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“English May Be My Second Language, but I’m Not ‘ESL’”

In this essay, I present three case studies of immigrant, first-year students, as they negotiate their identities as second language writers in mainstream composition classrooms. I argue that such terms as “ESL” and “Generation 1.5” are often problematic for students and mask a wide range of student experiences and expectations.

Exploring the Dynamics of Generation 1.5

In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest in meeting the needs of ESL students in the composition classroom, particularly with the growing number of second language writers entering our colleges and universities. During the 1990s, much of the scholarship on second language writing focused on the experiences and instruction of international students studying at U.S. universities. International students were a steady presence at large research universities, where many second language writing specialists were conducting research, and international visa students were easily identified on campus, through international student groups, data on degree status and countries of origin that is required by the federal government, and TOEFL scores and applications.

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Resident ESL students, however, have remained a more elusive group to study and more enigmatic to categorize.¹ In 1999, Linda Harklau, Kay Losey, and Meryl Siegal introduced their edited collection *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition*. It was the first composition collection to use the term “Generation 1.5,” referring to U.S. resident ESL students who had completed at least some of their secondary schooling in the United States. Census data from the U.S. Department of Education indicates that the number of English language learners (ELL), those students speaking a language other than English in the home, has increased to over 5.5 million students in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education). Yet when these students graduate from high school, they often become anonymous on the college and university campus. Once they have gained acceptance into the university, their numbers are not tracked. As Harklau, Siegal, and Losey explain in their chapter, “U.S. colleges and universities collect virtually no information about U.S. residents’ or citizens’ native language status” (2). For many of these students, this is a welcome anonymity.

I would argue that the terms “ESL” and “ELL” and even “Generation 1.5” are fraught with all kinds of complications for resident students and for us as compositionists.² For students, these complications are emotional as well as tactical. Because what exactly does it mean for a student to be “ESL”? And when, if ever, does a student stop being an “ESL” student? If we take apart the terms “English as a Second Language” or “English Speaker of Other Languages” (ESOL), the terms seem purely descriptive in nature. But as Eli Hinkel, a second language specialist, noted in a discussion on the topic of labeling second language writers held on the SLW-CCCC listserv, the terms are far more nuanced, complicated, and significant for nonnative speakers. As Hinkel wrote:

after 34 years in English-speaking countries, I am not an *English language learner*. I am a nonnative speaker [. . .] I speak *English as a second language*. I tell my students that it is possible to achieve more in a second language than many people can in their first. I think that students need to know that being a proficient nonnative can actually be a point of pride because it is a significant achievement. (Hinkel, my emphasis)

Hinkel’s comments are indicative of the tricky space in which second language writers find themselves. The term “ESL” is not only a descriptor, it is also an institutional marker, pointing to a need for additional services and also to the status of someone still marked as a novice in the English language, an English language learner (ELL). For many U.S. resident second language writers, the

question of when to or when not to be identified as ESL is a fluid one. And the complicated nature of what it means to be an ESL student is particularly difficult in the confines of the first-year composition classroom, where issues with writing and expectations may still be a challenge for these students. As composition instructors, we need to understand the fluidity of the ESL descriptor but also to understand what the experiences of these students are in the composition classroom.

In this essay, I examine the delicate nature of “ESL” identity for student writers. The essay begins by exploring the theoretical connections between identity and writing. I then present case studies of three first-year students and examine how they negotiate their identities as second language writers in mainstream composition classrooms. Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings for composition. In particular, I argue that these students’ experiences raise compelling questions about our categories for second language writers, including the ever-growing use of the term “Generation 1.5,” and our approaches toward these students in the composition classroom.

Connections between Identity and Writing

Robert Brooke, in his work on identity negotiation in writing workshops, has defined the social identity in two parts: the identity that is assigned to us by our environment and our social interaction and the identity that we assign ourselves. Yet those identity roles can be accepted or resisted by the individual; they are dynamic (Brooke 17). It is this process of compliance and resistance that often comes forth in the writing of college students. As Brooke explains, “Individual college students need to find their own way through the tangle of self-definition and social place which writing involves. [. . .] The problem facing young people is a problem of defining how ‘I’ will act in the society ‘I’ live in—and secondarily, of defining whether or not some form of writing will aid in this process” (7).

Other compositionists have drawn upon the work of Erving Goffman and his theories on performance and social identity in order to explain the connections that can be made between student identity negotiation and their writing in the composition classroom. Drawing in part on Goffman, Roz Ivanič, in her analysis of adult student writers returning to higher education, explained that writing and identity have a two-fold relationship. First, writing is a key to developing a certain sense of identity. Second, writers often “perform” certain identities in their writing. Thomas Newkirk, in his work on the autobiographical writing of college students, noted that “all forms of ‘self-expression,’ all of

our ways of 'being personal' are forms of performance, in Erving Goffman's terms, 'a presentation of self'" (3). The same can be said of immigrant ESL students. They are seeking to define and often "perform" themselves within the context of the university and their peers, while at the same time negotiating the complex realities of their unique linguistic and cultural experiences. Often, composition instructors only see a single aspect of that performance and are perplexed by the "backstage" realities that often influence these students' decisions in the composition classroom and on the written page.

The theoretical connections made by Brooke, Newkirk, and Ivanič provide the backdrop for reading the links between identity negotiation and writing in the experiences of the students that I discuss in this essay. The three U.S. resident second language writers in this study are often struggling between a classroom, home, and social identity. Some of them are eager to embrace "the anonymity" that writing superficially seems to offer; they see writing as a place that is "free from social, geographic, or national ties" (Ivanič and Camps 5). None of these students self-identify with an "ESL" label, despite the fact that English is, indeed, their second language. And all three students are eager to leave "ESL" labels and classrooms behind.

The "ESL" Label: A Deficit Model, or the Glass Half-Empty

As earlier studies of "Generation 1.5" students have noted, the "ESL" label is often problematic for students, not simply because of placement concerns, but also because the term is linked to a student's institutional experience with the term. In her study of "language minority students," Linda Lonon Blanton documented the problematic nature of the institutionalized "ESL" label. Blanton, in her critique of college preparatory courses and the kinds of instruction often in place in those courses, noted the range of secondary school experiences that "ESL" students may have had. Some may have spent years in mainstream classrooms, only to find themselves underprepared for the reading and writing demands of higher education. As Blanton explained, "When these students reach college, they may feel strongly that they shouldn't be placed differently from other U.S. high school graduates, and are offended when labeled *ESL*" (Blanton 123). As Harklau, Siegal, and Losey commented, even students who are still in need of some language instruction can view such support as "stigmatized and are insulted by designation as an 'ESL student'" (5).

