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Transnational Voices in Academia: Narratives of Identity and Positionality through Research and Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we, two transnational doctoral students and language educators of color, engage in a reflexive dialogic conversation focusing on the positionality of our identities. Utilizing duoethnography research methodology, we explored our academic and professional journeys in post-secondary education in our home countries and an Anglophone context. A discussion on negotiating our positionalities in our immediate academic, professional, and sociocultural contexts is provided. We argued that unveiling one's positionality requires a prolonged reflexive engagement that assists in establishing quality in qualitative research and exploring fluidity in positionality. We closed with implications and invitations to use duoethnography as a path to self-exploration, solidarity, and allyship.

Keywords: counterstories, duoethnography, reflexivity, positionality, transnational doctoral students of color.

Student-researchers working towards a Ph.D. are usually required to develop a wide array of research and writing skills, including data management, data collection, and reports, to demonstrate independence and self-directedness in constructing and producing knowledge. Often, students pursuing a doctoral degree must articulate positionality statements in their published papers or dissertations as the main component of their influence in their research. Unlike what graduate students read about in the guidelines on articulating a positionality statement, this is a prolonged engagement process and reflection on social identities. It also involves a deep understanding of ontological values that allows a dialogical commitment beyond simply listing social identity groups or categories (Folkes, 2022; Secules et al., 2021).

While the number of transnational and international students increases, about 4,193,277 students were enrolled in doctoral programs between 2004 and 2021; their representation in graduate programs becomes outstanding (Parker, 2023), but little is known regarding their progression, perspectives, and positionalities in their dissertation writing process (De Costa, 2015). Scholars in Second Language Acquisition specifically, and applied linguistics more generally, have proposed asset-based approaches to conceptualize research problems and designs through which students' languages and racialized identities and experiences are highlighted and framed as a resource rather than a problem. The Douglas Fir Group (2016), a transdisciplinary movement in second language acquisition from the U.S. and Canada, called for integrating people's diverse, multilingual repertoires and identities through which students' voices are highlighted to understand forms of learning in multilingual spaces.

The primary objective of this duoethnographic study is to examine and analyze the lived experiences of two doctoral students as they navigate their journey towards obtaining PhDs in response to the call for the inclusion of multilingual perspectives. Utilizing narrative work or counterstories as tools for "deconstructing culturally dominant discourses," this study focuses specifically on transnational emerging scholars engaged in doctoral research and teaching in post-secondary education in the United States (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 3). By exploring our identities through reflexivity, we aim to discuss our research, teaching beliefs, and stances to understand how our social identities impact the research process and pedagogy.

The data collection and analysis, as well as the subsequent write-up of this article, were guided by the following research questions:

1. How do we, two transnational doctoral students, language educators, and emergent researchers, narrate our academic and professional journeys in post-secondary education in the United States?
2. How do we negotiate our positionalities in academic and professional engagements?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reflexivity and Positionality: Methodological Pathways to Self-Awareness and Research Integrity

Qualitative methodologies facilitate the examination of reflexivity and positionality as methodological instruments to demonstrate the credibility and soundness of the research problem, research inquiries, and data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jamieson et al., 2023; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023; Pillow, 2003). Although the notions of validity and reliability are closely linked to quantitative methodologies, we position ourselves as emerging scholars whose philosophical perspectives challenge prevailing positivist and postpositivist outlooks that presuppose the necessity of verifying knowledge through hypotheses or plausible facts, empirical observations, measurements, and theory validation (Creswell, 2014). In this manuscript, we reflect on our lived experiences as scholars and

language educators with transnational backgrounds and our personal experiences as doctoral candidates in higher education institutions in the United States.

In this investigation, we emphasize the significance of reflexivity as a vital element in the research process as it shapes positionality and facilitates the examination of the impact of social categories on theoretical, epistemological, and methodological choices. Moreover, reflexivity highlights the importance of establishing rapport, trust, and ethical storytelling to ensure transparency and articulate researchers' assumptions and values. As a result, we preferred the inclusion of duoethnography as the most optimal qualitative approach to analyze how we negotiate our social identities and establish long-lasting engagement in a reflexive, dialogical, and conversational manner to enable self-exploration of our lived experiences as emerging academics and practitioners within the fields of higher education and applied linguistics. In the next section, we elaborate on the concepts utilized in this investigation.

Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: Beyond Methodological Functions

The notion of reflexivity enables the interaction between the researcher and the acknowledgment of oneself, the research participants, and the study context. Reflexivity permits the identification of potential biases that may influence the research process and the interpretation and presentation of data (Corlett & Marvin, 2018; Holmes, 2020). Based on this assumption, reflexivity is not solely a research concept but also a means to achieve self-awareness, often through confronting one's uncomfortable self, lived experiences, and expertise. It represents the reality that the researcher experiences and values, as well as their beliefs and attitudes (Berger, 2015; Yao & Vital, 2018). Crafting a reflexivity statement for the researcher, for instance, can be seen as an act of rebellion in the pursuit of one's true identity (Trinh & Herrera, 2020) while also serving as a healing process that transforms one's life by fostering a community of solidarity (Dobbs & Leider, 2020; Lin et al., 2004). In either scenario, reflexivity showcases the researcher's recognition of their developmental journey in becoming a researcher (Watt, 2007).

Reflexivity pertains to the critical self-examination of the social identities of the researcher and their potential impact on the research procedure. As stated differently, reflexivity encompasses a complete awareness of the researcher's biases, values, and experiences that shape all phases of the investigation. Reflexivity is exemplified through the recognition of cultural and social dimensions and the power dynamics intrinsically linked to the work and positionality of the researchers. Engaging in reflexivity is a methodological consideration that may result in enhanced self-awareness in the research process, as comprehending one's professional identity is essential for ethical integrity. Reflexivity is a pertinent concept for language educators who manage and traverse between their identities as researchers and teachers while conducting research (Green & Park, 2021; Park, 2017) and completing the milestones to attain a doctoral degree.

A case in point is the International Association of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, renowned as TESOL, which is promoting more scholarship that illustrates how practitioners actively engage in reflexivity and identity development (De Costa, 2015; Greene & Park, 2021; Her et al., 2021; Sharkey et al., 2021; Yazan et al., 2022). They have found out that through identity-oriented reflection, it is possible to carve out space for the negotiation of transnational identities and professional voices (Yazan et al., 2022). The importance of reflexivity in exposing teachers' vulnerable professional identities and responsibilities during the 2020 public health emergency, for example, was also exposed in Green and Park (2021). In terms of understanding the marginalization of scholars in English literacy education, Lin et al. (2004) conducted a collaborative narrative project whereby their intersecting identities (e.g., being women scholars of color and multilingual speakers with English as an additional language) added to the barriers and multilayered challenges since English as a second language (ESL) as a discipline is perceived as a low-status field in their working environments.

Similarly, the fluid reflexive process shows how researchers' and educators' positionality influences and penetrates their teaching space, bringing awareness to their teaching roles and responsibilities (Green & Park, 2021). The reflexive practice of language educators allows the recognition of the assets they bring to the classroom and the exploration of their professional and cultural identities in creating culturally and linguistically sustaining learning opportunities to support multilingual and multicultural students (Kibler et al., 2022). Her and colleagues (2021) demonstrated that the reflexive practice of a novice Ph.D. student helped them realize the hidden messiness of research while being a teacher educator in post-secondary education. The focal doctoral student realized that the research methodologies impacted her professional identity and pedagogy.

The concepts of reflection and reflective thinking also resonate with the need for educators and researchers to understand their unique learning needs and the challenges they face in work placements (Barton & Ryan, 2020). The use of qualitative data analysis techniques, such as the thematic analysis of interviews, allows the exploration of the reflections of international students concerning distinct learning requirements and financial, cultural, and linguistic challenges they experience. For example, Barton and Ryan's (2020) analysis explored students' experiences with host supervisors, highlighting instances of unsupportive behavior. Their study employed thematic analysis to describe how international students navigate challenges and reflective processes in the context of work placement and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

Self-study methods are becoming increasingly popular in academic research because methods like autoethnography provide opportunities to integrate diverse voices (Yazan et al., 2020). However, there are challenges to this method in terms of a lack of "knowing ourselves as subjects-in-discourse without engaged voices counterposed in dialogue" (Ahmed & Morgan, 2021, p. 4). In this research

process, we as co-authors decided to immerse ourselves in a reflective process and study the value of autoethnographic approaches to qualitative research, especially when asking questions about reflexivity and introspection about our own lives and long-term experiences in the field (Poulos, 2017). We found common ground because we have relatively long experience working with multilingual students as teachers and researchers. We engaged in conversations about our positionalities as transnational doctoral students and language educators of color. For this study, we determined that instead of writing about our own experiences, we engage in scholarly conversations about our positionality, philosophical dilemmas, and complexities in the field. In addition, we both reflected on our doctoral research processes, which has impacted our views about the social identities of the students we teach. The method that we decided to use to generate, document, and process data in alignment with the research questions was duoethnography.

