4. Student Language Identity

Designing inclusive classrooms for multilingual students must involve a knowledge of their felt experience (Salazar, Norton, Tuitt, 2010). Gail Shuck (2010) recognizes that composition studies and second-language acquisition studies have long acknowledged that identity is "dynamic and constructed" in discourse and discourse communities, and she extends this negotiation of self in an examination of multilinguals' lives through the idea of language identity (Gee, 1990). "Not only do they juggle the kinds of identities that monolingual students do--roles as students, as parents, as peers, etc.--- but they also negotiate and renegotiate their sense of themselves as language users" (p. 117).

Exercise 1: Reflection on Student Identity.

Faculty Activity: How do you describe your multilingual students in terms of language? How do they describe themselves?

Student Activity: How have you been described by others in terms of language? How do you describe your own language identity?

This can be a low-stakes writing: informal 5 minute free-write to capture immediate thoughts, or an assigned journal.

Adaptation: In-class peer-to-peer discussion. Students can take notes for each-other and report back to larger group discussion (with peer permission and according to classroom norms). The information gathered can also be used as starting points for a language identity paper or literacy narrative paper.

Adaptation: Construct an informal or formal survey at the beginning of your course to gather student identity perceptions for understanding the diversity and its possible connections to readings (text selections) or particular struggles students might encounter with readings or writing assignments.

Exercise 2: Comparative Response

Institutions and teachers often "impose identities on multilingual students, placing only international students into ESL courses, for example, or determining curricula based on simplistic native-speaker/nonnative-speaker distinctions, and therefore do not always take this complexity [of student identities] into account" (Shuck, 2010, pp. 118). For example:
- Fixed/Bound binaries
  - L1 and L2
  - Native English Speaker (NES)
  - Nonnative English Speaker (NNES)
  - Multilingual= deficit in L2
  - ESL vs Reg. Comp
  - Positions multilingual speakers as outsiders
  - World is monolingual
  - One country = one language

In her research, using contextual framework theory (McKay and Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000) Shuck identifies in her student subjects a shifting sense of language identity: depending upon "micro-level" (face-to-face interactions) or "macro-level"(culture, history, social norms, ideologies) contexts. She states that terms used to identify language identity can change according to language expertise, language inheritance, or language affiliation (Leung, Harris, and Rampton's model of language identity, 1997).

Expertise refers to different types, "including the ability to draw effectively upon resources of multiple languages for multiple purposes" (p. 121). Inheritance can identify a person who, though not claiming expertise or affiliation, may be born into a family and or community language tradition, and affiliation describes an individual who feels an "attachment or identification" for a language "whether or not they nominally belong to the social group customarily associated with it" (p. 555, qtd p. 121).

Shuck's student subjects identified (p. 125) as:
- English language learner
- Multilingual
- Nonnative speaker [of English]
- International student
- Foreign student

Faculty Activity:
Explore why and when students might identify with these terms, and what they might mean. Compare to Shuck's explanations (pp. 123-134).