The struggle between home and school identity may also lead to further complications about what it means to be an "English language learner." Yuet-Sim Chiang and Mary Schmida, in their work on language identity and owner-

ship, studied American-born children of immigrant parents. They found that even though these students considered English their primary language, they “still struggle with trying to reconcile the home language and culture of their parents and families into their social identities.” As Chiang and Schmida reported,

What these students are experiencing seems to be serious disjunctures between the way they conceptualize their linguistic identities. That is, on the one hand, they are not fully comfortable speaking, reading, or writing their heritage language, whereas on the other hand, they are not fully integrated into the culture of mainstream, academic English by the virtue of the label, linguistic minority. (86)

Chiang and Schmida found that the label “linguistic minority” often hindered these students because they “are expected to stumble over the English language for it is not their native tongue” (93). Students then internalized these expectations and were led by them to “see themselves as incapable of owning the language” (93). The institutionalized labels that are placed on second language students clearly have a profound effect on how they define themselves in the college classroom and in their writing.

In Ilona Leki’s four-year case study of Jan, an immigrant student from Poland, she found that similar issues of ownership, or lack thereof, played a role in how invested the student was in his education. Jan used what Leki called “smoke and mirrors to create a public image of himself to his teacher as a serious, hard-working student” (31). The reality, however, was that he felt divested of his educational experience. His goal was to “play the game” in order to get by. Jan saw his main objective as surviving the bureaucracy of the system and maintaining his G.P.A. Indeed, throughout his four years in college, Jan continually felt like an imposter, “stubbornly convinced that the whole educational enterprise was a game,” a test of survival (32).

That “imposter” or outsider image is a strong one that perpetuates a deficit model of “ESL” that can discourage students from seeking academic assistance. This point is exemplified by Sue Starfield’s study of discursal identity in the essay writing of two black nonnative English-speaking students at a South African university. Starfield found that “students’ prior life histories, the socially structured opportunities, and the more or less privileged discourses they have had access to, affect their engagement in the essay-writing process” (130). Moreover, she learned that one of the students, Siphon, was having more difficulty in the university and in passing his classes because he did not readily identify as an ESL learner. As Starfield explained, “Although Siphon was very

conscious of his poor English language skills, his shyness or perhaps a reluctance to adopt the institutionally available subject position of *disadvantaged second language speaker* and seek help with his essay writing compounded his lack of success” (131; author’s emphasis).

It is this positioning, as a “disadvantaged second language speaker,” regardless of English language proficiency, that is particularly salient when we consider the position of second language writers in composition classrooms, particularly those students that we are categorizing as Generation 1.5. Often, we fail to recognize that “ESL” refers to a great deal more than language proficiency or placement. As Harklau has noted,

learning in a second language is not simply the accrual of technical linguistic abilities but rather is intimately related to identity—how one sees oneself and is seen by others as a student, as a writer, and as ethnolinguistic minority (e.g., Harklau 2000).³ Therefore we need to understand how Generation 1.5 students’ writing is interwoven with multiple, unstable, and ambivalent identities as immigrants, as young adults, as ethnolinguistic minorities, and often as people of color in the United States. (“From High School to College”)

Harklau’s comments are compelling. I would add that compositionists also need to find out and consider how those “ambivalent identities” play out within the composition classroom and in students’ approaches to their writing. The case studies that follow begin to add some student perspectives to the complexity of those identity negotiations and what they mean for the student writer in the composition classroom.

Voices from the Composition Classroom

Methodology and Data Analysis

In this project, I bring together case study inquiry and teacher research. The project began as a case study inquiry into the experiences of immigrant ESL students in the mainstream first-year writing course. Specifically, I began with the following questions:

1. How do second language factors (culture, background, prior education, prior writing experiences, etc.) play a role in how immigrant second language students construct and compose their identity in a mainstream first-year writing course?
2. For immigrant students, what does it mean to be an “ESL” student in college? Do they identify with that categorization? Why or why not?

The study was based at a midsize, land grant university in the Northeast. The university is not known for its diversity, although, like many similar institutions, the demographics have started to shift in the last few years. To select participants, I chose second language students who were enrolled in sections of the mainstream first-year composition course. Although the university does offer ESL sections of the course, students self-select their placement.⁴ To recruit participants, I informally surveyed fellow composition instructors, asking if they had any students in their mainstream classes who spoke English as a second language and had studied in U.S. high schools. One of my colleagues responded that she had two such students in her course, and if they were willing to participate, she would be willing to let me observe her class and the students. I chose two students in a single course because it gave me more control in terms of the variables, particularly the kinds of writing assignments, the teaching methods, and the course objectives. After learning about the project, the two students, Sergej and Misha, were eager to participate and to share their experiences.⁵ IRB approval required that their responses and insights be kept private from the instructor until the course had ended. Sergej and Misha were the only two nonnative speakers of English in the class of twenty-four students; this was not unusual for the university. The instructor was a graduate student in the composition program with extensive experience in teaching composition and literature courses. Her course design emphasized student-driven activities and input, and it was influenced by process approaches to writing along with discourse community theories. Assignments asked students to explore their discourse communities, their literacy experiences, their perspective majors, and their own research interests.

The third participant was a student in my own first-year composition course in the semester that followed my research with Misha and Sergej. At that point, I had considered the project complete, but when Jane came into my course, the teacher-research aspect of this project began to unfold. Jane's presence in my course complicated my understanding of Sergej and Misha's experiences. Although I have taught ESL courses in the past, this particular class was a mainstream composition course with almost all native English speakers. When I told Jane about the project, she was interested in participating, and we agreed that I would not interview her until all coursework had been completed and grades had been finalized. She was informed that her participation in the study would not affect her grade.

The data for the study included the following:

- An initial questionnaire about the students' educational and linguistic background. (Appendix A)
- Writing samples from the students' first-year composition course, including personal narratives, literacy autobiographies, research-based essays, freewrites, reflective writing on their progress, and one-page reading responses.
- Transcribed audio-taped interviews with all three students. For Misha and Sergej, I held three interviews throughout the semester. The first interview was based on the initial questionnaire; the second interview was based on writing samples from the midterm portfolio; then a final exit interview focused on their experiences in the composition course, their preparation for college writing at the secondary level, and certain traits in the writing samples. The questions for these interviews were generated for each individual based on prior interview material and the student's writing samples. For Jane, I held two interview sessions after the semester had ended, following the same protocol as was used with Sergej and Misha.

These three sets of data allowed me to triangulate my findings regarding the students' expression of their identity as second language writers and the complex nature of their experiences in a mainstream first-year writing course. In my analysis, I examined moments in the students' essays and classroom writing that spoke to their identities and their experiences as second language students. Specifically, I looked at what subject matter they chose to write about and how they framed themselves within that subject matter, particularly as it pertained to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds and their immigrant experiences. In looking through multiple drafts of certain essays, I paid attention to the students' decisions to revise, delete, or elaborate on subject matter that pertained to their identities as second language writers. I also studied their more reflective pieces of writing, such as their portfolio cover letters, to see how they interpreted the composition classroom and their place within it. My readings of the students' texts were informed and complicated by my interviews with the students and my observations in the classroom. In what follows, I share the insights, perspectives, and writings of Sergej, Misha, and Jane.