Duoethnography is an approach in which two or more researchers dialogically interact, critique, and interrogate the meanings they give to relevant issues (Norris & Sawyer, 2009). Norris and Sawyer (2012) argued that in duoethnography, the researcher is positioned differently because they are the site of research, and there is an “outward-looking vantage point to contribute to critical social inquiry” (p. 486). Duoethnographies are collaborative and offer a transparent lens to understand shared lived experiences, generate empirical materials in broader contexts, interpret meanings dialogically, and seek critical perspectives in language teaching and negotiation of identities (Sawyer & Norris, 2013).

The purpose of duoethnography is not to prove the truth or validity of stories but to portray “knowledge in transition” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 20) through self-reflexivity. Duoethnography is a flexible method and embraces dialogic interaction and narratives. While engaging in duoethnography, we were guided by the following tenets of the approach, which is: 1) polyvocal and dialogic since the voice of each researcher is explicit; 2) rigorous, as it facilitates reconceptualization and reinterpretation of past experiences in a dialog; 3) accessible to both academics and practitioners; and 4) open and flexible. Building on central tenets of duoethnography, our study embodies duoethnography and invites other emerging transnational scholars and teachers to explore their positionalities.

Few studies address the impact of researchers’ identities and positionality in teacher identity research (Varghese et al., 2016). With this study, we aim to contribute to this call by integrating the dimension of positionality into our analysis (Secules et al., 2021) and critically assessing and challenging our assumptions through cycles of dialogue and interpretation. In our research, we adopt the conceptual framework proposed by Secules et al. (2021), which allows us to introspectively explore our identities, positionalities, and the subsequent influence on our academic and teaching endeavors. Central to this framework is the reflective process of understanding oneself, particularly regarding privilege and/or oppression (see Figure 1). This reflection is not a static exercise but a dynamic and iterative journey that delves into the intersectionality of one’s

identity, encompassing factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background.

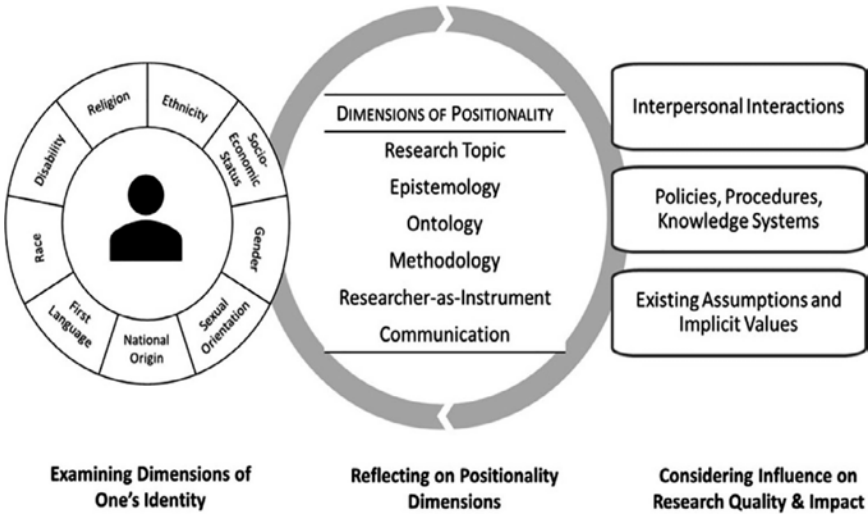


Figure 1. Process for Using Prompts to Deepen Understanding of Research Quality and Impact (Secules et al., 2020, p. 36)

Our methodological approach involves engaging with six positionality dimensions: research topic, epistemology, ontology, methodology, researcher-as-instrument, and communication (Secules, 2020). We examine each dimension to comprehend its impact on the research process. We acknowledge that one's identity influences interaction with research subjects, shapes one's interpretation of data, and directs one's theoretical perspective. Figure 1 represents this introspective analysis, illustrating the continuous cycle where personal and academic selves mutually influence each other, consequently affecting the research's quality and integrity. Through this process, we aim to conduct an inquiry with a heightened level of consciousness, ensuring that our findings contribute to the academic discourse and demonstrate the complexity inherent in researching minoritized voices and identities.

