke, hypothetical sentences, and ventriloquizing, revealed the hidden raciolinguistic ideologies at work. Those discursive moves represent the students' agency in negotiating their identities in opposition to the institutionally imposed identity of Other, namely, a nonnative speaker of English. In some degree, the international students' identity negotiation could be seen as an outcome of inequality (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004) in the sense that they had to negotiate their identities under the restrictive power structure and the ideological act of othering. What matters is not merely whether the students' strategies for their identity negotiation were successful. What's more important is that,

through critical reflection on language and identity, the students were able to exercise their agency in choosing the discursive strategies with which to respond to the dominant discourse. Their critical awareness may have sensitized them to the ideological workings of discourse so that they would be able to deploy discursive tactics to negotiate their identities.

The language ideologies embedded in the ESL practices were restrictive and exclusionary. Those ideologies were being propounded through the practices in conjunction with a discourse of difference—marking of Others. The representation of Asian students in the English language class is an example of the ideological categorization and identification of Others. The ESL program used an oral English proficiency assessment tool to screen and demarcate culturally and linguistically distant Others, thereby playing the gatekeeping role of a listening subject (Flores and Rosa 2015, Shohamy 2014). In the classroom, then, American academic cultural norms and expectations were deemed legitimate, while other possibilities would be considered illegitimate or deviant. The ways in which teachers and students interact in U.S. academic settings were presupposed to be the norm against which differences would be measured and subjected to correction or repair. Thus, international students would be trained to adopt American ways of teaching/learning and classroom interaction, which were considered normative instructional practices. As such, American TAs and native speakers of English may be assigned the default status of unmarked norm in opposition to the marked identities (Urciuoli 2016) assigned to international TAs and nonnative speakers of English. This linguistic and cultural normativity is undergirded by the ideology of native—speakerism (Holliday 2017) and requires international TAs to become like American TAs and to sound like American TAs. This process of “submission to native speaker norms” (Seidlhofer 2005, p. 170) is the ideological process of hegemony, which renders naturalized, unmarked, and invisible the default status of we—categories.

Some pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings of this study. The findings underscore the significance of critical language awareness for critical reflection on power issues in culturally and linguistically diverse educational contexts. The development of critical language awareness can increase consciousness of how language can be used to produce, maintain, and perpetuate power relations and thus can enable the linguistically marginalized to possibly resist inequality and discrimination entailed by those relations. This argument for critical reflection on diversity is aligned with other critical moves in multicultural and multilingual pedagogy and critical language awareness practices in education. The findings of this study suggest that awareness is a critical capacity that the linguistically and culturally marginalized might leverage to gain insights into the ideological

workings of language, which influence the formation of social relations. Their minoritized status may enable individuals to be aware of their positionality in certain contexts and to explore the ways in which they can take action in response to such situations. For ESL educators, critical language awareness can be incorporated into their instructional practices. By that means, they will be able to move away from the deficit approach and normative practices toward ways that promote an appreciation of the cultural wealth brought by diverse students. Meantime, critical researchers and practitioners need to seek out ways to put their scholarly effort for transformative approaches and theories into practice as the deeply ingrained discourse of *'the international student problem'* still is produced and reproduced in reality. For colleges and universities, there should be collective efforts to increase the critical language awareness and intercultural sensitivity of all their students and engage them in reflections on their own perceptions and ways of stereotyping Others. Instead of simply conforming to the dominant norm in communication, all students should be aware of the fact that their own norm is one of many and is subject to change. They should learn how to negotiate meanings and identities in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts.

A key theoretical contribution of this research to the literature on language ideologies in educational settings is that the study has attested to the theoretical and analytical viability of critical discourse studies. Language ideologies usually operate underneath the surface and do not easily get to one's consciousness. However, those ideologies are always present in discursive practices and social interactions, let alone, the interactions in language classrooms. Some of those ideologies become dominant while others become rendered less powerful and otherwise invisible. Theoretical accounts on discourse in its relation to the social teach us that, without a critical engagement with the instructional practices and texts and talk in class, it could be difficult to tease out the complexity of the language ideologies embedded in educational settings. As illustrated by the case of the language disclaimer in the current study, the notion of *cruces* (Fairclough 1992) can be employed as a significant analytical point to locate ideologies at work for critical discourse studies. Discursive conflicts manifested at the moment of *cruces* may indicate the multiplicity of ideologies about the same linguistic reality. The *cruces* are moments of disjuncture between and within ideologies played out normally in the relationships of domination and subordination in interactions, which may be a good entry point for a critical investigation.

In this regard, a suggestion for future research derived from my research findings is to increase through critical inquiry the knowledge base of the dynamic tension among differing ideologies which keeps things changing and thus pushes further to evolve. The agentic

identity work of international students in this study may serve as an example of the continuous critical inquiry that problematizes and changes deeply ingrained essentialist approaches to diversity and identity in language education settings. The continuing exploration of multiple forms of negotiation out of the social actors' agency may open up possibilities of transformational changes.

What has been presented in this article is a case to illustrate the phenomenon under investigation, so the study may be subject to several limitations in terms of generalizability primarily due to the small size of participants. The study does not aim to generalize to other similar contexts but rather to discover more particularities and new information relevant to understanding the workings of language ideologies in relation to the identity construction in educational contexts. The findings may be drawn on for other contexts concerning similar issues. However, the usefulness of this study should be determined by how well the findings could be relevant for other contexts.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: Tertiary

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Appendix

Transcription Notation

- [...] Some material of the original transcript or example has been omitted
- (()) Extra-linguistic information/ the nonverbal
- [A point where overlapping speech occurs
- ↑ A rise in intonation
- :: Elongated sounds
- ... An untimed pause
- (? ?) Uncertain/unclear talk
- (.) A micro pause
- (0.2) A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause
- “ ” Reported speech/ hypothetical speech