Sergej

Sergej came to the United States from Serbia in 1998 under refugee status. He and his family were sent to an urban city in northern New England with a 10

percent ESL student population. He could have come to the university a year earlier but opted to stay in high school one more year in order to improve his English. Although his home language was Serbo-Croatian, he had studied English since he was ten years old, but as he explained, “you don’t have good teachers when you have war.” He writes, reads, and speaks English extremely well, although there are still markers of his ESL background evident in his speech and writing. His parents had limited English proficiency, and although his mother was a professor of Russian and his father a lawyer in their homeland, both of Sergej’s parents were working in less-skilled positions in the United States. In fact, they were unable to contribute to his college expenses, and Sergej depended on his part-time job, financial aid, and scholarships to remain in school. He wanted to finish college as quickly as possible and find a good job that would help him and his family be more financially secure.

When Sergej came to the university, he enrolled in the honors section of freshman composition and was not interested in an ESL section. In our first interview, I asked Sergej why he had not opted for the ESL section of the course. I share his response at length:

Sergej: I’m not ESL.

Christina: What do you mean?

S: I don’t take ESL classes. My senior year in high school I didn’t take an ESL class. So I don’t think that I qualify as an ESL student.

C: Even though English is your second language?

S: Ahh . . . I don’t know. I guess I’m not taking the term right. I don’t know what the term means. What is ESL student?

C: Good question. From what you’re saying, there is ESL as in “I need to take ESL classes.”

S: Yeah, that is the way I look at it.

C: Ok, so it’s like . . . “English is my second language but it doesn’t mean anything. . . .”

S: Yeah, it doesn’t mean that I am ESL. ESL is more. I look at ESL as some kind of institution. It gonna help get your English to the higher levels.

Although he did not wish to be classified as an “ESL” student, he did identify himself as such to his composition instructor because he believed that it would give him “more privileges,” and that, in general, teachers would be more forgiving of certain errors in his writing and his speech.

In reading through Sergej's work over the semester, the role of an outsider becomes apparent almost immediately. Although he writes about his personal experiences, his subject matter does not articulate any tangible sense of community or connection. In his writing, the pronoun "I" is often used to signal a sense of being outside the main community, and it is surrounded with descriptors such as "outsider," "not many friends," and "visitor." In most cases, these moments are followed by descriptions of nervousness, embarrassments, or silence, "where I didn't know what to say." In one text, Sergej writes, "I am not a very social creature and I like it that way." He adds, "If I had more [friends/people in my life], I'd feel it would take away my freedom." His decision to cast himself as an outsider speaks to other moments in his life when Sergej has felt on the margins.

During the 1990s conflict in the Balkans, Sergej, as a Serbian, was forced to leave his home in Croatia as the conflict escalated. When he came to the United States, he was given no choice about where he and his family would live. When asked about his home address, Sergej responded with emphasis that he lived in "the projects," alluding to the fact that his family was receiving government assistance and had little choice in their housing decisions. When he came to the United States, Sergej and his family were placed in a city with a high Bosnian-Muslim refugee population, a population that was targeted and abused by many Serbian groups during the conflict. The tensions from the war have followed him, and he found that to be isolating, writing in one essay, "They [Bosnian students] may have had a problem with me, but I didn't really associate with any of them . . . I had a lot of free time in high school. I didn't have any friends to hang out with." Again, he reiterates that identity of himself as a non-member on the margins. Sergej used the margin as a way of protection, so he could not be hurt or slandered by those around him. In our interview, he acknowledged the power of language in keeping him on the outside, asserting: "I am very direct as a person. But I am very careful too. I am careful when I say something that somebody else could use. I'm cautious. I've been misinterpreted so many times."

Although Sergej spoke in our interviews about his experiences in Croatia and the role that those experiences played in his attitude toward the composition course, it was striking that he rarely mentioned his cultural background or experiences in his writing. In fact in over thirty pages of writing, including one long and twelve short writing assignments, his homeland was mentioned in a total of fourteen sentences. In most cases, these events cast him in a subjugated role; he was being acted upon by others. The events of the war and the

cultural background in general were things that he articulated as being placed upon him. This viewpoint became evident in the following excerpts from his essays and class assignments:

I felt rather out of place when I came to the U.S. and all that propaganda against the country I still had connections with *made me* feel rather mad. I felt like retaliating for something when I was writing it. (My emphasis)

It [the war] changed my life upside down, and instead of being an average student in Croatia who had everything going for him, I *ended up* in the United States having to pay for my own education.” (My emphasis)

In these passages, the phrases “changed my life” and “I ended up” articulate his sense of powerlessness. These views were also apparent in other texts where he wrote about his parents and their decision to pack the car and leave his homeland, or about their expectations that he, as the only “good” English speaker, would translate and pose as them in legal or financial transactions. His loss of place and homeland was amplified by his loss of control, the sense that he no longer could act of his own accord but had to follow the directions and expectations of others.

His essays and in-class writing speak to this “lack of control,” and that perception continued to dictate his current situation in school and in the United States. When I asked about the subject matter in the texts about his homeland or family, Sergej noted that these few writings made him feel “less indifferent” about his writing. They were the few pieces to which he felt some connection; however, he was adamant in his contention that no one cared to read about his personal experiences. In an interview, I asked him if writing about his homeland was too personal. He replied:

S: I don't think it's personal. But I think nobody cares about it. So why write?

C: Why do you think nobody cares about it?

S: I don't know. What would somebody care? If somebody does care about it, I feel it's kinda [unintelligible]. Somebody kind of interested, but he is interested just to be nice about it. It doesn't really . . . give me a word here.

C: You think people aren't interested in those experiences?

S: I don't know. I . . . see . . . Take for example. I did write a few things about war. There is one freewrite.

C: About traveling? Leaving Croatia?

S: Yeah. And then I got comment “Thanks for sharing this.” Right? I felt stupid. “Thanks for sharing this?” Thanks for sharing what?

C: Was that difficult to write about?

S: I just hate the thing that “Thank you for sharing this.” Because like she . . . it seems to me that she is trying to be nice, to be concerned about it. But she doesn’t really care. She is going to forget about it next year. I found it pointless. And I hate those comments. Sympathy and insincere.