Data Generation and Analysis

As emergent scholars, we understand that academic conventions are necessary for a research methodology that relies on interpretivist data generation and analysis frameworks. Our research process was non-linear, recursive, and dialogic because we needed a set agenda when we started to engage in informal discussions on our teaching philosophies, practices, and the complexities of the research process. What we did know was that our lived experiences as international and transnational doctoral students and language educators of color and understanding the uniqueness of the experience as we were both navigating

doctoral research in an Anglophone context. Our interactions were rhizomatic and free-flowing (Ahmed & Morgan, 2021), and we relied on our ethical subjectivity as a fundamental source of social transformation and resistance (Shin, 2022).

We engaged with reflective empirical methods of collaborative inquiry to assemble and make meaning of ourselves as researchers and research participants (Secules et al., 2019). We had weekly meetings between August 2021 and May 2022, and we moved between formal and informal conversations and reflective journal writing to generate data (Farrell, 2015). Among these meetings, three 2-hour-long discussions were audio recorded and transcribed using new information and composition technologies (e.g., email, Zoom, Google Docs, Otter.ai, Delve Tool) to process, clean, and code narrative data. Weekly online sessions were crucial because we discussed more significant theoretical issues and the rationale behind conducting the study. In addition, we implemented a grounded theoretical framework for coding (Saldaña, 2016; Charmaz, 2014), where deductive and inductive reasoning were the main provisions to dissect transcribed data and make sense of our positionalities. In inductive reasoning, we implemented open or initial codes through multiple iterations to identify relationships between similar codes and combine them to create a category. At the deductive level, we applied (re)focused codes and selective codes based on the six dimensions of positionality (Secules et al., 2021) to critically assess our data and generate categories and thematic units that directly answer the research questions.

FINDINGS

The explicit mention and self-examination of roles, values, assumptions, and sociocultural backgrounds determine a crucial component of a qualitative methodology (Norton & Early, 2011). As emergent researchers, transnational doctoral students, and language educators, we have encountered similar perspectives and positionalities that motivate us to study this nature. We are both users of English as an additional language, and at some point, shared the international student status, working in U.S. higher education in the instructional and research capacities. We both have taught local and international students who are getting admission to U.S. universities.

Racialization and Identity

Nasiba

Identity is a site of struggle; it is socialized, acquired, and performed (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000). I learned about these features and the plurality of identities in my graduate school. Reflecting on my first year in the U.S., I recall interactions where I was ascribed certain identities; I was perceived and interacted in certain ways. Even without conversing with me, people would assume that I am a “non-native speaker of English,” “not from the U.S., then where?,” “An Arabic-speaking person from the Middle East?” “Muslim... then definitely Arab? and “Asian”. When I arrived in the U.S. for the first time, I would identify myself only by my ethical/national identity: Uzbekistani. However, I became an Asian, a

non-native speaker of English, Hijabi Muslimah, and an international student in the United States. This experience has demonstrated how identities are fluid, multiple, and dynamic. Reflecting on my racialization experience and the fluidity of my identities, I consider identity to be a site of assimilation but sacrifice, too. Upon entering the United States, my identity expanded but at the expense of oppression of my ethnic identity: my Uzbek identity got silenced and became invisible.

Juan

For me, unlike Nasiba, identity is a site of contestation and re-identification. Coming from a racially diverse country, Colombia, into another racially diverse country was a journey of re-identification. Colombians are not homogenous; they are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. We also live within the Black and White divide (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), and our society is diverse, and so is the United States. However, racialization leads to racism, discrimination, and dehumanization in both contexts. Racism is in the very texture and fiber of society, and my racialization experience meant an inability to convert my identities as an expatriate and re-identify as an immigrant on a working visa; a Colombian English teacher became a Latino or Hispanic, using English as a Second Language.

Academic Journey: Theory and Practice

Nasiba

The undergraduate education that I received in Uzbekistan mainly was theory-based. In my BA program, I was primarily involved in learning how to teach English, often by reading from Soviet books. The only paper I wrote at the end of my BA program was identifying semantic features of polysemous words. However, my educational experience in Europe and the United States became a journey into teaching theories and engaging myself in praxis. I learned by doing, researching, and trial and error in Europe and the United States. I developed a scholarly identity and perspective by viewing my education as relevant to my teaching context. Whenever I read an article, I needed to consider from researcher, scholar, and teacher's perspective, e.g., a "hands-on, hands dirty" approach. The Western academic framework also introduced me to notions such as academic honesty, plagiarism, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). It does not mean that I did not know about intellectual property and academic integrity, but culturally, in our country, I was taught that knowledge is reproduced and performed collectively. Therefore, it does not belong to an individual. However, Western-dominated research ethics promotes and preserves the culture of individualism and independence (Pentón Herrera et al., 2022).

Graduate school has changed my perspective regarding research. For me, research should be relevant to people's lives, needs, and challenges, have transformational power, be empowering, and be focused on finding solutions and alleviating people's lives. I decided to use critical ethnography instead of traditional ethnography in my dissertation. While considering traditional and

critical ethnographies, I wondered how some ethnographers would come to the field, act like “a fly on the wall,” collect and interpret data from an insider (etic) perspective, never letting the community know what they were looking at what sort of problems they are looking trying to solve as a researcher (Wei, 2020).

Juan

Reflecting on my education, I recognize that my education in the United States has been enlightening in many ways. My philosophical beliefs about what constitutes knowledge, education, and research have shifted along the way. I started questioning whose knowledge is valid, how inequalities and inequities impact one’s access to education, and whose voices need to be centered in research. To satisfy my curiosity, I applied for a Ph.D. program and took classes based on critical theory, research ethics and evaluation, sociology, and language policies, to name a few. I realized that research needs to center the voices of marginalized and silenced people and analyze those through critical lenses. Research is an empowering tool because it enables participants to voice their struggles out loud. This is how I came to narrative inquiry and counter-storytelling. The way I perceive reality is constructed with my research participants, who are marginalized, silenced, and invisible in academic contexts. The narratives they tell and retell are sources of knowledge and reflections of the realities they live in.

Professional Journey: Theory in Practice

Nasiba

While pursuing my master’s degree in teaching English as a second language (TESL), I worked as a teaching assistant in an English department. I taught oral communication and writing composition courses to international undergraduate students like me. My Pakistani, Bangla, Indian, and Nigerian students who spoke English as their native language would often inquire about their placement in multilingual sections of composition courses and why they study with other students for whom English was an additional language. This teaching experience made me reflect on why students from English-speaking countries are made to re-learn English, why their English is not valued as American English, whose English I am endorsing in my class, and what ideologies I am promoting through my teaching. My reflective questions were addressed in my master’s program when I was introduced to Global English. This paradigm embraces the sociolinguistic reality of Englishes that opposes its monolithic legacy of prestigious English varieties. Global Englishes are heterogeneous nativized uses of Englishes by a global community whose Englishes are often discriminated against by the so-called standardized varieties of Englishes, such as American English and/or Received Pronunciation (Norova, 2021; Norova, 2022). My students spoke English as their mother tongue; however, their Englishes was neither recognized as a legitimate variety nor given privilege in the field of higher education.

During my six-year stay in the United States as an international/transnational student, I also worked as an ESL teacher in two language centers, which turned out to serve utterly different student populations. In the first one, I had affluent White young adult transnational students who studied English to increase their linguistic capital; in the second one, working-class Latine, Asian, and Caribbean immigrant adults who needed language to survive in an English-dominated society. Working in two different centers and teaching radically two distinct student populations exposed me to the notion of race and class from an intersectional angle (Au, 2018). I witnessed that race and class shape my students' experiences, and as a result, my students were either among the privileged or the oppressed.

Juan

I came to the United States on a work visa. I was primarily employed to teach English in rural areas. The student population I served were children of seasonal migrants for whom English was an additional language. My immigrant students used to share their experiences with discrimination, dehumanization, and racism. Then, I started my master's degree in a predominantly white institution and taught Spanish to undergraduate students. I do not deny that higher education and secondary education are funded through different sources and in various amounts, and there is more investment and funding in higher education. However, I did not expect disparity in funding schools where White and Black students were taught. My teaching work in the Boston area, where predominantly Black students lived, exposed me to this reality. The school where I worked after completing my master's program was a historically Black school. I had many brilliant and invested students who simultaneously had little aspiration to continue their education. Most of them shared dehumanizing stories of racism, inequities, and inequalities they experienced daily due to their Blackness. Before, my experiences as an educator and graduate student were those of a classroom teacher, instructional specialist, and teacher educator. For the last 17 years of employment in multiple educational settings, I have questioned why some students have more opportunities to access services and resources across educational levels than others, especially when I have received financial support from U.S. institutions without being born in this country. Being accepted into the doctoral program prompted me to investigate this problem further and conceptualize an optimal research methodology to address this line of inquiry and somewhat give back to society in doing so.

Intersecting Worlds: Navigating Race and English Language

While creating a curriculum for a pilot program during the 2020 public health emergency, we realized that we have several common grounds in our teaching philosophies, research interests, and the persistence of maintaining both areas in harmony. For the pilot program, we decided to bring language and racialization together and discuss linguistic racism with multilingual students who had to learn English as an additional language. The topic was strongly influenced by our

positionality and informed by our own lived experiences with the English language. The excerpt below is from our earlier negotiations of choosing a suitable topic for the course we both were assigned to co-teach:

Juan: Okay, in our grad school, we both learned how race operates; we both experienced racialization and racism in different forms in the United States. Now we are going to teach other multilingual multiracial high schoolers who may not have this type of knowledge. We learned about this by experiencing and through formal education. Personally, I feel like when I am in front of my students, I want to find subtle, yet intentional ways of talking about these issues. So, what's your opinion about it?

Nasiba: Race talk is painful, it is uncomfortable, I agree, it should be approached delicately. We need to have a race talk, any discussion about racism, inequity, and inequality among different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic communities need to be openly discussed. This is the number one priority on our agenda. Everything that comes to the teaching table should resonate with our students' lives, needs, and challenges.

Our conversations also revealed our desire to contribute to the decolonization of our fields. English language teaching (ELT) and research are legacies of colonialism and imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Both areas have been occupied by predominantly White groups and facilitated the dissemination of perspectives of the privileged groups. Decolonizing entails centering perspectives, social issues, knowledge, and experiences of non-Western individuals, who historically have been oppressed, silenced, and labeled as the "Other" (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Tuhiwai Smith, 2018).

While sharing our stories, we realized that Whiteness became a salient topic in our conversations. Whiteness is penetrated in linguistic ideologies through standardized English and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2007). Although we mentioned Whiteness only a few times in this writing, we decided to decenter Whiteness from our duoethnography. We aimed to deliver the counter stories of our teaching, research, and racialization and disrupt the invisibility of transnational student agencies. We intend to disrupt the colonial nature of research by being a racialized "Other" who co-constructs knowledge by privileging the voices of the racialized "Others" in predominantly White academia (Bhattacharya, 2009; Smith, 2021). With this in mind, we unapologetically pursue research and pedagogy and maintain the connection between the two.

Research Inquiry Dimensions

The conceptualization of qualitative research problems and questions is the product of a comprehensive literature review that guides the researcher to find methodological or theoretical gaps that must be filled through their research tasks. In considering the orienting question of how our positionality impacts what research we choose to do, the data from our audio-recorded conversations revealed that our linguistic and cultural backgrounds are determining factors in

conducting and guiding research with marginalized students. Both of us frame research topics that transcend individual interests, as they are directly associated with our own previous experiences as immigrants, transnational students, and the English language:

Juan: Being a graduate student in the United States has always been a challenge, especially being a Ph.D. student. Before I started this process, I was exposed to a whitewashed curriculum, and I wasn't aware of the racial inequalities inherent to higher education. We never got to question how difficult it might be for students to get to this point to navigate a predominantly white environment where professors and students are middle-class, monolingual, white individuals.

Nasiba: That's right. It wasn't until I started taking critical theory courses that I realized that the system was skewed in a way to benefit students with these privileged backgrounds, and I even had the idea that I had to become more English-like in the way I presented my ideas, and my linguistic and cultural wealth was not even a degree closer to be valued and cherished. I felt like I had to "fit" the system and the culture so I could be valued and heard.

Juan: I couldn't agree more. And when it comes to research and teaching, it didn't take me long to understand the sociopolitical connotations of English-only policies that have been put in place that have affected students throughout the years and denied them the right to use or learn their home languages. It was clear to me that students who were not fluent or proficient in English got differential treatment and were placed in completely different learning tracks from those of their monolingual counterparts.

This dialogue demonstrates that we became aware of our place in U.S. society generally and in academic settings, more specifically, as the critical element to base our mindset to initiate our research activities. The fact that we have been exposed to standardized language ideology shows how our motivation and passion stem from this experience and background as transnational doctoral students and language educators of color. Similarly, both of us describe our interest in conducting a qualitative inquiry to improve the educational opportunities of students, both local and international, to participate in the process of constructing knowledge.

Epistemological Dimension

The nature of qualitative research implies a complete understanding of the place occupied by researchers as the main instrument to conceptualize the problem, propose and implement a research design, and report findings. The researcher's positionality is, therefore, a quintessential instrument for acknowledging the reality surrounding the context under study. It is essential to highlight the premise of qualitative research designs, which involves the explicit account of researchers' knowledge, beliefs, philosophical assumptions, frameworks, and influence throughout the study. This means that researchers need

to engage with theories and concepts that are specific to their content area in general and to understand the methodological criteria to be able to understand, analyze, and evaluate qualitative data.

Nasiba: Since the moment of entering America, I became an Asian. But this becoming was loaded with different modes of oppression. Being a non-native speaker being nonwhite, being an F-1 international student, being an immigrant, so many labels came, with just one word, Asian. Race has never been a focus in my education up until I got into the Ph.D. program. Studying Critical race theory (CRT) and critical pedagogy, I developed my racial literacy, which is a privileged way of getting to know about race. But not every international student reaches this privileged level of education to understand how race and racism work in the U.S. This learning journey taught me how I was linguistically and racially discriminated against at some points of my life which went unnoticed.

Juan: How did you feel then?

Nasiba: It's damaging, it hurts a lot, it's painful. I decided that this kind of pain needs to be named in the classroom, this damage needs to be announced and challenged among students. Every time I enter a classroom where there are multiple multilingual, multiethnic communities and students of color, I reflect on my experience and want to know about theirs. So, for me, international students, their journeys with race and the development of their racial literacies became my research agenda. What I see now is that racial literacy is still lacking in the undergraduate curriculum. I'm working here on campus with multiethnic, multicultural, and multiracial students, and they are still deprived of that type of literacy.

Ontological Dimension

In exploring ontological values and their translation into research activities, we both agreed upon the importance of our internal reality of the subjective experience and the subjective-objective reality that emerges from our positionality and ongoing reflexivity. Different from the premises of objectivity and rationality in post-positivist paradigms, both of us align with a pluralistic perspective wherein transformation and interpretivism play a predominant role. Our values and positionalities impact the identification of the key concepts and methodological perspectives that initiate with the lives and experiences of marginalized people to create empowering relationships. Observing and working with marginalized students, for instance, creates a unique position where the participants answer research questions.

Both of us acknowledge the relevance of processes of race and racialization and all the dynamics that involve racial relationships in the context of institutionalized spaces. Being exposed to theoretical frameworks that allow the exploration of race and racism during our doctoral studies demarcated the necessary lens to conceptualize research and promote racial justice.

Understanding how race and racism operate in education serves as the motivation to affirm our commitment to truth and students' development and recognize "praxis" (Freire, 1970) as an authentic transformative action:

Juan: As researchers and teacher practitioners, we are aware that messages of injustice and equity should go beyond preaching stances, which could be problematic. The idea is not to regurgitate information with no call to action. Teaching and practicing CRT is not about making ourselves look trendy or feel good. We are bringing our privileged and oppressed identities to express them in writing and mitigate discriminatory practices that people experience in racialized spaces.

Nasiba: That is what praxis is all about. It is an action that leads to transformation and change.

Juan: I love that. That's another philosophical belief that unites us.

The axiological assumptions within a transformative approach suggest that researchers should advocate for human rights and social justice. In other words, research inherently should advocate for transformative action. The researchers should pay close attention to how the lives of people who experience oppression are represented and involve participants in the research process.

Methodological and Ethical Dimensions

Conducting research with the premise of impacting people's lives and bringing their voices to the center implies an exploratory or descriptive approach that accounts for the lived experience of linguistically and culturally diverse populations in educational settings (De Costa, 2020). Based on our experiences, we agree that qualitative research designs and methods are the most suitable methodology for positioning students' voices at the center and exploring their perspectives more closely. Because qualitative methods imply the sharing of personal content, we are aware that involving participants in the research entails an intimate process where they may be vulnerable. It is essential to establish a sense of trust and rapport starting in the recruitment process. Researchers must show clear objectives and expectations to participants, and all of them are helpful and accommodating throughout the data collection process. Researchers should know the importance of representing participants with integrity and sensitivity. Our positionality and reflexivity manifest the motivation behind conducting more qualitative studies, which determines the nature of and the methodological orientations to collect and analyze the data. Considering the ethical aspect of methodology, we as practitioners agree to establish transparent relationships with our research participants to achieve accurate and truthful knowledge.

Juan: The data collection process is a crucial part of the methodology, specifically when considering prolonged engagement with the research setting and participants. Data gathering should coincide with the research problem, so everything should be aligned. That's why the process of guaranteeing trustworthiness is crucial in qualitative methodology.

Nasiba: We examine a certain phenomenon and conduct research because the issue resonates with our lived experiences. Knowing this,

we must approach the research participants with care and their stories with empathy.

Centered on the set of beliefs included in the transformative paradigm, both of us concur that incorporating the narratives about marginalized students in postsecondary education should be the main data source. Our understanding as researchers of the stories that we both heard has shaped our positionality and the execution of current and future research projects. Our reflections demonstrate the awareness of integrating not only our voices but, most importantly, the voices of people who need to get some benefit out of the research enterprise. Acknowledging social identities and honoring people's voices show compassion for the stories and experiences of people willing to share them.

Communicative Dimension

The common practice in qualitative research projects is to present an impersonal or disconnected positionality statement that discloses social identities like "a shopping list" that may or may not be a part of the research project being presented or published (Folkes, 2022, p. 1). More than disclosing social identities in lame positionality statements, researchers must have a clear understanding of their role in the production of knowledge and engage in the processes of reflexivity in every single project they are involved in. Communicating research and social identities could be a cumbersome task because truth must be exposed to an audience, especially when names are attached to these self-disclosures. As emergent transnational scholars, we understand that privileged normative identities are unmarked and, therefore, taken for granted because research has been predominantly Eurocentric and values the knowledge of predominantly white and male identities. We acknowledge that our voices may be disruptive because we have not been a part of the normative trajectory that accompanies research and researchers:

Nasiba: I really wondered how some ethnographers would come to the field, do research, and study the field like a fly on the wall or they would be like sort of an insider to collect some ethnic perspective, but you know, researchers come to the field with certain problems and want to find that solution for the academic circles. But the society remains oblivious about the issue. They remain so because they are never told about that. So that's how traditional ethnographic research has been conducted. Research findings must be shared with communities and co-constructed knowledge needs to be disseminated elsewhere.

Juan: The way we produce knowledge and whose knowledge is valid is what deteriorates the potential that non-traditional researchers bring to the table. Unfortunately, we are part of the system that has requirements and milestones to be completed. Like how we are perpetuating one way or another, that very same topic, because in our program, for example, we have milestone expectations. We write a dissertation and publish some chapters of it in the form of peer-reviewed articles or a chapter in edited collections because there is "a publish or perish" culture in

academia. Nonetheless, the type of distinct and alternative knowledge we produce and share with our academic and non-academic communities is what matters.

The reflections above underscore the relevance of positionality and reflexivity as fundamental pieces of research communication. We, as transnational scholars, agree that disclosing our social identities as “non-white” working-class immigrants and speakers of English as an additional language creates a site of struggle, but at the same time, highlights a site of resistance to make our voices heard, conceptualize our identities, and communicate them openly via narratives. Our position in the academic world determines who we are concerning our teaching and research interests. It is undoubtedly the beginning of a long educational journey. Still, both of us deem it essential to invoke political and theoretical alignments (Berger, 2015) to problematize and go deeper into conceptualizing the social identities of qualitative researchers in social science and humanities.

DISCUSSION

In this section, we synthesize the discussion of our findings and propose some methodological implications for emergent qualitative researchers so that they can engage in dialogic storytelling and explore our positionalities in our immediate academic, professional, and other sociocultural contexts.

Prolonged Engagement is a Strategy to Unveil Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher's positionality is not a fixed but fluid, dynamic, and multifaceted process often bound to social, cultural, and political contexts (Cho & Yi, 2019). Through our reflections and recollections of previous education and teaching practice, we realized that during our work and study experience, we experienced *becoming* equity-oriented transnational scholars and radical teachers. We constantly redefined ourselves based on our students, the institution we studied and worked in, the ideology we needed to challenge in our teaching and learning process, and the injustice we needed to combat. We found liberation not in juggling but uniting and keeping the two together. We did not want to normalize inequalities and injustice in our students' lives. We also did not want to leave our social issues unmarked in our lives. We reflected on our transnational educational experiences, privileges, and oppression and applied our experiential knowledge to praxis.

Reflexivity is a fundamental process for developing and shaping positionality to situate one's reflexive subjectivity with research to maintain transparency between the social and political context of the study and the reading audience (Holmes, 2020; