Learning to Teach in the Global University: Multilingual International Teaching Assistants’ Language Socialization into Academic Discourse Practices

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Introduction

- An increasing number of multilingual international students are hired to teach undergraduate or graduate-level courses as international teaching assistants (ITAs).

Methodology

Research Questions

- What instructional and interactional challenges do multilingual ITAs encounter in classroom problem-solving activities?
- How do multilingual ITAs engage with these challenges?

Critical Ethnography

- Micro-level socialization practices and macro-level institutional and sociopolitical ideologies referenced through the use of language, shape processes and practices

Research Context & Participants

- Graduate-level University Teaching Practicum class at a U.S. Midwestern University for ITAs to further develop linguistic and discipline-specific knowledge required for teaching in higher education.

Findings

A major challenge facing ITA participants is the Initiation-Response-Evaluation in instructional interaction.

- Instructors explained the unspoken ideologies underlying legitimized linguistic forms in higher education contexts (Excerpt 1)
- ITAs negotiated alternative ways to construct their voices and teaching styles as competent members in disciplines (Excerpt 1)
- Nonverbal expressions commonly used to more effectively verbally initiate, respond, and evaluate students’ questions and answers in instructional interaction (Excerpt 2)

Theoretical Framework

Language Socialization

- Focus on processes of linguistic and cultural development in and through the use of language

LS in Academic Contexts

- For ITAs, critical to competent participation in academic contexts is to learn how to use diverse linguistic and nonverbal resources to teach discipline-specific knowledge

More needs studied to uncover instructional and interactional challenges facing multilingual ITAs and university students on U.S. campuses

Findings

Excerpt 2: You mean that?

- Variations: Uh, I’m sorry. Did you mean that, when did you mean —
- Student 1: Yes, Yi.
- When the receptive force is positive, and when the interactive force is negative

Excerpt 1: Is it Okay to say, that’s not quite right? Or is it too harsh?

1. Student 1: If the answer is wrong, how do you give feedback politely?
2. Instructors: How do you give feedback politely to instruct answers?
3. (Excerpt 1)
4. OK.
5. What do you think?
6. (Excerpt 1)

Implications

- Multilingual communicative repertoire often used by ITAs to negotiate alternative ways to construct teaching styles as confident and proficient members in disciplines.
- ITAs target language competence for instruction (particularly vocabulary) and pragmatic proficiency relevant to U.S. classroom interactions (specifically I-R-E exchanges) were highly influenced by their prior academic discourse practices.
- Juxtaposition between content experts and language novices creates interactional consequences for ITAs’ instruction and situated identities as course instructors vulnerable for negotiation of their disciplinary knowledge and memberships.

References