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ACADEMIC AND LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION OF RUSSIAN MA TESL STUDENTS AT
US UNIVERSITIES: STRUGGLES, TRIUMPHS, AND NEW IDENTITIES

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Modern Languages
The University of Mississippi

by

MARINA LEPEKHOVA

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

Each year a great number of students leaves their home countries to study abroad. As a result, international students constitute a considerable portion of student body in US universities and around the world. For many students, study abroad is a holistic and a life-changing experience. Life in a foreign country and everyday exposure to new social and academic cultures make international students undergo an uneasy academic socialization process and re-imagine themselves through the use of second language (L2). This process is simultaneously coupled with academic and language socialization practices that construct novices as certain kinds of situationally organized persons, with certain emotions, moral understandings, and beliefs, who engage in certain kinds of social and cognitive activities (Duff, 2010).

The present study analyzes the academic socialization experiences of four Russian graduate students at US-based MA TESL programs. While some research has described the processes of academic socialization of Asian students (Park, 2006; Morita, 2004; Samimy, Kim, Lee, & Kasai 2011), Saudi students (Barnawi, 2009), and Mexican students (Johnson, 2001), there is a clear gap in the body of knowledge involving language learners and users from the Russian Federation. This qualitative study draws on the theory of academic and discourse socialization as well as identity theory to examine struggles and challenges Russian students encountered while attending American MA TESL programs. More specifically, the study examines the linguistic choices of the students that helped them construct various identities in different academic settings. The data for the study stem from in-depth interviews and reflective journals.

The results of the study allow the researcher to gain more insights into the complex process of discursive identity construction and transformation and to trace the changes in the academic socialization process of international graduate students.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents. Thank you for your love and support. I hope you are proud of me.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

NNES Non-native English speaker

NES Native English speaker

L2 Second Language

MA TESL Master of arts in teaching English to the speakers of other languages

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

US-based MA TESL programs attract many international students from across the world. With English becoming an international language of communication and teaching, there is an urgent need to account for the experiences of those who enter a new academic context and try to establish their new social and academic identities. International MA TESL students' socialization experiences and perceptions are illustrative of the dynamic and fluid nature of identity, the situated nature of understanding who one is, and multiple influences on identity formation. According to Pavlenko (2003), academic and professional socialization encompasses not only the process of acquiring given knowledge and set of skills, but also involves a complex process of negotiating multiple identities, competence, cultures, and power relations. Additionally, Samimy et al. (2011) emphasize the fact that "international students are a crucial component of campus diversification and internalization at school" (p. 562). It is especially important to understand the experiences of non-native speakers of English (NNES) who are becoming a part of TESL graduate programs and starting to establish their professional identities as teaching language professionals (Johnson, 2001). As Park (2012) states, understanding and documenting the academic and professional experiences of NNES teachers' journeys prior to and during transition from one academic context to another "could raise awareness of rewards reaped and challenges encountered from the ways in which their identities have been constructed in TESOL programs" (p. 128).

For the reasons mentioned above, the topic of this study is important to the field of linguistics and other related fields, such as applied linguistics, education, and bilingualism. The current research will yield significant results that can be used in various educational settings to assist international graduate students with their academic and professional needs. Moreover, the findings of this study will help educators understand the struggles and concerns Russian students are facing when entering new academic contexts.

The purpose of this research is to examine the process of academic and language socialization in which Russian MA TESL students, being competent English language users, exhibit evolving graduate student identities while enrolled in American colleges. Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed in the study:

1. How are Russian MA TESL students constructing and negotiating their identities through discourse in American graduate school communities?
2. What struggles and challenges do Russian MA TESL students face when entering new academic environments?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Academic Socialization of Graduate Students

Socialization is the process through which an individual learns to adopt the values, skills, attitudes, norms, and knowledge needed for membership in a given society, group, or organization (Gardner, 2010). Unlike other models of professional socialization, however, graduate student socialization is unique in that the student is becoming socialized not only to the graduate school environment and the role of student but simultaneously to the professional role. Golde (1998) argues that the process of graduate school socialization is one "in which a newcomer is made a member of a community. In the case of graduate students, the community of an academic department in a particular discipline" (p. 56). For her, "the socialization of graduate students is an unusual double socialization. New students are simultaneously directly socialized into the role of graduate student and are given preparatory socialization into graduate student life and the future career common to most doctoral students" (p. 56). Additionally, Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) describe graduate student socialization as "the processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills" (p. iii). Thus, socialization is believed to be integral to the success of the graduate students and their perseverance (Turner & Thompson, 1993).

The research suggests that academic socialization of graduate students tends to occur in stages or developmental phases. The study done by Weidman et al. (2001) singles out four stages of academic socialization. In the first one, the anticipatory stage, students enter graduate school "with stereotypes and preconceived expectations" (p.12). Additionally, in the anticipatory stage novices learn new roles, get to know academic procedures and agendas that should be followed, and construct new identities. The second stage, "formal stage", allows graduate students obtain "formal instruction in the knowledge upon which professional authority will be based" (p.13). The formal stage helps students determine their degree fitness and practice their expected roles. In the third stage that Weidman et al. (2001) call "informal stage", neophytes learn informal roles through interactions with faculty members and other graduate students and establish interpersonal connections. As a result of acquiring new informal codes, students become aware of flexibilities in performing roles while still following role requirements. The fourth stage, "personal stage" enables students to separate themselves from the department in search of new identities and find "true selves". This stage makes students "access their career marketability, degree of competitiveness, and commitment to both personal and professional development beyond graduation" (p.15).

Another model of academic socialization was proposed by Gardner (2008). In her three-stage model, she accounts not only for professional and academic development that graduate students undergo, but also discusses personal identity development. As the initial stage of academic socialization, she mentions the time leading to the admission into the graduate program, during which "students are forming relationships and key understandings of what it means to be a graduate student and a future professional from the initial experiences" (p.68).

The next phase described by Gardner encompasses not only the coursework, but also the process of establishing social contact with the peers, faculty members, selecting an advisor and a thesis committee, and for the majority of students having experiences of a teaching assistant. This stage is an integral component of building a successful graduate career of a student and a teacher. Finally, in the third stage, personal and interpersonal development relate to the students' "changing relationships with faculty members and peers, including their orientation toward a more professionally minded self, rather than solely that of a student" (p. 65).

Although the models discussed above provide valuable insights into academic and professional socialization of graduate students, they are criticized by many researchers. For instance, Antony (2002) argues that many of the models are monolithic in nature and do not account for individual differences based on a student's discipline, institutional context, and social environment. He also indicates that "in addition, these models fall short of explaining the complexity and holistic nature of the graduate student experience as they tend to focus primarily on programmatic components rather than the total developmental transformation experienced by a student in his or her graduate program" (p. 205).

In her study on academic socialization of international and American doctoral students at US universities, Gardner (2010) interviewed 60 subjects from a variety of disciplines. Students were asked to describe their academic socialization process, struggles, and challenges they are experiencing in everyday academic life. Four major themes emerged from the data analysis, which are support, self-direction, ambiguity, and transition. She noticed that international graduate students had their major difficulties with support and transition. They had to be more self-reliant and did not seek much support from peers and advisors. Conversely, American students relied more on support from the department and peers.

However, Gardner insists that students' experiences cannot be monolithic. She argues that "the defining characteristics of institutional and departmental cultures as well as the experiences particular to a specific discipline greatly affect a student's experience while in graduate school" (p. 76). Additionally, some themes come to surface at a particular time in graduate school.

Another study by Gardner (2007) arrived at similar conclusions and identified similar topics. In that inquiry, 20 graduate students from chemistry and history departments at a big research-oriented university discussed their socialization processes. Among the central themes that came to surface were ambiguity, balance, independence, development, and support. Ambiguity was a prevalent topic in many students' narratives in the earlier years in a doctoral program. One of the participants in the study called it "riding a torpedo of graduate school" (p. 731). The feeling of ambiguity was caused by lack of clarity, feeling of uncertainty regarding future career plans, and overall ambiguity of expectations from the program. As for independence, it was more of a balancing act for many students. Gardner indicates, "Independence exists for these students as a sort of tension between having not enough or too much, especially in regard to the relationship with their advisor. This concept was demonstrated in phrases like "hands off," "looking over your shoulder," and "control freak." (p. 733). However, independence is a site of struggle for many students when they feel they have too much or too little independence. Gardner argues more research is needed to analyze complex relations between real self and the self these students are striving to become.

Duff (2002) argues that academic socialization is not merely acquisition of pre-given knowledge and set of skills, but it also involves the process of identity negotiation, building new cultures, and power relations. Such researchers as Zamel (1997) state that academic socialization

should be considered bi-directional, because not only do learners coming from various backgrounds negotiate academic discourses, but also discourse communities are able to change novices who join them. The research has demonstrated that academic socialization is not a process of cultural transmission by those who possess more institutional power and those who lack it, but “involves active negotiation and sometimes contestation of norms and practices by those engaged in them, reflecting individuals’ agency, goals, abilities, and preferences” (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2014).

2. Language Socialization

In many contemporary studies, the terms “language socialization”, “discourse socialization”, and “academic enculturation” are used interchangeably. Language or discourse socialization is a framework that emphasizes the centrality of language in the socialization of newcomers in a sociocultural group. As Ochs and Shieffelin (2001) argue, “the process of becoming a competent member of society is realized to a larger extent through language, by acquiring knowledge of its functions, social distribution, and interpretations in and across socially defined situations, i.e., through exchanges of language in particular social situations” (p. 277). Consequently, language learning is inseparable from social interactions in which newcomers of a certain discourse community socialize with its competent members.

Newcomers’ learning is often assisted by more competent members of the group.

According to Morita (2004), there are two major approaches to analyze discourse socialization. One of them is the product-oriented approach that focuses on identifying what learners need to know to become legitimate members of a given discourse community. One direction of the product-oriented approach is also to look at the linguistic and rhetorical

conventions that novices need to master. The other approach is process-oriented that investigates how students are socialized in a given discourse community.

Morita (2004) conducted a study on academic discourse socialization of international MA TESOL students in a Canadian university. Having employed the notion of “community of practice” proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), she used classroom observations, students’ self-reports, and interviews to illustrate major challenges and struggles international MA TESOL students experienced. In addition to constructing new identities as graduate students, the participants were also negotiating competence and power relations to be accepted in their community and be recognized as legitimate participants of classroom discourse. The common identity described by the participants was the identity of “being less competent than others” (p. 583). Due to the tensions related to classroom discussions, reading materials, and lectures, subjects felt they were not contributing as much as others. Tensions associated with lack of English proficiency and being perceived as “stupid” or “not very intelligent” also came to surface in students’ responses. However, among the notable findings was the fact that students’ identities could fluctuate and shift depending on the context. In some situations, they felt they were deprived of power due to their non-native status in the field or poor English skills; in other settings, they felt confident about their language and overall knowledge.