His understanding (or misunderstanding) of the instructor’s comment was indicative of the resentment that Sergej felt toward his instructor and the course throughout the semester. When Sergej spoke about the course, he was strident in his commentary. His difficulties with meeting the expectations of the instructor, particularly in terms of understanding the rhetorical situation of the classroom space, seemed to push him even further to the outside of a writing process in which he felt no investment. In the classroom, he did not often participate willingly in the community of writers that his instructor strove to create. He did not want to reflect upon his writing, he did not like to revise, and he found the assignments “pointless.” At one point, he emailed his instructor to share his opinion of the “pointless assignments” she gave, and in a following class, he openly questioned her authority in the classroom. In our interviews, he was less confrontational and more confused. He just wanted to get through the course and move on. Even in the moments when he wanted to please his instructor, he wrote that he just “[couldn’t] get it.” As Sergej commented to his instructor in a midterm portfolio cover letter, “I thought I did fine, but your comment say not so. Without you, I see nothing.” As I read Sergej’s comments, I am reminded of Newkirk’s discussion on presentation and performance in writing. As Newkirk explained, “the sense we have of being a ‘self’ is rooted in a sense of competence primarily, but not exclusively, in social interaction. [. . .] We feel this competence under attack when our performance routines fail us, in a foreign or hostile setting when we have difficulty ‘reading’ the situation” (5). Sergej’s estrangement from the course seems rooted in his difficulty in “reading” the classroom and the expectations of his teacher. The sense that his performance failed him became more apparent as the semester continued, and as a result, Sergej became increasingly indifferent to his writing.

The language and presentation of subjugation presented themselves again in his discussion of the course. In an interview I asked about his sense of ownership in his writing for the course, and Sergej commented, “She [the instructor] tells you what to write and you have to do it.” His written responses for the

class were filled with similar moments in which he talked about himself being placed in the object role by writing and the writing process, commenting that “[the writing] can never be perfect.” And that “this process [of revision] proved me wrong. I realized that it is not possible to write something right in the first place.” Indeed, Sergej seemed to equate revision with a sense of embarrassment and powerlessness. Even when he commented on the war and his childhood in our interviews, he brought himself back to the course and the revision process, saying:

Sometimes I wish that I go back, think back; I really wish I had kept a journal of what I'd thought when I was in that situation. Like during the war. Chances are I'm never going to be in the war again. Then I really wish I had a journal. But then I was kid. Even if I had it, it would be kinda funny. And I hate going back to read my writing all over again. It kinda makes me embarrassed. 'Cause you look back at the ideas that you had before and you think, boy was I a kid back then. And then I know the same thing is going to happen two years from now. I'm gonna go back and see the way I thought now, and I'm gonna say, “Boy was I stupid.” That's why I don't like going back. And when you revise that's what you do. I hate it.

His equating his experiences with the war and the process of revision are powerful. These moments speak to the difficult reality of students such as Sergej. Although his writing may not “read” as second language writing per se, in terms of expected errors, etc., elements of his past experiences were shaping his perceptions of writing practices and his expectations of the composition classroom.

Sergej was adamant that he hated the process of revision and writing put forth by his instructor, but he knew he must do well in order to maintain his scholarship and thereby guarantee his financial ability to stay in school. He felt caught between those two places. In his comments on writing the reflective assignments, he mentioned that he had to write them and that he strategically performed his “progress,”

[c]ause she's my teacher. I need an A in that class . . . Because when I write that . . . you can't say . . . “I am indifferent to every piece of writing that I do here.” Completely indifferent to it. But I can't say that in the cover letter. So I have to lie.

Part of Sergej's resistance was cultural. He believed in an academic tradition that was more of straight transmission of knowledge. In our discussions, he often referred to universities in his home country, noting the differences in expectations and examinations. He reported to me that based on his knowledge of the Yugoslavian universities, collected from stories told by his parents

and relatives, schools and universities there emphasized a more authoritative, impersonal approach. A system that, according to Sergej, was mimicked at the lower grade levels as well, and it was a system in which he excelled. Clearly, he found these academic traditions to be more rigorous than the ones he was finding in his composition classroom, where there was open discussion, a high level of student involvement, and an emphasis on writing over oral examinations. Sergej was clearly at odds with the academic traditions of the composition classroom. But he was also at a loss as to how to perform in this new setting. He saw himself as a competent student, even a competent writer, in his home language, yet in this U.S. university setting, his performances as a student and as a writer were failing him. It was “a foreign or hostile setting” in his mind (Newkirk 5). He was uncomfortable with the teacher’s role and unable to define his rhetorical position in the classroom. At one time, he took the teacher’s style as an opening to question her authority at every turn, a move that was seen by the teacher as disrespectful. And, at another point, he would read her every suggestion as an authoritative order, positioning his teacher as a difficult, unforgiving taskmaster. He moved back and forth between these two vantage points, struggling to determine what was expected of him. In the end, he constructed a classroom where there was no flexibility and little room for negotiation. But my own observations found a composition classroom that provided many opportunities for student voices, student-led writing prompts and activities, open discussions, and peer workshops. The teacher often asked for anonymous feedback on assignments and projects, for example, so that she could adjust the curriculum to meet student needs.

In Sergej’s final portfolio, he tried to hide his hostility. When he approached his reflective cover letters and writing assignments, he made a point of performing his “conversion,” as in the following examples from his cover letters:

I was taught in my college composition course that I am to state everything that I am going to write about in my introductory paragraph. I don’t like that, and if I don’t like it, I can’t be good at it . . . So for my next essay, I will try to learn to like the theses statement.

The only thing I didn’t like were the cover letters, but I can understand a need for them.

Although Sergej’s “conversion” performance did not tend to boost his own certainty, there can be no doubt that he was intending to build some solidarity with his instructor, despite his true ambivalence.

In the end, when I asked Sergej if it might have made a difference had he been in an ESL section of first-year composition, he was adamant that he did not belong there. (In truth, I agree with him.) Aside from a few missing definite articles, he insisted that his writing did not reveal his linguistic and cultural background. He did not classify himself as an international student and did not wish to be segregated from his “American” peers.⁶ He did not seek any special services on campus and did not associate with any of the ethnic or international groups on campus. When we first spoke, Sergej had been unaware that a section of freshman composition was available for ESL learners. After learning about the ESL section of first-year composition, Sergej indicated that he would never have signed up anyway. He stated, “I don’t really care. But I wouldn’t. Because if you want to learn more . . . better English, you going to learn it from Americans, not the ESL students.”

Misha

Misha, also a first-year student at the time of this study, was a computer science major. He immigrated to the United States in 1994 when he was ten, in comparison to Sergej, who arrived when he was seventeen. Various family members came with Misha, including a younger sibling, grandparents, and his mother. However, his father remained in Russia for reasons that Misha was unwilling to discuss. Misha attended fifth grade, junior high, and high school in another large New England city with a diverse population, though Misha noted that he was “the only Russian student. Everyone else spoke Spanish. Even the teachers.” Throughout junior high, Misha took ESL courses and enrolled as an ESL student so that he could attend “the better” junior high school in the city. When he reached high school, he says he was no longer an “ESL student,” and he enrolled in mainstream English courses. Although Misha found the freshman composition course challenging, he had great success. His instructor was impressed with him as a student, both in terms of his effort and his writing.

In comparison to Sergej, Misha showcased his Russian background throughout most of his writing in the course. Of the four major assignments, Misha wrote one essay, his favorite piece of the semester, exclusively on his experience of coming to America. In addition, the opening to his research essay on the origins of beer included an extensive flashback in which he discussed the subject with his father while still a child in Russia. Furthermore, his final portfolio includes eight sample freewrites, three of which focus exclusively on his bicultural/bilingual experiences, and a reader response about

education and literacy in his family. As Misha writes in an early draft of his literacy narrative:

I have become literate in life and grew up much faster due to one of the sharpest turns my life has ever made—my immigration to American from Russia. Not only did this experience taught me the language and culture of a completely different society but it also gave me a dyadic personality of which I am very proud . . . I have become an entirely different person.

Unlike Sergej, Misha was not forced out of his country by war. He left Russia partly because of religious discrimination and partly due to the promise of economic opportunities in the United States. Misha wrote that he had some initial fears about being “harassed here because I [was] a Jew,” but those concerns never manifested in the eight years he has lived in the United States. Instead, his immigrant narrative and experiences have become something of value to him. His writing throughout the semester reveals a desire to remain connected to his Russian heritage, and my guess is that such a connection is particularly important, in light of the fact that he is trying to remain connected to his father, who remains in Russia. There are moments where his sense of loss leaks onto the page. In one instance, writing about his “dyadic personality,” he tells his readers, “Just imagine tearing your whole existing life into bits and pieces, and selling off 50% of it, packing 20% of it, and leaving behind the remaining 30% . . . It’s like a giant part of me just ripped away, you know?”

But in the end, Misha remained optimistic. He writes, “I try to preserve my Russian heritage and at the same time keep my American heritage . . . I have come a long way in terms of adjusting to this society . . . [understanding] how things work here.” When he wrote about his place in U.S. culture, he was positive, noting in the final sentences of his literacy narrative that “this experience [of immigrating to the United States] have made me more literate in life itself and will make the future a richer place.” In some ways, I am unsure how to read this conversion, this immigrant narrative. Is this part of Misha’s performance? There is a part of me that remains skeptical. There seems to be a definite awareness of audience here, an American audience that wants to welcome this kind of affirmative immigrant story.⁷ It meshes well with our optimistic “melting pot” vision of America. But in my conversations with Misha, he seemed to buy into this narrative as well, noting that this was a narrative in which he continued to feel pride and ownership.

Misha was confident of his abilities as a writer, and he showed great respect to his instructor and her knowledge on the subject of writing, even though

he did not always agree with her. In fact, in an analysis of written interview transcripts and writing samples, Misha did not exhibit any indication of the level of disengagement or subjugation that Sergej manifested in his writing and behavior throughout the term. He noted that his friend Sergej just didn't understand how things "worked here," and that Sergej seemed to question the instructor's authority in ways that threatened his grade. Misha, on the other hand, saw the composition course as a necessary part of his college career. He welcomed the chance to write and relished the opportunities to explore his personal experiences and his cultural history. In fact, he described his literacy autobiography as "the best thing I ever put together." As Misha explained in our interview:

I wrote the literacy essay almost like a memoir. It was really big. I had to narrow it down and stuff. But it was really cool I thought. I'd like to write like a bigger memoir, make a humongous thing out of it, write my whole story about how I came here.

That is not to say that he didn't disagree with his instructor, but he knew that he had to meet certain expectations in order to get the grade. And Misha was eager to get a good grade (like many students) and was willing to adapt some of his ideas of writing to achieve that end; however, he never resented the instructor's authority. Instead he continued to view his writing, his personal experience, as something over which, in the end, he maintained control. Misha exhibited this ownership in a conversation on his literacy narrative, explaining:

She [the instructor] crossed out some stuff that I wanted to include in there. But you know, you do what she says; it's all for the grade. Now I'll go back, and I'll change some things to the way it was before. Change some stuff around the way I liked it.

His sense of ownership and control was in stark contrast to Sergej's experiences. While Sergej focused on his writing as strictly a requirement for the course, Misha saw value in writing that had merit beyond the classroom. Misha saw the instructor's authority and her feedback as constructive, but not overwhelmingly constrictive or silencing. In some ways, it strikes me that Sergej gave almost too much authority to his instructor. Misha, on the other hand, seemed more aware of the rhetorical situation and demonstrated a savviness that served him well. He saw some of his revisions as part of a larger rhetorical strategy. In the end, Misha seemed to be more comfortable in his environment, more at ease in the classroom, and more confident with his writing.

As I write about these two students, I am concerned that I am creating a simple linear model—in which recent immigrants, perhaps refugees, are placed on one end and immigrant students who have lived here longer are placed on the other end. So to undermine that tendency, I would like to share one final case as a way to complicate the picture and also to turn the researcher lens on myself.

Jane

As I completed my case studies of Sergej and Misha, I was also teaching my own section of first-year composition. Like every semester, I began the class by handing out brief surveys with questions requesting such information as students' nickname, phone number, high school, major, favorite music, favorite book, and so on. In addition, I asked students if English was their second language. As I read over the slips of paper that evening, I was not surprised to find that every student had answered “no” to the ESL question, given the university's demographics.

So when Jane handed in a draft of her first essay, a literacy narrative, I was surprised to read about her elementary school experiences in Hong Kong. I later learned that she had come to the United States in 1994, the same year as Misha. Jane's family spoke Mandarin Chinese at home, and she had taken ESL courses for over five years. Later, she would explain to me, “I consider English to be my first language now, because I don't think in Chinese at all. I consider it my first language because I think it, I write it.”

But Jane also made choices to obscure her cultural background as well. When our class made maps of our various discourse communities, Jane drew a tree with three branches. For two of the branches, she labeled extensively her high school and college communities, the language and phrases that were used in those communities, and the people that were part of those communities. On the third branch, she wrote out her family name—no other details or descriptors. When we shared our maps in class, Jane barely mentioned this final branch and gave no other details. Like Sergej, she was guarded and cautious about her cultural background. In class, I respected her silence on the matter, but I was curious to know why. I had tried to create a classroom community where cultural and linguistic diversity were valued. My syllabus included a diverse array of authors, many of whom are nonnative English writers, and I openly shared my own bilingual/bicultural upbringing when we talk about language and communities. When I mentioned this research project to her, she agreed to participate without reservation. We agreed that I would make copies

of her writing and keep some observational notes, and we would talk after the semester had ended.

As the semester continued, her writing continued to show evidence of caution and camouflage. As I read through her drafts of the literacy autobiography, I was puzzled by the choices she made. She wrote about composing her college application essay, and a line in her initial draft caught my attention:

I wanted to talk about my experience with learning a new language and culture, but I didn't want them to know that English was my second language. I want to get into college for me as a regular student.

Jane deleted this section from the final draft of her literacy autobiography. In her subsequent personal experience essay, Jane wrote about the death of her grandmother. Again there was evidence that she wanted to conceal her cultural and linguistic background. The narrative failed to establish a setting for the events. In discussions with her readers in peer workshops, Jane revealed that the events occurred during one of her final trips to Hong Kong from Taiwan. In conference, she explained to me that she was hesitant about sharing the setting with her audience, although she would not elaborate on that decision.

When I spoke with Jane at the end of the semester about these choices, our conversation revealed a great deal about the identity negotiation in which she was engaging within the context of the course:

Christina: So do you consider yourself to be an ESL student?

Jane: Not anymore. (*Laughs*)

C: What do you think an ESL student is?

J: Umm . . .

C: What stage is it? I mean, if you're not anymore, but you were? What's the difference?

J: It is just . . . It is hard for me to think of little words in Chinese. I am so used to speaking in English. I think that's the difference. Some people I know still think in their native language and still have to translate it into English. I don't think I have to do that.

In our discussions, Jane revealed that she hadn't enjoyed her experiences in ESL classes during junior high and high school. She often felt singled out by ESL teachers, and she hated the label of "ESL." Jane further explained this in an interview:

You feel like you are behind everyone else. That you are not maybe as intelligent. Which is not true at all. But you feel very behind. I feel like the ESL program is very isolating. They have their own little room that you have to go to. At that age (junior high), it can really hurt a teen . . . an adolescent's self-esteem.

She seemed to carry this feeling of isolation with her; making decisions (consciously or unconsciously) to cover her cultural and linguistic background in order to blend with her peers. When I asked her why she didn't elaborate on her family or cultural background during our discussion on discourse communities, she was somewhat defiant:

C: You didn't talk much about your family?

J: I included my family.

C: Yes . . . but it was a branch with your family name, nothing else, and you didn't discuss it at all. Was that a conscious decision?

J: I don't really think about that. (*Laughs*) Maybe I just felt more comfortable not talking about it.

C: Do you feel uncomfortable talking about it?

J: No . . . It's not something I like to talk about with strangers. People I don't know very well. It is not something I just bring up.

C: Why?

J: It is kinda like the whole issue with homosexuality. You don't say "hi, my name is. . . . And I'm a homosexual." I don't think it is very necessary for me to mention.

I am struck by her fears of being "outed" as an immigrant—as a second language speaker. She was very aware of the liability that was involved with that label. She didn't want to be different. I am reminded of my prior experiences teaching middle school ESL students and how diligently many of my former students worked to assimilate into American culture, donning the latest Tommy Hilfiger fashion and mimicking the English they heard on MTV. Anything to blend.

Jane told me that she was one of only ten ESL students in her high school. It was a minority group that she resisted, and the role of "ESL student" or "linguistic minority" is not one she wished to perform. Instead she reached out to join other more mainstream groups: cheerleading, the honor society, the newspaper, the prom committee. She did not want to be defined against the backdrop of her linguistic profile. Yet in her college essay she wrote about the

American “society’s ideal of Beauty and how a young Asian girl just didn’t fit the 5’8” blond hair blue eyes look.” In my interviews with her, Jane came across as a young woman who wanted to challenge that ideal, but she was concerned about being “too different.” Part of her reluctance to embrace her cultural heritage seemed to come from her sense that she was always singled out as the “different one,” placed up on the auditorium stage during a school’s diversity week, and consistently reminded that she was different when she so wanted to be the same. As Jane explained:

I didn’t like ESL . . . I didn’t like how she [the ESL teacher] made it seem like it [ESL] was your only identity. Like my comparison with homosexuality. Like I think they try to make that [ESL identity] apparent to other people. And maybe some people don’t feel like that’s who they are as a whole person. Like it’s a part of them, but it is not the most important.

Jane’s experiences remind me that although we often have the best intentions to be inclusive and to value diversity, sometimes students feel pushed to define themselves in a singular way, cast in a role they do not want to play, and forced to choose one identity over another.

Complicating Our Definitions: A Discussion

Each of these students has complicated my own understanding of second language writers and made me question our current categories for second language learners. Sergej’s experiences remind me how tacit culture is. Often, it is the unspoken element in the room, yet it dictates so much of how we “see” a situation and ourselves. Sergej, for his part, was unaware of how his perceptions of the composition classroom and of writing, in general, were driven by his cultural expectations and experiences. Jane’s comparison of being “outed” as an ESL student still haunts me. Her indictment of ESL teachers and an ESL profession that singled her out and neglected to see the multiplicity of her identity is a powerful one. I feel implicated in her accusation—as an ESL teacher and a writing specialist. Jane makes me think about what it means to have an “ESL identity.” She makes me question what I know about that identity and what it means for students like Jane when they approach their personal and academic writing.

Misha’s experiences remind me that it is not all bad. He reminds me not to “throw the baby out with the bath water.” This is not a call to end personal or reflective writing in the composition classroom. Nor should we reconsider our attempts at valuing diversity in that classroom. We should not return to

monolingual assumptions about our students; nor should we retreat from writing opportunities that encourage all students to reflect upon their literacy experiences, their cultural and linguistic legacies. Misha reminds me that there are students out there who are eager to connect, to understand, and to write about their personal experiences with learning language and culture. Often these writing tasks are ways for students like Misha to write themselves into the classroom, to find their place among native-English peers. The value that Misha sees in writing about his homeland, his family, his second language experiences—the good, the bad, and the ugly—remind me of how powerful and personally rewarding such writing can be for students.

But we do need to proceed with prudence. “ESL,” “bicultural,” and “bilingual” backgrounds are not always seen as positive markers by students, no matter how we try to frame diversity as a positive attribute. I am aware that conducting a study of Sergej, Jane, and Misha has indeed reemphasized their difference. Although they were very willing to work with me and share their thoughts and writings, I cannot help but feel that I may have helped to recreate the wall that Sergej and Jane were desperate to pull down. In incorporating them into a study of ESL students, I have defined them within the very box that they want to avoid—a box that may no longer fit the diverse range of second language writers in our composition classrooms.

As Gwen Gray Schwartz has argued in her article “Coming to Terms: Generation 1.5 Students in Mainstream Composition”: “Many mainstream instructors often assume that any student who is still in the process of learning English should be placed in an ESL class; understanding that there are gradations of ‘ESL’ is as important as educating mainstream instructors about the existence of Generation 1.5 students” (44). The institutional markers of ESL, ESOL, or ELL are often rejected by “Generation 1.5” students who wish to move beyond the status of English language learner and to leave those markers behind in mainstream classes, particularly upon arriving at large college campuses.

But what of the term “Generation 1.5”? Evidence from the recent meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication suggests that the term resonates among composition instructors. In fact, “ESL and Generation 1.5” was used as a heading for the Selected Topics guide in the CCC 2005 and 2006 programs, and a number of sessions and workshops directly referenced “Generation 1.5” in their titles. At the annual Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) convention in 2005, there were thirty-one sessions that directly referenced “Generation 1.5.” However, the term is beginning to be used in a way that encases all U.S. resident ESL students as if

they were part of a singular category. Schwartz sought to qualify our discussion of Generation 1.5 students by introducing the concept of “cross-over students,” as “college students who immigrated to the United States at some point in their formative years” and have crossed over into mainstream classes by the time they enter college (42). She noted, however, the multiplicity that these students may represent. As Schwartz has argued,

The term “Generation 1.5” has been used to describe a broad range of students (e.g., those who left their home countries prior to any schooling, those who were born here but live in ethnic enclaves, and sometimes it is even used to describe second generation students), even though Rumbaut and Ima originally defined the term to include only those students who were not born in the U.S. but who have received at least the latter years of their secondary schooling here in the States. The distinction is important because students who have received almost all or all of their schooling in the U.S. are bound to have different schooling needs and abilities than those who have straddled two countries’ educational systems, sometimes becoming only partially literate in both languages. (43)

Students like Misha, Jane, and Sergej all fit the definition put forth by Rumbaut and Ima, yet their experiences vary greatly. Clearly, the term “Generation 1.5” has, itself, become problematic. As Harklau has noted, “Generation 1.5” is an “amorphous” term, and “we seem to be using it in many different ways.” In fact, it is a term that has broadened with its popularity. On one hand, it has brought attention and interest to the issues of U.S. resident ESL students and their writing. But as Schwartz has also pointed out, “the term Generation 1.5 is over-used, and its meaning has become diluted so that it no longer serves to be very useful in identifying, describing, and placing such students” (43). Harklau, in her own questioning of the term, has noted parallels to David Bartholomae’s comments on the essentializing of the term “basic writer.” Harklau explains,

It occurs to me that like “basic writer,” the term “Generation 1.5” unfortunately lends itself far too easily to essentializing, and to a discourse of “need”—a way to define multilingual students as in need of remediation. I see worrying trends towards colleges using the label Generation 1.5 to cordon off multilingual students and their language use rather than addressing what Smitherman has called “a broad-based challenge to address linguistic diversity throughout the body politic.”⁸

I agree with Harklau’s concerns. As the term “Generation 1.5” becomes more prolific, we need to reconsider our use of the term. As I have mentioned before, Sergej, Misha, and Jane all fit this definition—but all are highly English lan-

guage proficient. In fact, each rightfully questions the identity marker of “ESL” (and also “ELL”). Are they still English language learners? If so, when do they ever graduate out of the category?

I would argue that the students in this study begin to challenge our assumptions of Generation 1.5, or perhaps they challenge us to qualify our use of the term. Even Sergej does not fit the typical picture of a refugee student struggling in the margins. None of these students do. Indeed, they all received top grades in their composition courses. Sergej has made the recommendation that other case studies be pursued because his experiences and his success should not become indicative of the norm. Indeed, Sergej’s story was one of success in many ways. Despite his moments of alienation and disenfranchisement, he was eager to work hard and to finish his degree. In addition, he did well academically in his first year at college. Sergej was not indicative of those immigrant students who enter the college system “with limited proficiency in academic reading and writing, as well as limited content knowledge acquisition” (Bosher and Rowcamp 6). Yet despite his advantages, he still struggled with issues of identity and expectations. For his part, Sergej did not fully understand the rhetorical situation that he was expected to navigate in the classroom, and in that regard his experiences, his resistance, and his identity struggles were significant. If a student as successful as Sergej remained on the margins in his own mind, what is the fate of a student with less confidence and less academic prowess?

Implications for the Composition Classroom and Our Teaching

It is a complex route that students such as Sergej, Misha, and Jane navigate in their academic and personal lives. They wish to blend, yet they can easily become confused or resistant when their cultural expectations are challenged. Sometimes they view “outing” themselves as ESL students to be advantageous, and other times they may reject any special treatment altogether. They may want their pasts, their languages, and their differences to be acknowledged, discussed, and even celebrated, yet they may not wish to be forced into disclosure.

So given that, what strategies can we develop as composition teachers? It seems that, in some ways, we are trapped. The wide range of origins, immigration status, prior education, prior experience with ESL courses, feelings about home language and culture make these students difficult to box into a single definition. Furthermore, we do not want to “box” students into an ESL identity category of which they want no part. Yet at the same time, it helps us, as

instructors, to be better aware of second language writers, for they often do come into composition classrooms with unique needs as writers. Literature on second language writers continues to help composition instructors to be more aware of the issues of pedagogy, placement, and assessment. The recent surge in interest in “Generation 1.5” and ESL writers is valuable for compositionists working with a more linguistically diverse population, and such an interest should be further encouraged so that every composition instructor is prepared to work with second language students. But at the same time, much of the second language writing literature requires us to be able to identify our students in the category of “ESL.” When students reject the “ESL” label for any number of reasons, composition instructors can be left with the illusion of a monolingual classroom. It perpetuates a myth of monolingual space that is increasingly out of step with the reality of the first-year composition course. As Paul Kei Matsuda noted in “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition,” which appeared in the July 2006 special issue of *College English*⁹:

The myth of linguistic homogeneity—the assumption that college students are by default native speakers of a privileged variety of English—is seriously out of sync with the sociolinguistic reality of today’s U.S. higher education as well as the U.S. society at large. [. . .] We need to re-imagine the composition classroom as a multilingual space where the presence of language differences is the default. (641, 649)

This study of Sergej, Misha, and Jane highlights the multilingual nature of the composition classroom in the 21st century—beyond the institutional labels and markers.

These student stories are not necessarily easily available to composition instructors. Students may be hesitant to talk about their pasts, and teachers hesitant to ask. The key to this dilemma may be to establish a rapport with our students early on, both through writing and conferencing. As composition teachers, of course, this is nothing new. But often our knowledge of our students is reduced to a simple survey of questions at the onset of the course with the question on “speaking English as Second Language,” embedded between “Favorite Book” and “Intended Major.” Students, like Misha, Sergej, and Jane, are less likely to label themselves “ESL” and to examine their expectations within the context of cultural and linguistic differences. Furthermore, they are often hesitant to answer those questionnaires truthfully when they are unsure what the “ESL” question implies (i.e., Will the instructor expect less of them?)

Hold them to lower standards? Separate them from their peers? Be on the lookout for markers of nonnative proficiency?).

When students do share their identities as second language writers, we need to consider what that means to the particular student. We cannot assume that “ESL” is this monolithic, universal code word that explains everything we need to know about a student. As teachers, we can develop a greater sense of the world circumstances that often bring these students into the United States and a greater understanding of the communities that they are a part of before they arrive on our campuses. We need to consider that there are details that are layered within those community experiences, within their experiences with the institutional label of “ESL,” and within their expectations of us as writing teachers. We need to be cautious that we do not force or perhaps reinforce a label that the students are trying to leave behind; at the same time, though, we need to continue to reaffirm the value of diversity and respect a student’s right to create an identity that is not based solely on cultural difference.

Composition, as a field, should continue to support initiatives, such as the *CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers*, which encourage writing program and university administrators to train composition instructors to work with a broad range of second language students and to consider how such complicated issues of identity may influence their classroom. Students like Sergej, Misha, and Jane may be competent English writers. Indeed, their writing reflects only minor difficulties with pronouns, missing articles, and the occasional questionable word choice or phrasing. For most composition instructors, these minor markers will not disrupt their reading of the student text or make them question the English writing competence of such students. However, as these three students’ experiences show us, the writing is not the only factor that affects a student’s performance and decisions in the composition classroom. It is important to understand that U.S. resident ESL students have a wide range of experiences, particularly in terms of when they arrived, the conditions under which they left their homelands, the conditions they met upon their arrival in the United States, and their educational experiences both here and in their homelands. Understanding that history, and their literacy histories in particular, may provide instructors with a better sense of U.S. resident second language students’ rhetorical moves and strategies, as well as their attitudes and expectations of the composition classroom, particularly when their cultural and educational expectations may be at odds

with the expectations of the teacher. We need to appreciate the fine lines and complexities that shape these students' lives and our interactions with them.

Finally, I propose that in our discussions of second language writers, we need to move away from a sense of singular identity to one of multiplicity. We must move toward identifying these students who write in English as their second language as whole individuals with multiple, sometimes meshing and messy, facets and experiences, and not merely as singular products of their native culture and language.

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Notes

1. Joy Reid was one of the initial second-language specialists to describe the differences between resident ESL students and international ESL students at the college level. She categorized resident ESL learners as “ear” learners of English and international ESL students as “eye” learners of English, based on their different educational experiences with the English language. Reid has noted that the “two groups of ESL students have learned English differently, and so their language problems have different sources and different solutions” (3).

2. In recent years, the U.S. Department of Education has limited its use of the term “ESL” in favor of the term “English language learner” (ELL) in its descriptions of second language students. This is particularly apparent in policies and literature that surround the No Child Left Behind Act. As a result, the term “ELL” has seen increased usage in discussions on second language students in K–12 settings and in some higher education settings.

3. Harklau is citing an earlier work of her own: Linda Harklau, “From the ‘Good Kids’ to the ‘Worst’: Representations of English Language Learners across Educational Settings,” *TESOL Quarterly* 34.1 (2000): 35–67.

4. At the university, first-year composition is a single semester course, and special sections are offered for honors students and for second language students. The first-year composition courses are taught by a variety of full-time English faculty, lecturers, and graduate students in composition and literature. The ESL section of

first-year composition is typically taught by graduate students in the linguistics program. I am aware that at many institutions, ESL writing courses are taught by ESL writing specialists, with a wide range of expertise in both composition and second language acquisition. In addition, many of these specialists are active participants in the growing field of second language writing. Although Misha, Sergej, and Jane all rejected the ESL section of the first-year composition, these ESL writing courses serve an important function for many second language writers in colleges and universities.

5. Pseudonyms have been used for all student participants.

6. In my conversations with the participants, “American” was often used as the term to describe their native-English speaking peers, regardless of citizenship or nationality.

7. I am aware that Misha could also see me as part of that idealized “American audience” as well. When I met with him and the other participants, I did share my own immigrant history and bicultural background. But in the end, I know that I represent the same kind of audience as Misha’s teacher.

8. Harklau quotes a passage from Geneva Smitherman, “The Historical Struggle for Language Rights in CCCC,” *Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice*, ed. Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 7–39.

9. The July 2006 special issue of *College English*, edited by Min-Zhan Lu, Paul Kei Matsuda, and Bruce Horner, explores themes and issues relevant to my work here. As Horner explains in his introduction to the issue, “The essays gathered in this special issue of *College English* participate in an emerging movement within composition studies representing, and responding to, changes in, and changing perceptions of, language(s), English(es), students, and the relations of all these to one another” (Horner 569). The articles in the issue propose that students need to be able to work with “a variety of Englishes and languages” as readers and as writers (570). The articles in this issue raise provocative and compelling arguments about the state of composition and the place of multilingualism in the field’s discussions. Horner writes that the essays constitute “a call for a radical shift from composition’s tacit policy of monolingualism to an explicit policy that embraces multilingual, cross-language writing as the norm for our teaching and research” (570).

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Appendix A: Initial Questionnaire

Please take a few moments to fill out the following questionnaire. This information will provide me with some necessary background for the research project. Thank you.

Name: _____

Age: _____ Sex: Male / Female Major: _____

What year are you in at the university? (Please circle one.)

First-year Sophomore Junior Senior

Have you attended any other universities/ or colleges in the past? _____ If yes, please name them.

Current place of residency: _____

Please answer the following questions.

1. How many years have you studied English?
2. How many years have you lived in the United States?
3. What is your native country, and what is your native language?
4. How much schooling did you have in your native country?
5. Did you attend secondary school (middle/high school) in the United States?
6. If yes, where did you attend school?
7. What language(s) do you speak at home?
8. Do you continue to write in your native language? (If yes, describe what you write—i.e., letters, email, articles, poetry, etc.)
9. Have you taken any writing courses in your native country? (If yes, please describe the course briefly.)
10. What do you think is the most difficult part of composing a piece of writing in English?

11. When you compose a writing assignment for your first-year writing course, do you compose first in English or in your native language? Please explain.
12. Please explain the process that you used to write for this course (include brainstorming, revision, whom you spoke with about the writing, etc.)? How much did your writing change from the first class to now?
13. Do you think the expectations for writing in an American university differ from the expectations in your native country?
14. Are you aware that there is a first-year writing course offered solely for ESL students? _____ (If yes, was there a reason that you decided to take the mainstream course?)
15. Would you have preferred to be in a class with other international/second language students?
16. In your opinion, is it important for your instructor to know that English is your second language?

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Christina Ortmeier-Hooper is Assistant Professor of English Education at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst, where she teaches in the School of Education. She has taught undergraduate courses on writing for both native and nonnative English speakers as well as graduate courses for ESL and English writing teachers. At the Conference for College Composition and Communication, she has chaired workshops and presented on second language writing issues, and she serves on the Committee on Second Language Writing. She is also the founding chair of the TESOL Second Language Writing Interest Section. Her scholarship focuses on composition, adolescent literacy, and second language writing.