The scholar further elaborated on the concept of agency and how international students were shaping their own learning by exercising their agency in different contexts. She states that agency is established in interactions that an individual participates in. According to Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), “agency is never a ‘property’ of a particular individual” but rather, “a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large” (p. 148). Study participants indicated that some of them were

trying to gain full membership in classroom discussions while others claimed they did not feel like participating in any activities and remained at the periphery. One finding is especially worthy. As Morita suggests, while some students established agency in different ways while responding to classroom activities, they all experienced major identity transformations as well as reconsidering their beliefs on teaching and learning. These research findings indicate that identity is situated, fluid, and flexible.

In another study, Morita (2000) explored how native and non-native students were socializing in an academic discourse community by participating in oral presentations. According to Morita, “in their daily academic life students, particularly graduate students, are normally required to interact orally in various contexts. Their performance and participation in oral activities, such as class presentations and discussions, meetings with professors, conference presentations, and thesis oral defenses, are important not only for successful completion of their courses and programs, but also for their disciplinary enculturation and apprenticeship into academic discourses and cultures” (p. 280). This study showed that academic discourse socialization is not a unidirectional process of transmitting knowledge from competent users to novices, but a complex process that involves negotiation of agency, identity, and power relations. Despite the fact that most of the participants had substantial teaching experience, they still felt insecure in classes when their knowledge and learning skills were challenged by instructors and professors.

Discourse or language socialization is one of the prominent topics not only in studies on academic socialization, but also in establishing one’s teacher identity. Some researchers, such as Ahmadi, Samad, and Noordin (2013) investigated academic socialization of EFL teachers in TEFL graduate program through oral discourse practices in the first year of their program. The

study findings revealed the situated nature of identity and how quickly it could shift depending on the context. The study participants indicated that participation in group discussions facilitated their professional identity reconfiguration and reimagining. In addition to it, negotiating their positions in the discourse community through interactions with experienced members of their community and the disciplinary texts, the student teachers went through the process of identity formation as a legitimate member of their discourse community. The researchers suggest that “encouraging dialogical interactions in TEFL graduate classes as sociocultural contexts can play a significant role in professional development of EFL teachers and their formation of pedagogical self” (p. 1768).

Duff (2010) suggests that “academic discourse is not just an entity but a social, cognitive, and rhetorical process and an accomplishment, a form of enculturation, social practice, positioning, representation, and stance-taking” (p. 170). Among the most important aspects of academic discourse production or interpretation are complex processes of identity negotiation and acquisition of new linguistic codes coupled with discursive and social practices. As a result, academic discourse becomes a site of struggle, especially for the newcomers. The process of academic and language socialization is tightly connected with the concept of identity.

3. Identity as a Multifaceted, Complex, and Discursive Construct

Over the last few decade, identity has become a rich area of investigation not only in the fields of education, psychology, and anthropology, but also second language acquisition. For Norton (2000), identity deals with “how people understand their relationship to the outside world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 410). The processes of identity construction, transformation, and negotiation rest on several major characteristics.

Identity construction is a complex and multifaceted process affected by the sociocultural context (Schechter & Bayley, 1997). The process of academic socialization in a foreign discourse community can be complicated by the fact that international students are immersed in the cultural, social, and academic contexts that are completely different from their home settings. Students' image of a foreign academic community can be imagined and based on the stereotypical perceptions and expectations. The term "imagined community" is a concept borrowed by Anderson (1991). He uses it describing nations and suggesting that a nation is socially constructed and ultimately imagined by the people who perceive themselves as the part of that group. He continues, "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1991, p. 8). Kanno and Norton (2003) argue that newcomers or novices also create imagined communities, which are "group of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom learners connect through the power of imagination" (p. 241). International students enrolled in study abroad programs can also possess images of the communities in which they want to be active participants in the future. These images have a large impact on their current learning and socialization processes, although they are not yet members of such communities (Norton, 2001).

In addition to the multifaceted and complex nature of identity, an abstract notion of identity is not meaningful outside discourse. International students who are enrolled in US colleges and schools use English on a daily basis both inside and outside the classroom. As a result, they are not only exchanging linguistic information with the members of the target language community, but they are constantly negotiating a "sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (Norton Pierce, 1995, p. 18). In the foreign academic context, L2

becomes the main means through which international students negotiate their social identities, since it is through language that a person is either given or denied access to social groups. Students are moving between various social groups and social contexts, thus constantly negotiating and constructing their identities to gain membership and establish power in a particular social group. They must have multiple and changing identities to move from one context to another, which means that students are negotiating and constructing their identities in every social context. In the process of identity negotiation, language plays a very important role. It can be concluded that identity is constructed by language and that people establish their identity by how they choose to use language (Norton, 1997).

4. Identity Construction of International MA TESL students

There has been a great number of studies focusing on the identity issues of international students, including MA TESL students. A number of studies have concentrated on various facets of MA TESL student identities, such as (re)construction of professional selves (Ilieva, 2010), being a NNES (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Park, 2006; Pavlenko, 2003), and social group membership (Cho, 2013; Johnson, 2001). Among the emerging themes in these studies are struggles with language proficiency, overcoming native/non-native dichotomy, and negotiating membership in a multilingual community.

4.1. English Language Proficiency: “A child who has just learned how to speak”

One of the major concerns reflected in the studies that involve international MA TESOL students appears to be their language proficiency. Undoubtedly, securing a high level of English language proficiency has become one of the targets for NNES as they continue to envision English as a form of social, academic, and symbolic capital (Park, 2012). In today’s globalized world, English plays a dominant role in various international discourse communities.

Researchers, such as Crawford (2006) argue that people use English widely as lingua franca, because those whose native language is not English have to negotiate their participation, struggling to get legitimacy and membership in an English medium academic discourse communities. Drawing from this point of view, language is seen as a linguistically mediating tool for gaining participation, legitimacy, and membership in L2 mediated academic community discourse. Such participation, legitimacy, and membership, indeed, involve negotiation, construction, and co-construction of identity that international students experience.

Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) attempted to investigate what means are used by NNES in TESOL programs that help them overcome the native/non-native speaker dichotomy. The study suggested that all its participants felt disempowered by the fact that their English was not native-like. Brutt-Griffler and Samimy claimed that “the social construct of non-nativeness assigns to the L2 speaker the identity of a permanent learner, meaning that the self-construction of identity requires deconstructing the social values imposing the former conception” (p. 425). Another study by Pavlenko (2003) yielded similar results. One of the MA TESOL students in her study portrayed her attempts to acquire a native-like English competence and thus become a legitimate member of the TESOL community as “an almost lifelong and unsuccessful struggle” (p. 257). Moreover, other participants admitted their instruction in English led them to view English exclusively as a language of White majority. To emphasize the importance of having a good language competence one of the students asserted that “in this country (the US), if you do not speak English properly, you are less than a human being” (p. 258).

According to Zacharias (2010), linguistic identities appeared to be of paramount importance for NNES enrolled in MA TESOL programs at American universities. One of the subjects of her study shared her experience of failing to order chicken nuggets from a drive-

through counter despite her repeated attempts to pronounce the same sentence. She expressed her deep feeling of being upset for failing “to even say the simplest words correctly” (p.186).

Shaping, negotiating, and reconstructing identities seem to be challenging not only outside the classroom, but also inside the classroom. Morita (2004) explored how graduate students from Japan who were attending a Canadian university negotiated their participation and membership in their L2 classroom community. Her research produced striking results pointing at the fact that major challenges met by those students related to their desire to negotiate competence, identity, and power relations, “which are necessary for them to participate and be recognized as legitimate and competent members of their classroom community” (p. 573).

One of the emerging themes in the study of two Saudi MA TESOL students conducted by Barnawi (2009) was the students’ inability to express themselves in English, to participate and be accepted into their classroom community. They felt “pressed to express their ideas in English” and did not want to participate in classroom discussions “due to inability to articulate complex ideas in English”. As master’s students, they did not want “to lose face in front of other students” (p. 72). Moreover, the participants in the study pointed to the difficulty in using academic English versus English as a communicative tool for everyday communication, “It was not only the language, but even the course contents as well. I am here contrasting between language as a communicative tool and the academic language, e.g. books” (p. 74).

In Samimy’s et al. (2011) study an Asian graduate student felt discriminated against when he was involved in group work on a project. He expressed his deep feeling of frustration in his class log: “I had a group discussion with three domestic classmates in class. During the discussion, two of them did not see me...[and] did not even ask my opinion on the topic. They

seemed to consider me invisible. One of the possible reasons may be their assumptions of me as an Asian who cannot speak English and did not have anything to say” (p. 567).

In addition to being an ‘outcast’ in their classroom communities, some NNES felt pressed by their social roles as a graduate students at an American university due to the lack of English proficiency. There was a clear discrepancy between the image of oneself and reality. One of the participants in Zacharias’ (2010) research study claimed that she felt “like a child who has just learned to speak” (p. 187). To her, an English teacher and a graduate student must be fluent in English and perfect in listening comprehension – two skills she did not possess.

Facing language insecurities and their influence on one’s identity is a prominent theme in the research study conducted by Johnson (2001). In her study, a female Mexican student pursuing her master’s degree in TESOL reported her anxiety at being viewed as a NNES and that her inability to fully express herself in English would affect her writing academic papers and teaching other people the language that is not her native. She confessed before submitting papers or sending an email to the professor that she had to revise her writing two or three times to make sure she was demonstrating “some kind of proficiency” (p. 16).

4. 2. Being a Part of Non-native community

International students who are enrolled in MA TESOL programs across the US have to face challenges related not only to their insufficient language abilities, but also in defining what it means to be a NNES teacher in an ESL context. The question of who is a better language teacher, an NES or an NNES, has long been discussed in literature. Phillipson (1992) introduced the notion of the “native speaker fallacy” and argued there is no validity to support NES’s superiority to NNES, because “the greater facility that a NES is supposed to have (e.g., fluency, knowledge of idiomatic expressions, and cultural understanding) can be taught to a NNES” (p.

199). Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999) asserted that the NS vs NNS binary opposition is a socially constructed identity, not a linguistic one. Among the most significant socially bound factors that help differentiate between an NS and an NNS are national origin and accent.

The research inquiries by Pavlenko (2003) and Samimy et al. (2011) drew attention to disconnectedness between who these teachers were in their home countries and how they were viewed in a new teaching context. According to Norton (2000), identity is a site of struggle in a way that subjectivity is produced in the variety of social sites, all of which are structured by relations of power in which the person takes up different subject positions that may be in conflict with each other. One of the informants in the study conducted by Samimy et al. (2011) revealed she felt confident about her identity as an English teacher back in South Korea; however, she could not feel confident about being an NNEST teacher in the US. She claimed, “When I taught English in Korea, I did not have much concern as an English teacher, other than for my pronunciation. Actually, I was already confident...however, my self-confidence as an ESL teacher in the US drastically dropped” (p. 566). Her experiences indicate that identities are fluid and depend on the context.

When describing the journey undertaken by L2 graduate students matriculated in MA TESOL program in the US, Pavlenko (2003) also pointed to the disconnectedness between one’s teaching experiences in his or her home country and in a TESOL program. One of the informants found herself disappointed and, as a result, was not confident about her performance in class. She stated, “As a non-native L2 teacher of the last two and a half years in Korea, I have felt sorry for my students for not speaking good English. Now as an L2 learner here, I am sometimes frustrated in my bad speaking and listening abilities in English because I often cannot be a good participant in my classes” (p.259).

The issue of juggling an L2 user's and an ESL teacher's identities was also raised in the studies by Johnson (2001) and Park (2012). In Johnson's study the participant exhibited multiple identities as a TESOL student and an ESL teacher. However, at times she felt uncomfortable trying to balance those identities and it often resulted in her feeling linguistically insecure with her ESL students and ESL colleagues.

Finally, similar experiences of a complex process of juggling multiple identities were reported by a Chinese graduate student in Park's (2012) research inquiry. Park argued that once the study participant found herself in a new academic context, her linguistic identity underwent transformation. She began to question her language achievements in China and thus felt powerless. For that student, English language proficiency meant the ability to handle any situation and thus exercise her power.

4.3. Entering a Multilingual Community

In her study of NNES identity reconstruction, Pavlenko (2003) introduced an appealing idea of how L2 graduate students in MA TESOL programs can balance the sense of who they are and where they belong. She argued that contemporary theories of bilingualism and especially Cook's notion of multicompetence open up a new venue for NNES teachers "to construct themselves and their future students as legitimate L2 users rather than as failed native speakers of the target language" (p. 6). Pavlenko found evidence that her participants in the study started to reimagine themselves and acquire a new identity after class readings on current theories of bilingualism and who can be considered bilingual.

According to Cook (1992, 1999), the concept of multicompetence puts forward the idea that people who know more than one language and use them in their daily lives have a distinct compound state of mind that is distinguishable from two monolingual minds. Students came to

see their competence differently; some of them asserted they never considered a possibility of viewing themselves as bilinguals and multicompetent L2 users rather than NNES.

Students' entry into the newly imagined community of multicompetent L2 users helped them reshape the sense of who they are and empowered them. As Samimy et al. (2011) stated, empowerment involves people in the process of reimagination of their own power and helps create a new relationship with their own context. Indeed, the process of identity reconstruction and reshaping was beneficial for many MA TESOL students whose native language was not English. One of the participants in their study concluded, "The most noticeable change in me throughout the course in terms of the language issue is probably perception and practice change in relation to accent....However, accent is not an issue anymore....I do not need to make too much of an effort to sound like an American or a native speaker to be more qualified NNES professional" (p. 566). Her voice was echoed by another student from Ilieva's (2010) study that investigated how teacher education programs allow NNES teachers to construct positive identities and pro-active educators. The informant of the research inquiry claimed, "...teaching toward the goal of achieving native-like language proficiency is a misleading mission...NNES teachers should see themselves as multicompetent language users rather than...deficient language users" (p.357). Additionally, Park (2012) claimed that her study participant started viewing herself as a bilingual who can employ language and cultural experiences in improving her teaching philosophy and addressing student needs became more important than embracing her NES identity.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Method

The current research is qualitative in nature and revolves around four case studies. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is an overarching term encompassing several forms of inquiry that “help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption to the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). When contrasting qualitative research with the quantitative one, Merriam adds, “words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learnt about a phenomenon” (p. 8). The goal of the current study is to understand the process of academic socialization among Russian graduate students enrolled in American colleges. Thus, it is important to analyze what meanings people derive from their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Case study, as a method of conducting research, is able to “exemplify larger processes or situations in a very accessible, concrete, immediate, and personal manner” (Duff, 2012, p. 96). In my attempt to report on the uniqueness of each participant’s academic socialization process, I was not planning to test any hypothesis. Instead, I was trying to identify various patterns and themes. I could then compare and contrast struggles and challenges each participant experienced in the MA TESL program. As a result, I deemed a case-study approach a suitable methodological framework for the goals of the present study.

2. Research Context and the Participants

The participants in this study were enrolled in or graduated from three different universities located in three different states. Rita and Liza graduated from Gamma University. The MA TESL program is a small program that attracts not only American, but also international students. Another participant, Elena, was attending the MA TESOL program at Sigma University located in suburban part of the Appalachian region of the southern USA. The MA TESOL program at Sigma University is a big one with about 30 students enrolled each year. The fourth participant, Irina, was a graduate student of MA TESL program at Beta University, which is located in the southwestern part of the United States. The program at Beta University is a large program that enrolls around 25-30 students each year.

When the first interview was conducted, the participants were in their first, third or fourth semester in their respective programs. The summary of their educational backgrounds, age, and teaching experiences is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participant information*

Name	Liza	Rita	Elena	Irina
Age	32	27	27	28
Program	MA TESL, Gamma University	MA TESL, Gamma University	MA TESOL, Sigma University	MA TESL, Beta University
Semesters taken towards degree	4	4	3	2
Previous education	Specialist in Russian and English Philology	Specialist in Translation and Translation Studies	Specialist in Linguistics and Intercultural Communication	Specialist in Teaching English and German
Teaching	EFL, ESL,	EFL, ESL,	EFL, ESL, Russian,	EFL, ESL,

experience	Russian	Russian, German	French	Russian, German
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Note. Age = age the beginning of data collection; Name = pseudonym; Semesters taken towards degree = semesters taken towards degree at the beginning of data collection

3. Data collection

For this study, the participants were recruited through a network sampling method. This method is common for the purposeful sampling, in which the researcher intentionally samples a group of people that can best inform him or her about the problem under examination (Creswell, 2007). The network sampling, in its turn, helps obtain reliable participants who will not only provide the necessary information, but will also direct the researcher toward other participants who meet the study criteria (Merriam, 1998).

From the variety of the methods to conduct qualitative research, in-depth interviews and reflective journals were utilized as the main sources for the data. As Merriam (1998) states, interviewing can be deemed a legitimate and effective method to collect data, especially when researchers cannot immediately observe feelings, thoughts, intentions, perceptions, and past experiences.

The first face-to-face interview with each participant was conducted in the summer of 2015 and lasted for about 60 minutes. The interview was semi-structured and included two sections of questions. The first part was aimed at eliciting demographic information, such as date of birth, marital status, levels of education completed, languages spoken, study abroad experience, and motivation to study English as a professional discipline. The second portion of questions concentrated on academic experiences in Russia and in the United States.

The next phase of the data collection focused on collecting narratives or stories from the participants' academic life in the United States. According to Morita (2004), personal narrative

helps participants reflect on their past and present experiences and document any changing feelings and attitudes towards the environment in which they are immersed. The participants were given prompts on writing narrative journal entries. In this study, they were asked to reflect on several dimensions of the life of MA TESL student, such as reading and writing in American graduate school, advising/working with classmates, life inside and outside classroom, teaching in American classroom, struggles and triumphs in American graduate school, and general remarks. However, the participants also had an opportunity to add any story/narrative they felt was reflective of their new experiences in American graduate school. The participants were asked to write and respond to the questions in English. The interviews were also conducted in English. Each participant provided about 15-20 journal entries that contained valuable data.

The last stage of the data collection included the second interview that was conducted via Skype in spring 2016 and lasted for about 90 minutes. The aim of the second interview was to clarify the information obtained and check with each participant whether my interpretation of the data was accurate and detailed.

4. Data Analysis

The process of data analysis included two stages. When analyzing the raw data obtained from the interviews and narratives, inductive and deductive reasoning were utilized (Merriam, 1998) to seek for the specific patterns that emerged in each participant's narratives. Hence, in the process of coding data, several patterns were identified, which led to the building of themes (Creswell, 2009) for each participant. In the second stage of the data analysis, the analytical framework proposed by Fairclough (2003) was adopted. It included the discourse analysis of the linguistic choices made by the participants to construct various identities. More specifically, modality as the discursive means to construe one's identity was analyzed. According to

Fairclough (2003), modality expresses the degree of commitment of a person to verbal representations in terms of truth or necessity. It is a linguistic tool to express one's identity. Fairclough argues that identities are relational, because "who one is is a matter of how one relates to the world and to other people" (p. 166).

There exist several means to express modality in speech (Fairclough, 2003). One of them is achieved through different types of modality: deontic and epistemic. Deontic modality deals with "the necessity or possibility of acts performed by morally responsible agents and is associated with the social functions of permission and obligation" (Lyons, 1977, p. 823). In English, deontic modality is usually expressed through modal verbs, such as *must*, *can*, *may*, and *should*. Additionally, such adverbs as *definitely*, *probably*, *obviously* are used in speech to indicate permission, obligation, or necessity. Epistemic modality has to do "with the possibility or necessity of the truth of propositions, and is thus involved with knowledge and belief" (Lyons, 1977, p. 793). In English, epistemic modality is achieved through, but not limited to hedges and tense. According to Holmes (2008), a hedge can be defined as a linguistic tool that generally helps reduce the force of an utterance and soften the effect of the statement. While analyzing hedges, such as *sort of* and *I think*, in a context, Holmes (2008) suggested that these linguistic devices had complex functions, since "they mean different things according to their pronunciation, their position in an utterance, what kind of speech act they are modifying and who is using them to whom in what context" (p. 303). Hedges help the speakers distance themselves from the proposition or to avoid sounding categorical.

Another typical linguistic device used to express modality is evaluative statements. Fairclough (2003) defines such statements as those that relate to "the desirability and undesirability, what is good and what is bad" (p. 172). Evaluative statements usually convey the

speaker's attitude to the statement, and evaluation is achieved through the use of lexemes with either positive or negative connotation. Fairclough argues that in some statements, evaluation is not expressed so explicitly and is rather assumed. He calls such statements "assumed values". They represent the value system shared by the speakers and their interlocutors and do not need explicit verbal means, such as words with positive or negative connotations, for their realization.

V. FINDINGS

1. Rita

“Graduating from university without any support from my advisor was my major accomplishment”

Rita graduated from a state university located not far from Moscow in 2011. She earned her Specialist’s degree in translation and translation studies. By the time of her graduation from the Russian university, she had developed fluency in English, French, and German. Rita indicated that one of the critical points in her studies in Russia was one semester spent in the United States as an exchange student. Having immersed in the environment of multilingual and international students, Rita realized the world was much bigger than just Russia, and studying abroad would provide her with excellent job opportunities. Another aspect that fascinated Rita was life on an American campus as a student. Her decision to pursue a master’s degree in TESL was firm and well thought.

By the time of the first interview and journal entries, Rita was in the fourth semester of her MA TESL program in Gamma University. She was about to graduate from the program and was working on her thesis. By the time of the second interview, Rita had graduated and had been employed as an ESL instructor in one of the language schools in the United States. She showed her interest in the current research and eagerly shared her reflections on the program and her socialization process.

Among the emerging themes in Rita's interviews and journals was the discursive construction of three distinct communities, in which she was negotiating her role, membership, and status. She was constantly positioning herself in one of the "us versus them" communities, in which "us" meant Russian students, international students, or NNES whereby "them" denoted American students or NES. Having actively employed such discursive strategies as the contextual use of personal pronouns, Rita established fluctuating identities. Depending on her association with a certain community, Rita's use of personal pronouns "I", "we", "you", and "they" created either a sense of belonging or built discursive distance between her and "the others".

As Rita was sharing her experiences with academic reading and writing in American graduate school, she utilized various discourse markers as a tool to retain her national identity. In the discursive construction of "us" (Russian students) versus "them" (American students), personal pronouns "we" and "you" played a crucial role.

Excerpt 1: *Very often in Russia you just read the text and take notes, you answer some questions that are kind of predictable. You actually know what you are going to talk about.* (Journal 1)

In the above excerpt, Rita expressed her strong bond with the community of Russian students who seem to share the same educational background when it comes to reading academic texts. At the same time, the use of personal pronouns, a hedge "kind of", and a focusing adverb "actually" showed her negative attitude to such approach to reading.

Not only reading, but also writing academic papers seems challenging for Rita. She shared her observations and experiences of how writing is usually taught in Russia.

Excerpt 2: *In Russia, obviously we do not do a lot of writing on the academic level. And no one actually teaches you how to write. You have no idea what a structure of a good essay is,*

how to write a report and what to include in it. You have a general idea and no one actually teaches you. We never had any writing classes at university. (Interview 2)

The above comment is also consistent with Rita's negative sentiment towards the Russian approach to writing academic papers. The use of personal pronouns "you" and "we" points to the struggles and challenges she was going through. Additionally, the use of the degree adverbs like "obviously" and "never" implies the struggles and challenges she experienced.

It is no surprise that Rita struggled with academic writing and reading in graduate school. Coming from an education system that places more importance on the precise quotes from the text rather than the analysis of the reading material, Rita found herself in a position when she had to develop new strategies to be successful in classes. In addition to the challenges related to reading academic texts, writing papers turned out to be complicated for Rita as well. The use of modal verbs of necessity "have to" and "need to" indicates the development of a new identity that Rita had to adopt.

Excerpt 3: Reading in a second language definitely is much more complicated than reading in your native language, especially when it comes to reading academic texts on a graduate level. I had to develop some specific strategies like scanning and skimming. (Interview 2)

Excerpt 4: Coming to the United States and writing on a graduate level was really challenging. You actually need to get the habit of writing a lot and almost every day. (Interview 2)

In the process of accommodation to the new academic setting and system that had different standards and rules, Rita was trying to identify herself with another community, i.e., the community of NNES. In establishing her identity within the community of NNES, she set up a dichotomy of NES and NNES. The use of repetitive "I" helped her construct an identity of a non-native speaker who was not born in America and was deprived of the privileges to attend IEP (Intensive English Program). By the use of the lexeme "people", Rita also excluded herself from the community of international students who attend IEPs before entering the graduate program.

Excerpt 5: *I was not born in America and did not go to American school. It was hard for me to adjust to the process of academic writing, because I am a non-native speaker. People who go to IEP (Intensive English Program) have a better preparation and learn the basics of writing. I did not have that chance. I came straightly in the program.* (Journal 2)

“Native versus non-native” construct plays an important role not only in Rita’s complicated adjustment to the new academic environment, but also in her biggest achievements in the program. In her recollection of a story describing her success on the SLA exam, Rita discursively employed “native versus non-native” opposition to emphasize the importance of her accomplishment.

Excerpt 6: *When we were doing a midterm exam in SLA class, both graduate and undergraduate students were taking this exam. I scored 98 out of 100 for that exam. The only person who scored 100 was a native speaker, and all other students, including native speakers, scored lower. The professor asked me if she could make a copy of my paper to show it as an example of how a good exam writing should look like.* (Journal 3)

In the above example, Rita’s identity as a NNES became pronounced. Interestingly, achieving success on the exam seemed to be especially valuable for her because she outsmarted not only NNES, but also NES. She was able to establish a positive identity of a successful NNES who set an example for her peers. However, being a NNES did not bring any pleasant moments to Rita when it came to her relationship with an advisor. Having “almost no advisor in Russia” (Journal 4), she hoped to meet a caring and a knowledgeable advisor in the United States. When creating an image of an American advisor and assigning certain characteristics to this individual, Rita was utilizing a modal verb “would” that helped her express her expectations.

Excerpt 7: *I had an idea it would be someone who would guide me through my academic life and help me adjust to my new academic and social setting.* (Interview 1)

According to Pavlenko (2003), the role of imagination in L2 learner’s discourse is important. She identified three functions of imagination: ideological, identity, and educational. In Rita’s case, she was engaged in the discursive construction of the image of an ideal advisor based on her own beliefs; thus, exhibiting “one of the most important aspects of a learning

trajectory, which transforms apprentices or peripheral community members into legitimate members of professional communities” (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 253).

Despite her high expectations of an advisor, her academic needs were not fully met. In Rita’s journal entries, one can trace the change in her relationships with her American advisor. The use of a hedge “kind of” and a modal verb “would” denoting repetitive actions in the past affirms Rita’s negative attitude to her advisor and discursively distances her.

Excerpt 8: *My first semester she was kind of helpful....She was kind of helpful, but some questions still remained unanswered. As we progressed in the second semester..., she began caring less and less about me, which was upsetting to me. I could see other students, especially native speakers, who could come to her office and ask for some advice or just get some help. She would eagerly help them. However, when I tried to ask her a few questions, she would just provide brief answers and try to finish the conversation as soon as possibly by saying she was busy. It was kind of surprising for me. Why would she treat me differently than native speakers?* (Journal 4)

The discursive example above points to the negative experiences of the participant that impinged on her academic socialization. By utilizing the native-non-native dichotomy, Rita expresses her feeling of becoming marginalized. The rhetorical question, “Why would she treat me differently than native speakers?” points to Rita’s misunderstanding of why she had to be excluded from the community of students based on her non-native status.

Rita’s defeated expectations in terms of advising forced her to adjust to the academic setting that offered her no help in thesis writing. In one of the journal entries, Rita shared her sad reflections. Her use of modal verb of necessity “have to” and degree adverbs “absolutely” and “only” was also illustrative of the negative experiences she encountered in the program.

Excerpt 9: *...I had to look for the answers to my questions elsewhere and go through this academic process myself. I was absolutely left alone with my thesis writing and had to accomplish everything myself. My advisor ignored my emails and was not in her office when we set up appointments. My thesis was the result of only my work without any help from my advisor.* (Journal 5)

The last community that Rita was trying to align with was the community of international students. In her narratives and interviews, she was actively negotiating her membership and role in the community of international students by contrasting it with the community of American students. She draws on her socially constructed identity of a foreign student when describing group projects and classroom activities in her program.

Excerpt 10: *I would say, normally, native speakers were much more active in all group activities, in classroom performance, answering all the questions asked by the teacher. Some non-natives were active as well, but the majority seemed to be shy and were not very willing to answer the questions. And sometimes we were not even given a chance to answer, because while we were still thinking what to say, some native speakers already had their answer ready simply because they can think in their native language much faster. (Interview 2)*

In the above excerpt, Rita strategically positioned herself as being a legitimate member of the international student community. The discursive construction “us-international students” versus “them-American students” is expressed through the use of personal pronouns, such as *we* and *they*. What is also notable in the participant’s narrative is the use of indefinite pronoun *all*, which indicates her irritation towards NES being active in class. It seems Rita felt disempowered because of her status as an international student. She justified her inability to fully participate in group projects and discussions by the fact that English was not her native language.

In order to establish legitimacy and become an active member of the classroom, Rita had to cooperate with other international students from the program. She ascribed positive characteristics to international students when sharing her experiences on her participation in group projects.

Excerpt 11: *It was a really good collaboration and I was really happy with my partners. They provided valuable contribution. We managed to finish a project on time and had a wonderful presentation. I think we were successful, because it is easy for non-native speakers to communicate with each other, than for Americans to communicate with non-native speakers. And the level of reliability is also different. You can always rely on your non-native peers because*

you know they will do work on time. With Americans I never had similar experience. (Interview 1)

Working in collaboration with non-native peers proved to be fruitful. By using such evaluative lexemes as “good collaboration”, “valuable contribution”, “wonderful presentation”, she constructed a positive identity of herself and her international peers that are always reliable and are easy to communicate with. Additionally, by contrasting NES and NNES, Rita assigned negative identity to her American peers who seemed to be unable to provide reliability and easy interaction.

According to Rita, one of the major struggles she encountered in the program was related to her teaching. Not only her non-native status, but also her identity as a teacher who would only give good grades to the students seemed to affect Rita’s academic enculturation process.

Excerpt 12: English and German were not my native languages and I had to communicate in those languages with the students. In my second year of teaching I was able to establish good relationships with all my students. Some problems that I had were related mostly to my non-native status. Some American students thought they would get higher grades because I was a non-native speaker of German. And since I was a TA, not a professor, they thought I was not supposed to be strict with them. (Interview 2)

In the above excerpt, Rita employs the modal verb “had to” pointing to the necessity to find an appropriate balance between various languages that were not her native ones and, as a result, develop a new linguistic identity based on code-switching. Additionally, the passive modal construction “was not supposed to be” affirms the expectations students had towards her as a teacher and were not shared by her.

2. Liza

“You have to speak a lot in class, to reflect, to raise your hand, and sometimes to interrupt the professor”

Liza graduated from a state pedagogical university located in the southeastern part of Russia. She received her Specialist’s degree (5 years of study) in Russian and English philology. Before coming to the United States, she had also obtained a master’s degree in Russian philology. Liza was highly motivated to get an American master’s degree in TESL as she was planning to teach English internationally. Among the critical points in her educational career, Liza named a few trips abroad, including a one-year study program as an exchange student in the United States. Additionally, Liza indicated that traveling to the international conferences to such countries as Georgia, Germany, Armenia, and Turkey helped her develop a sense of being a global citizen. Having acquired a substantial cultural and educational experience, Liza positioned herself as someone “who was open to new adventures and other cultures” (Journal 1).

By the time I contacted Liza for the first interview, she had already graduated from the MA TESL program and was working on a PhD degree in Applied Linguistics at Gamma University in the United States. Liza showed her interest in my research and gladly shared her academic and language socialization experiences with me.

One of the most interesting and salient themes emerging in Liza’s narratives was how she indicated her position in different communities, including the community of international students, Russian students, and NNES. As Liza reflected on her experiences with academic writing in American and Russian universities, she was constructing an opposition of how writing is taught in both systems.

Excerpt 1: *I think I did not have enough instruction on the formatting back at home. I believe in Russia we should have a separate class on writing....What I found unusual about writing is that American students reflected more on their experiences in writing. I never had a chance to think about my teaching philosophy and actually write my teaching philosophy when I was a student in Russia. (Interview 2)*

In the above excerpt, Liza constructed an identity of an unsophisticated writer who had to adjust to the requirements of the program. Additionally, she stated that writing reflections was new to her. The repetitive “I” revealed Liza’s identity of an inexperienced writer who lacked any exposure to writing reflections while “the others” (American students) were accustomed to it.

However, Liza’s narratives contained conflicting discourses. Despite the lack of experience with reflections and academic writing in Russia, Liza implied that she never received bad grades for writing and never had any language problems.

Excerpt 2: *Language was never an issue for me. I never had bad grades, but I had to seek help outside the classroom. Writing Center was one of places where I learned a lot about writing. We do not have such a luxury in Russia. (Interview 2)*

The use of a modal verb of necessity “have to” and a conjunction “but” points to the formation of a new identity that is related to learning how to write outside the classroom. According to Liza, the Writing Center is a luxury that Russian students do not have. It is notable to mention that Liza developed a new learning strategy of how to improve her writing by seeking help outside classroom and attending the Writing Center, which probably had a positive effect on her socialization.

In establishing her role and membership within a new academic environment, Liza was constantly comparing the two education systems. On the one hand, in Russia she acquired formal theoretical fundamentals of teaching and learning. On the other hand, her Russian education lacked practical application of the knowledge. Conversely, the American education provided her with the practice-based approaches to teaching, but seemed “quite primitive” (Journal 2) in terms

of theoretical foundations. What is important is that the combination of two educational experiences helped Liza “fill the gaps” (Interview 1). The following excerpts taken from Liza’s interview illustrate her transformation of views on the American system.

Excerpt 3: *I was involved in more extensive theoretical reading back in Russia, but we never paid attention to the practical application of the theory. I felt these gaps were filled when I was first exposed to the academic texts and articles in American graduate school.* (Interview 2)

Excerpt 4: *...at first I thought it was a bit primitive, and I was not sure why I was writing composition when I actually needed to do research.* (Interview 2)

The discursive opposition of the Russian system in which theory occupies the central place and the American system where everything revolves around practice made Liza reimagine herself as an L2 learner and a teacher of English and construct a new identity of an individual who could use the best from each system. The use of the hedge “a bit” shows Liza’s desire to minimize the criticism of the American system and maximize the approval of the Russian system.

Among other discursive processes that the participant employs in her narratives and interviews deals with her positioning in the community of Americans and international students. She called international students “non-Americans”, discursively labelling them as people “who are easy to communicate with” (Interview 2). Liza indicated she became one of them (international students) quite easily.

Excerpt 5: *It was easier for me to relate to the students who were non-Americans. I made friends only with international students. I felt more comfortable talking to them, because I knew they would understand my accent, they would laugh at the same jokes.* (Interview 2)

By characterizing international students as people who share the same language problems and laugh at the same jokes, Liza discursively constructed a binary opposition “Internationals versus Americans” and labeled Americans as people who would laugh at her accent and would not understand her humor. In the process of Liza’s academic socialization, international student

community played a crucial role. Her identification with internationals helped her accept her unequal position in her new environment.

Excerpt 6: *My expectation was I would feel equal to Americans, which did not happen. I talked more to internationals, because I knew they would not make fun of my accent and would not laugh at my language mistakes. (Interview 2)*

The excerpt above demonstrates how Liza expressed her closeness to international students. By the modal verb “would”, she indicated her defeated expectations of being treated equally by Americans, which in reality was not fulfilled.

Another observation made by Liza was the exclusive status of the MA TESOL program. She assigned positive identities to the students who study in such programs and who show interest in other languages and cultures.

Excerpt 7: *I feel like American students who are enrolled in TESOL programs are different from the students in other programs. These people know they will be working with international students. They are more open to the contacts with people from other cultures. They show interest in your language and culture and really want to find out more about you as a representative of a different culture. It is hard to make friends with the students from other programs. (Journal 3)*

Interestingly, Liza’s discourse points to the fact that she was not quite associating herself with the TESOL community. The use of the demonstrative pronoun “these” and the epistemic stance “I feel like” illustrates the distance between her and other students in the program.

Despite the eagerness of other students, especially Americans, to find out more about Liza’s culture and language, she could not make friends with them. She also felt uncomfortable when it came to classroom discussions. She was denied access to participate in the discussion because one of her professors could not decide to which nationality and race she belonged. The following story demonstrates how Liza was assigned various ethnic identities that she could not associate with.

Excerpt 8: *...In my other graduate class, I was offended by the professor who told me I was not white and thus could not express my opinion.. I was not offended by the fact that, according to him, I was not white. However, he could not answer my question about what race I can associate myself with. He offered me a few variants like Hispanic or Middle Eastern. I had nothing to do with Hispanic or Middle Eastern people neither historically, nor geographically. I was impatient to tell him that he calls himself Caucasian, but in fact, he has no relation to the Caucasus. This geographical area is closer to me, not to him! I was offended by the fact that without even researching the question, he put me in the group I do not belong. (Journal 4)*

The excerpt above shows Liza's dissatisfaction with the socially constructed identity she was offered to accept. These wrongly imposed identities of being called Hispanic or Middle Eastern did not only deprive her of the opportunity to express her opinion, but also hurt her feelings. She showed a strong resistance to accept any of the wrongly assigned identities.

In addition to being labelled as Hispanic or Middle Eastern, Liza was also wrongly perceived as an incompetent writer by another professor. It is obvious that the process of being assigned identities that Liza was not associating herself with had a tremendous effect on her socialization and clashed with her own perception of her role and status in the program.

Excerpt 9: *In one of my classes, the professor asked me whether I knew how to write a paper. I was kind of feeling offended because I knew how to write a paper. I guess she was speaking from her own experience of dealing with international students who knew nothing about the basics of writing. (Journal 5)*

In her process of academic socialization, Liza was assigned not only negative, but also positive identities. She showed her strong association and inclusion in the group of international students when she was teaching at IEP. Being "one of them" she was able to improve her teaching and set an example for her students.

Excerpt 10: *They respected me and I respected them. Sometimes we had language problems both wise and we struggled together. I think we were learning from each other. It was "sink or swim" experience. I had never had any student telling me I was not professional or had no right to teach English because of my non-native status. I was really waiting for such comments, but it never happened. On the contrary, my students were amazed and even motivated by my level of proficiency in English. They would say, "If you can do it, then I can do it too!" I think my experience of learning English helped them reflect on their own experiences. They treated me like an expert in teaching English. (Journal 6).*

In the above excerpt, the use of the personal pronoun “we” is important since it points to the inclusiveness of the participant to the group of international students. The discursive opposition “sink or swim” shows Rita’s evaluation of her teaching experience in the United States. It turned out to be positive and she was assigned an identity of a language expert despite her non-native status. Moreover, she was able to set an example to her students and use her non-nativeness to bond with them. The use of the hedge “I think” in this comment points to her ability to establish legitimacy of her non-native teaching in the American graduate school community.

Overall, Liza evaluated her academic performance in the program as high and insisted that studying was not hard for her. When comparing the two systems, she pointed to the crucial differences.

Excerpt 11: *In the United States, I learned how to be more confident and to speak up. I never had a chance to speak in my home country. During our lectures and seminars, we were not to interrupt the professor and ask questions. We had a lot of oral exams in my home university. We just memorized big chunks of texts and then were exercising our memory during exams. No one asked for my opinion. In the United States you have to speak a lot in class, to reflect, to raise your hand, and sometimes to even interrupt the professor. (Interview 2)*

In the above excerpt, Liza discusses the major differences between the systems and how she managed to adapt to the new academic setting. The use of the absolute adverb “never” and indefinite pronoun “no one” as well as the modal verb of obligation “were not to” echoes Rita’s negative sentiment towards the Russian education system. At the same time, she identifies the core values of it and how she had to distance herself from them when coming to study in America. The modal verb of necessity “have to” in the last sentence expresses the development of a new identity Rita had to acquire to be successful in class. Additionally, the use of an adverb “even” when referring to the interruption of the professor shows Rita’s deconstruction of some views on how lectures are held in the United States.

3. Elena

“I know I am not doing well in classes and I am OK with that”

Elena’s academic journey began in 2005 as she entered one of the middle-sized state universities in her home city located in the northeastern part of Russia. She obtained her Specialist’s degree (5 years of studying) in linguistics and intercultural communication. Additionally, she received a certificate in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Although Elena was born in the republic of Georgia, she spoke Russian as her native language and was able to become proficient in English and French. As she wrote in her journal, she chose to study English as a professional discipline because “English language teachers are in high demand in Russia. I was motivated by economic reasons to study it professionally” (Journal 1). One of the crucial points in Elena’s academic program was a three-month Work and Travel USA program that motivated her to pursue a graduate degree in the United States.

Excerpt 1: *Having spent a couple of months in the United States, I emerged in the American lifestyle. I decided that I wanted to spend some years in the United States. Getting a Master’s degree from an American university was the most reasonable way to accomplish this.* (Interview 1)

Prior to coming to the United States as a graduate student, Elena had a vivid image of the American campus, which was mostly based on the stereotypes portrayed by the American pop culture and movies. However, as she arrived on campus, her expectations were fully met. She discursively constructed an image of an American campus by placing herself inside the college town and school life and by calling herself “an insider”. As it can be noted, Elena did not feel excluded from the community. Conversely, she was a legitimate member of it. The evaluative vocabulary “amazing” and “surreal” point to her excitement about her new life.

Excerpt 2: *Campus makes me feel like I'm in one of those American college movies. Fraternities and sororities are actually real. International faces are all around. Being an insider in this international college town community feels amazing and surreal!* (Journal 1)

At the time of the first interview, Elena had completed 2 semesters of MA TESOL program. She was enrolled in her last semester at the time of the second interview. Throughout the program, she underwent a complex process of identity reconstruction and transformation. At the beginning of the program, she felt excited about the classes, professors, and classmates. In her interviews and journal entries, she presented herself as a competent user of English and did not feel discriminated against in any sense. Elena was eager to become a part of her school international community and was honored to study with the like-minded people. Additionally, she portrayed American education as an ideal system.

Excerpt 3: *I think I idealized the United States and its education system. For some reason, I had a stereotype that it cannot be bad. Everything in the United States should be better than in Russia.* (Journal 2)

The use of the hedge “I think” softens the effect of her statement based only on her opinion. However, she is aware of the stereotype that in Russia people idealize the American education. By using the contrastive lexemes “bad” and “better” and the modal verb “cannot” Elena points to her in-between position and confusion. In fact, her image of the American education system revolving around a stereotype common for Russian clashes with the reality of her American educational experiences.

By the third semester in MA TESOL program, Elena seemed to lose motivation for studying and teaching. She contended that she did not feel “a healthy competition spirit” (Journal 3). That influenced her GPA, relationships with her classmates, and professors. In her reflections on the group projects she had to complete, Elena stated she had to become a group leader and be responsible for everything because her classmates were not competent and reliable. One of the

reasons she did not feel comfortable with the group projects was the heterogeneous student population in her classes.

Excerpt 4: *...in our class one or two people were of the same level in the linguistics field as me. The rest came from a very different field, like philosophy or business, and knew nothing about linguistics. They needed explicit definitions of terms. Professors' expectations were very low because these people were new to linguistics. There was also a group of people with an undergraduate degree in linguistics, but they were bad students.* (Interview 2)

In the above excerpt, Elena builds a discursive opposition between “us” and “them”. She identifies herself with the students who usually display a high level of performance and do not need much instruction or explicit explanations. The opposite group are the students who come to linguistics from other fields “like philosophy or business”. She also shows her confidence in her knowledge by excluding herself from the students whose undergraduate major was linguistics, but who did not show any proficient knowledge. By using the evaluative lexeme “bad”, Elena eliminates herself from that group and places herself in the group of “good” students.

In addition to the decreased level of motivation, classes brought visible irritation to her. In excerpts 5 and 6, Elena expresses her concern regarding one professor’s teaching and the classmates around her. In her point of view, that is not what graduate school should look like.

Excerpt 5: *The teacher explains one thing over and over again. That’s painful. The concept is way too easy to waste class time. Students seem to not get it. What I can’t get is if you don’t understand something, you should probably do your best to get it at home. Read, google, translate every single word to your native language to understand it. It’s GRADUATE SCHOOL.* (Journal 3)

Excerpt 6: *I felt a bit of a condescending attitude from the teacher when he said, “Don’t worry about this. It’s too complicated for now.” REALLY?* (Journal 4)

In the above excerpts, Elena is found to adopt various discursive strategies to position herself inside and outside certain communities. First, the use of the “over” points to the irritation caused by others not understanding the concept. Additionally, the evaluative adjective “painful” adds to the atmosphere of the classroom where she was surrounded by incompetent students. She

establishes an identity as someone who is intolerant of repetitive explanations that should not be spent time on in class. Elena shows her strong disapproval of this classroom feature and excludes herself from such a group of students. She also excludes herself from the group of international students who expect to understand every single concept in class. The use of capital letters in the phrase “graduate school” and the adverbial phrase “really” is noteworthy. Not only does it express her dissatisfaction with the level of classroom instruction, but also points to her defeated expectations of what graduate school in America should be about.

The frustration and discouragement shared by Elena in her narratives and interviews suggest that the stereotypes about American academic life seem to be debunked by the reality of her program. Interestingly, she looked back on her Russian classmates and school spirit that she was missing in American reality.

Excerpt 7: When I come into the classroom before the class starts and when a teacher is not there, people hardly ever talk to each other. They are glued to their smartphones and seem to not be interested in each other. Silence. I miss this buzz of voices, jokes, laughter every classroom in Russia is filled with a couple of minutes before the beginning of class. (Journal 5)

In this discursive comment, Elena compares the two systems in which students display different attitudes towards their classmates and classes. This comparison is built on the contrastive evaluative vocabulary “silence vs buzz of voices”. Being an enthusiastic individual, Elena expresses her disappointment with the atmosphere in her American classes.

In her process of academic socialization, Elena felt challenged when it came to academic reading and writing. On the one hand, adjustment to the academic reading process was not difficult for her. Since in Russia she had to read much harder texts, she quickly got used to reading research articles and academic textbooks. However, she asserts that the format of the research papers was new to her. Elena emphasizes the simplicity of the material in her classes

and the professors' "boiling down the material" (Interview 1). The participant points to the reading strategies she had to develop, which helped her succeed in graduate classes.

Excerpt 8: *If I knew the content of one class very well, then I would not even read sometimes and I would be fine. Despite the fact that I was assigned a lot, I never actually read all of it.* (Interview 1)

Although the process of reading academic texts seemed not to bother Elena, writing in graduate school proved to be a new challenge for her. She had to develop a new identity as an L2 writer that would add competence and confidence to her writing abilities. Although she implied she was a competent user of English overall, such things as format and mechanics of the language were hard to accomplish.

Excerpt 9: *In Russia, I always felt competent about my writing. Here you always feel there is something wrong with your writing, because you realize there is such a huge gap between you and native speakers. Here it seems harder to remain confident in your writing.* (Interview 1).

In the above excerpt, she contrasted her Russian experience to the American one by creating a discursive opposition "competent vs hard to remain confident" and "native vs non-native writing". Elena explained why she felt there was "always something wrong with her writing". She was taught by NNEs. Despite their competence in the subject, they were not NES. Thus, they could not provide insightful feedback for her writing abilities.

In terms of advising, Elena found herself in an unusual situation. She juxtaposes her experiences with the Russian advisor and an American advisor, contending that in Russia she was able to develop not only professional, but also friendly relationships with her advisor. She emphasized that her Russian advisor played a great role in her academic success and motivated her to study linguistics. Conversely, her experiences with the advisor in American graduate school proved to be only professional and formal. The discursive juxtaposition of the Russian

and the American advisor is realized through the use of contrastive adjectives, such as “professional vs friendly”.

Excerpt 10: *I developed more like a business-type of relationship with my advisor here. Because of this, I was very discouraged from discussing things and problems I had with my advisor. Sometimes I just want to talk to the person who is an expert in linguistics when I actually even do not have a question. I would say, I was able to develop some kind of a bond or friendship with my advisor from Russia, but here our relationship is more professional.* (Interview 2)

The attitude Elena’s advisor displayed made her struggle and accept her position as a student who “does not really have an advisor” (Journal 6). Additionally, the participant points out she was not able to develop good relationships with other professors, who often times showed disrespect to her.

Excerpt 11: *I went to ask my professor a quick question about the assignment. She said to come back to her office hours and shut the door. I miss interpersonal connection I had with my professors at my university.* (Journal 7)

In addition to the new academic role, Elena had to adjust to the teaching role as she worked as a teaching assistant of Russian and taught both American and international students. Teaching in a formal university environment appeared to be a complicated journey. Elena described her impressions related to teaching as “scary” and “uncomfortable”.

Excerpt 12: *I was scared to walk into the classroom and start teaching Russian, because I never had any experience of a formal teaching at university or school. It was hard because I felt I was a foreigner to the students.* (Interview 2)

In the above excerpt, Elena assigns an identity of a foreigner to herself in her Russian class. She views her teaching as a difficult experience, in spite of her being a native speaker of Russian. Not only the status of being a foreigner in American classroom, but also students’ learning styles and habits made Elena’s socialization uneasy. In one of the interviews, she suggested her insights on American and Russian studying process.

Excerpt 13: *Sometimes I have to sacrifice my personal time. And I feel students do not realize this. I think in Russia you have this bigger respect for teachers. In Russia, as a teacher, you are closer to students emotionally, but there is some sort of distance between you and a teacher in Russia. You would never write an email to your professor saying, "I am sorry I forgot about the test". You would not do this, but here they do it all the time.* (Interview 2)

In the above excerpt, Elena's use of a modal verb "have to" implies the necessity to adjust to the new academic environment to become a better teacher. Additionally, she points to the distance existing in Russia regarding teachers' personal time by employing the statement containing assumed values. Despite the fact that you might be emotionally connected with a teacher, you appreciate and have respect for their personal time.

Overall, Elena insisted the graduate program seemed too easy for her. Despite the fact that she completely lost motivation to pursue a PhD degree and was not satisfied with the low level of her program, she was ready to adopt the American values and become a part of the American community.

4. Irina

"Obtaining an American degree is like winning the lottery"

Irina received a Specialist's degree in teaching English and German from a state south-Siberian university. Before coming to the United States, she had participated in two exchange programs between her home university and one of the states located in the western United States. Irina's motivation to obtain a master's degree in TESL was mostly rooted in her desire "to experience something different" (Journal 1). She claimed that she "was fed up with the Russian education system full of mediocre teachers, unmotivated classmates, memorization of the unnecessary material and subjective oral exams" (Journal 2). In time of the first interview and initial journal entries, she was in the first semester of MA TESL program.

Before arriving in the United States as a graduate student, she imagined an American campus like “a big area where students and teachers live together, jog in the morning together, and go out at night together” (Journal 3). This image was influenced mostly by the American pop culture and movies. Irina saw an American degree in TESL as an opportunity to become a better teacher and person.

Excerpt 1: Before coming to the United States, I had an image of an American campus that of course was based on stereotypes and influenced by the American pop culture. I was really excited about my graduate degree in a foreign country. It seemed like the biggest achievement of my life. I am coming from a low class family in Russia and the cost of the American education scared me. Since I got a TA and was fully funded by my US school, it seemed like winning the lottery to me. (Interview 1).

In the above excerpt, Irina assigns a social value to the American education by saying that it is the biggest achievement of her life. Interestingly, obtaining a foreign education for her seems like winning the lottery. This comparison is noteworthy, because winning the lottery is usually an unplanned event that will unlikely happen again. Additionally, Irina assigns not only social prestige to the American education, but also material value. Education in the United States is a privilege and usually people have to pay for it whereas in Russia it is possible to receive a good-quality education without paying for it.

In her recollection of the first few months of the American graduate school, Irina stated they were especially difficult for her, as she had to get used to the new system. In addition to taking 11 credit hours, she had to teach two sections of freshmen English composition, and provide office hours to the students. The working and teaching loads proved to be challenging for Irina. In the following excerpt, Irina uses the evaluative lexeme “painful” to describe her initial adjustment to the new system. She is also surrounded by new concepts that she calls “unusual”.

Excerpt 2: *The process of adjustment to the American system was quite painful to me. I knew nothing about how the system was functioning. There were a lot of unusual things for me I had no idea about, like a syllabus, midterm and final exams, office hours, and appointments with the professors. (Interview 1)*

In addition to encountering difficulties with the new academic concepts, Irina's adjustment to the new reading and writing systems turned out to be complicated. The process of adjusting to the reading system in American graduate school is described by Irina as "painful" and "lacking any sense". In one of the interviews, she expresses her feelings of misunderstanding and dissatisfaction with the amount of readings she had to do for her classes. Reading a twenty-page paper seemed to be challenging for her. She reverted to the past reading experiences in Russia and compared the American approach with the Russian one.

Excerpt 3: *Reading in graduate school is more about the quantity of pages rather than quality of the assigned material. I still cannot understand how a professor can assign 5 articles, each of them is 20-25 pages long for one class and never have time to go over each article. Also, sometimes we have to read two or three books for one class during the semester. It is very unusual for me as in Russia we barely could read one book during one academic year. I think I got used to a different (Russian) system – students are being assigned only the material they will be asked about in class. There were no extra articles for self-education or self-enrichment. I doubt it that any student in Russia would read more articles to broaden their knowledge in the subject. (Interview 2)*

In the above excerpt, Irina juxtaposes the two education systems in which reading academic texts is viewed differently. Reading in the United States is more intense and is based on the quantity of pages. The straightforward Russian system places more importance on the quality of reading. Irina's use of the hedge "I think" points to her struggles within the American reading system, in which a student can be asked about something that goes beyond the assigned readings.

Not only the volume of the readings was overwhelming for the participant, but also the class discussions based on the readings. Irina claimed the hardest thing for her was to get used to the academic language of the research articles and textbooks. To approach readings she drew on

the strategies that worked for her in Russia, mainly reading for the main ideas and understanding the conclusions.

Excerpt 4: *When I was first reading the articles for my first seminar in graduate school, I felt extremely overwhelmed not only by the number of pages I had to read, but also by the complicated academic language. I remember I spent more than two hours to read a 10-page paper. At first, I tried just to grasp the main ideas of the article, to identify the topics discussed in the paper, and to get the conclusions. I do not think it was successful because I missed the details.* (Journal 4)

Irina shared that her failure to participate in her first classroom discussion was due to the wrong reading strategies that she chose to employ. Additionally, the use of the adverb “extremely” and the modal verb “had to” points to the difficulties she went through and the gradual process of adjustment to the system. She had to deconstruct an identity of a reader who used to focus more on what is written instead of how and why it was written. Becoming a successful student in terms of reading academic papers meant relying on other reading strategies that were not typical for the Russian academic world.

Excerpt 5: *When in class we went over the paper, my professor wanted to know my opinion about certain things, not the accuracy of the facts/conclusions described in the article. I felt challenged. That was hard, because I had to ask questions and argue with some ideas while reading, not just scanning the text for the facts.* (Journal 5)

After Irina realized that those reading strategies did not function well in the new academic environment, she started developing new reading techniques that helped her be successful in class. One of such techniques was reading texts with a critical eye. In one of the journal entries, Irina elaborated on the value of critical reading in American graduate school, comparing the two education systems.

Excerpt 6: *I believe critical reading is valued in American graduate school whereby in Russia students are awarded for the precise quotes from the text. Of course, we had a right to express our own opinions in class in Russia, but reading for facts was more important.* (Journal 6)

In the above excerpt, Irina is discursively constructing an opposition of what is valued in each system. In the Russian system, it is enough to read for the exact facts in the text and be successful whereby in the United States asking questions and arguing with the main ideas of the texts are the key components of achieving good results.

Not only reading, but also writing academic papers proved to be challenging for Irina. Among the reasons why she encountered difficulties with writing Irina mentioned her lack of experience in writing papers in English.

Excerpt 7: Before coming to study in America, I had vague ideas about writing papers. Although I was studying English as a professional discipline, I never had an opportunity to write a big paper in English. In Russia, we wrote a lot of essays that I would call creative writing. I have never been taught how to write an academic paper. (Interview 1)

Among the genres Irina was struggling most were reflections. Coming from the environment where teachers usually do not ask students to reflect on their past experiences, reflections were a new type of academic writing she had to master. Irina also mentions she had to change her language. Instead of using bookish words and metaphors, she had to develop new language standards. The transformation of her language identity is salient in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 8: At first, it was hard for me to write anything in grad school, especially reflections. No one was ever interested in my experiences as a student or as a teacher. I was not asked to express my own opinion in my writing. It was more about using fluffy English full of metaphors and bookish words that were extremely valued in the Russian context. When I tried using what I thought was beautiful English language, my professor underlined a lot of things. (Interview 1)

In excerpts 7 and 8, Irina establishes the difference between the two systems with regard to writing. She points to the paradox of the Russian system, in which a language student who studies English as a professional discipline is not able to write academic papers in English. Irina

also suggests that “using fluffy English full of metaphors and bookish words” is what makes someone a good writer. This strategy failed to work in the American context.

Among the noticeable struggles in Irina’s academic enculturation was her expectations related to the advising and an advisor. She claimed she never actually had “a real advisor” (Journal 7) and felt awkward when she had to see her academic advisor in the TESL program. She did not find any support in meetings with her advisor and complained about it in her journal entries.

Excerpt 9: *After my first meeting with my advisor, I thought he talked to me using a written script. I did not feel he was sincere...I had a feeling I was left alone in new academic environment without anyone to help me assimilate or adapt to it.* (Journal 8)

In the above excerpt, Irina constructs her vision of the advisor by using epistemic modal constructions “I thought” and “I had a feeling” that distance her from the unpleasant experience of being left alone. The participant also argued she did not have a good advisor in Russia and expected the American advisor to help her with the selection of classes and with the research projects she wanted to be involved in. However, her expectations and needs were not met.

Among the noteworthy experiences in Irina’s academic socialization are those related to the division into NES and NNES in her classes. She was surprised at how many international students she had in her classes. Irina shared her observations from grammar and sociolinguistics classes in which there was some kind of competition between NES and NNES.

Excerpt 12: *I remember our grammar classes and not clever comments from my American classmates who could not differentiate between a noun and a verb. The majority of international students did pretty well in English grammar whereas the majority of Americans were struggling. However, when I was taking sociolinguistics in my second semester, the Americans were good at dialects and other stuff while for me it was extremely hard to talk about different dialects. When we had a midterm in sociolinguistics, I got a D and the majority of internationals were in the same boat.* (Interview 2)

In the above excerpt, Irina establishes the difference in performance of NES and NNES. By using the evaluative lexeme “not clever”, she builds a discursive difference between international and American students. Additionally, she uses the contrastive phrases “pretty well” vs “were struggling” and “good at” vs “extremely hard” when pointing to the differences in the class performance.

The unannounced competition between Americans and internationals distanced Irina from her American peers. She assumed they were not interested in her as a representative of a different language and culture. As a result, she communicated only with the Russian-speaking students because they shared the same culture and language.

Interestingly, in Irina’s interviews and journal, one can trace her English language learning development and how her linguistic competence was challenged. At first, Irina struggled with an accent and accepting the idea it would not go away.

Excerpt 13: Regarding my English, I can say that I still think I am in a fossilization stage, but this is good that at least I can trace some changes in my English. In Russia, it was not important for me, because I felt I was safe in the EFL shelter. When you are in the ESL context, everything is different. There are no Russian speakers around, and I have to use English as lingua franca with my classmates, which is unusual, of course. In Russia, I did not have such a privilege, because everyone spoke Russian. (Journal 11)

By the end of the first year in the program, Irina noticed the improvement in her English. Her pursuit in achieving native-like pronunciation proved a wrong path to take. Instead, she accepted her accent and the idea that intelligibility was more important than perfect pronunciation.

Excerpt 14: I feel like my English became more authentic. My pronunciation and intonation improved greatly. I absorbed a lot of expressions I often use in my own speech. I have been struggling a lot to accept my accent and the idea I will never lose it. But it does not matter anymore, because a lot of people speak with an accent. I think I have adopted an idea that intelligibility is more important than having no accent. (Interview 2)

Teaching in American classroom turned out to be not as pleasant as Irina expected. Since she was still in the process of adjustment to new academic culture and finding her place in the academic community, teaching proved hard for her. Being a NNEST, she felt disempowered to teach NES. The second semester of teaching brought even more problems. She seemed to lose control over the classroom and shared her concern in her journal.

Excerpt 15: *Some of them [the students] did not accept my feedback and had to double check everything with the Writing center. It was a bit insulting for me. I do not think students treated me well and I could hear some students discussing me, my language, or the way I looked. Some students could leave my class right in the middle of my lecture without even telling me they had to go. It was very disrespectful.* (Journal 12)

In this excerpt, one can trace the struggles Irina was facing in her classroom. Through the use of evaluative adjectives with negative connotation, such as “insulting” and “disrespectful” she points to the unpleasant experiences. However, by the end of the second semester in the program, one can trace her teacher’s identity transformation. Although she felt disempowered to teach Americans, she was able to legitimize her position among other teaching assistants. She was also able to find a balance in her teaching.

Excerpt 16: *I guess I found the balance between being strict and kind, subjective and objective, flexible and demanding. I also found my place in the classroom - I am not the center of my teaching, I am trying to make my students be the most important part of the class. Besides, I found my place in the department and among other TAs. I learned how not to feel discriminated against and be fairly treated by the director and the others.* (Journal 13)

In the above excerpt, Irina is discursively constructing the balance she was able to find. By using contrastive adjectives “strict and kind”, “subjective and objective”, and “flexible and demanding” she points to the accommodation of her teaching style to the needs of the students. Despite all the difficulties and challenges, Irina concluded that her first year in MA TESL program was a valuable experience and she was grateful for the opportunity life gave her.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provided valuable insights into academic lives and socialization processes of four graduate students from Russia. The academic enculturation process was unique for each participant, yet there were similar struggles and challenges all subjects encountered. Academic socialization included complex processes of identity negotiation, transformation, and establishing new selves. Discourse, being an important linguistic tool to construct or deconstruct certain identities, played a crucial role in this research.

Among the important findings is the role of imagination that came into surface in some participants' journal entries and interviews. All participants had vivid images of an American campus based on pop culture and movies. They employed evaluative vocabulary with positive connotation to describe their images. Wenger (1998) suggests that imagination is one of the means that helps people either include or exclude themselves and others in and from certain communities of practice and add to their identities "other meanings, other possibilities, and other perspectives" (p. 178). To bolster this point of view, Pavlenko (2003) also argues that imagination holding an identity function allows researchers "to view appropriation of newly imagined identities as an important aspect of a learning trajectory, which transforms apprentices or peripheral community members into legitimate participants" (p. 253).

In the process of academic enculturation, imagination can also negatively affect students' perceptions and beliefs. For example, Rita was assigning certain characteristics to the American advisor before even meeting this individual in real life. She created an image of a caring and knowledgeable advisor who would assist her with every academic aspect in her graduate student life. However, her expectations were not met. In her narratives, one could trace how her relationships with her advisor changed quickly from positive to negative. Imagination is certainly an important aspect of identity and membership negotiation. Nevertheless, as the current study suggests, it can also impinge on the development of new learning trajectories and identities.

Interestingly, negative experience with the American advisor was echoed by Elena and Irina. Only Liza was satisfied with her advisor. Like Rita, Irina claimed she never had a real advisor. Conversely, Elena was able to develop friendly relationships with the Russian advisor. The participants expected to find support and help in the meetings with their advisors, but it did not happen. Lack of academic support turned out to be one of the major challenges for the participants. In Russia, academic advisors function as mediators of students' successful academic lives and especially thesis defenses. Coming from the education environment in which advisors usually play a huge role in students' academic successes, it is not surprising that the participants had certain expectations.

Another issue that emerged in this research is the language proficiency. The number of studies reported on how low language proficiency can affect students' academic performances. For instance, in Park's (2012) study, the Korean MA TESL student felt disempowered in classroom discussions due to her low language abilities. Similar experiences were shared by the Japanese and Chinese participants in other studies (Cho, 2013; Zacharias, 2010). In the current study, all participants presented themselves as competent English language learners and users.

For example, Liza and Elena claimed language had never been an issue for them. They were successful in classroom performance and in writing papers although they experienced problems with the format of writing. Additionally, Elena and Rita stated they were active participants in group projects and performed as the group leaders. This particular finding is not consistent with the results from other studies. For instance, an Asian graduate student in Samimy's et al. (2011) research inquiry felt discriminated and could not fully participate in the discussion, when he was involved in group projects with his peers.

Despite the fact that the participants in this study characterized their language proficiency as high, they still were under pressure to define for themselves what it means to be a NNES. According to Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999), native-non-native binary opposition is socially constructed and has little to do with one's language proficiency. Indeed, non-native status of the participants in the current study was more related to the construction of social identities rather than linguistic ones. Only Irina claimed she was able to improve her language proficiency and become a legitimate member of the community. Like in Pavlenko's (2003) study, she developed an identity of a multicompetent language user and was no longer striving for a native-like pronunciation. This transformation allowed her to find place in the community of teaching assistants and other faculty.

The wrongly assigned identities based on non-nativeness seemed to affect some participants' enculturation processes. For example, Liza had to negotiate her ethnic identity and was excluded from the classroom discussion because her professor had no idea where she was coming from. On the contrary, Rita described one of the triumphs in the program by employing a native-non-native construct. Her high achievement on the exam was especially valuable because she was a NNES and received a better grade than NES.

Interestingly, Rita and Irina were the only participants who struggled the most with teaching in American classroom. A non-native status for them turned into failure to find their place in the classroom. Rita was assigned a “foreigner” identity immediately and was expected to give only good grades to the students. Similarly, Irina was not trusted by the students and felt insulted and hurt by the problems in her classroom. Elena’s teaching situation was different from other participants’ teaching experiences as she was involved in teaching Russian. However, she was also assigning a “foreigner” identity to herself and could not fully accommodate her teaching style to the needs of students. Only Liza was able to derive positive experiences from her teaching and non-native status by setting up an example of her own successful language learning to the students.

Another salient theme that came to surface in the study on Russian MA TESL students was their initial underestimation of the American education system. Rita, Liza, and Elena deemed their programs easy and not challenging. They felt they were overprepared for the programs offered by their departments respectively. However, Irina struggled the most with her classes and assignments. Initially, she tended to underscore the level of classes and had to change her attitude to the grammar class, which at first seemed superficial and lacking depth. Additionally, she felt that some classes in her program, like sociolinguistics, were more challenging for the international students because they had little exposure to various dialects in the United States. In the research methods class, Liza was resistant to accept writing reflections that is used in American graduate school as a preparation tool for the actual research. Writing reflections seemed primitive to her.

Like in other studies on international MA TESL students, the participants in this study were not fully assimilated in the program and kept distance from the NES community. For

instance, Rita and Liza did not have much contact with NES and communicated more with other international students. This positive group identification with other internationals helped them establish new identities of English as a lingua franca users and derive positive academic experiences from such collaboration. For Irina it was easier to find other Russian speakers around her and start friendship with them because they shared the same culture and language. Interestingly, Elena distanced herself from both NES and NNES communities. In her narratives and interviews, otherness construction was a prominent topic. By using negative evaluative vocabulary and a binary discursive opposition with personal pronouns “we” or “I” vs “they”, she excluded herself from the certain groups, including NES and internationals. A similar discursive process was typical for Rita, who either included in or excluded herself from various communities. However, unlike Elena, Rita was able to associate herself with a non-native community of international students.

VII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to better understand the process of academic enculturation of Russian graduate students. More specifically, the study attempted to address the question of what struggles and challenges Russian graduate students face when enrolled in US-based MA TESL programs. Additionally, the study looked at discourse as a meaningful tool for identity construction, negotiation, and transformation. The results of this study illuminated various identity construction and transformation trajectories four Russian graduate students in MA TESL programs were undertaking. All four subjects were negotiating their role and status in the communities of NNES, NES, international and American students. Rita employed personal pronouns “I”, “us”, “we”, “they”, “them” as a major language tool to negotiate her social identity. Liza, Irina, and Elena relied more on oppositions and evaluative vocabulary that helped either distance from or position themselves within the community.

The participants also underwent the process of deconstructing some identities and adopted new identities that helped them succeed in classes and in teaching. For example, Irina struggled the most with academic reading and writing. The learning strategies that functioned well in the Russian context failed to work in the American context. She had to establish the identities of a critical L2 reader and writer to overcome the tensions in academic adjustment to the new system. Similarly, Liza was able to combine her past educational experiences with the new ones to build a new identity of a successful graduate student.

Specifically, she drew on the theoretical fundamentals of the Russian system and practice-based approach of the American academic environment to better accommodate her needs. Like Liza and Irina, Rita and Elena underwent the process of identity reconstruction and were able to develop new identities that employed different academic strategies. For instance, Rita stopped reading academic texts for facts and started employing critical reading strategies.

The implementation of the new learning strategies and development of new identities allowed the participants to overcome tensions related to the process of academic socialization and become active members and learners in their programs respectively. Although for some participants, like Irina and Rita, the process of adjustment to the new education system proved to be complicated and painful, they were still able to derive positive experiences from academic enculturation and language socialization processes.

1. Pedagogical Implications

The study points to certain pedagogical implications as well as important aspects of academic socialization that have already been addressed in other studies. However, they are still being neglected or not fully met by educators. First, MA TESL programs across the country should pay more attention to the academic enculturation experiences international students encounter and how they affect their academic performance and language learning. I believe TESL classes should require international graduate students to reflect more on their academic socialization experiences and share their reflections both with American peers and professors. Writing reflective journals may be beneficial for the international students to trace changes and focus on the construction of positive identities. Instructors may require such journals as a part of a final course project in various classes. Additionally, overcoming tensions and struggles that foreign students face may become an important part of their teaching philosophies. As this study

demonstrates, being an international TA can be challenging. I believe international TAs should be constantly reminded that sharing their own learning experiences with both Americans and internationals can motivate students to study and to learn from international TAs.

Because international graduate students have to negotiate their membership in classroom communities, they should have enough opportunities to construct positive self-images. If the curriculum allows, academic writing and reading classes for international graduate students should be implemented. As another option, graduate classes should address, at least to some extent, writing basics related to formatting and argument structure. What is more, the importance of the Writing Center should be emphasized. As the current study shows, international students are not always aware of how Writing Centers on American campuses can help them meet their learning needs and improve their academic writing.

Additionally, more interaction is needed between NES and NNES. The instructors might consider an option of pairing up NES with NNES when it comes to group projects and classroom discussions. International students should become an important part of the classroom, as they are able to provide unique cultural and linguistic experiences. The process of academic socialization is not unidirectional and not monolithic in nature, but rather bidirectional and diverse. Thus not only international students should adjust to the new academic environment, but also faculty members and domestic students should be ready to meet people from all over the world in their classes.

Lastly, there should be more research and learning opportunities for international graduate students. The current study shows that some participants felt there were overprepared for the program and did not learn much. Challenge of not being challenged can hinder students' academic development and enculturation as well as decrease their level of motivation for further

studies. I argue that implementation of special groups and organizations on campus, designed for both international and American graduate students enrolled in TESL and linguistics programs may be beneficial. For instance, TESL club can become a place where students can discuss not only struggles and problems with their peers, but also share their teaching and research ideas, discuss current research trends, and build valuable network connections.

2. Limitations of the Study

This study shed light on some aspects of academic socialization of international MA TESL students. However, the results of this study have some limitations. First, the findings of this study cannot be used as generalization and cannot be apply to all groups of international students. This research concentrated only on Russian MA TESL students based on their shared cultural, language, and academic backgrounds. Second, this study was based on the data obtained only from interviews and reflective journals. Such methodological techniques, as observation of the participants in their environment could have strengthened the research. Finally, the results of the study could not be deemed purely objective since one cannot exclude the subjective role of the researcher. Although the findings of this study have some pedagogical value, the subjective interpretation of the data and the researcher's biases are inevitable.

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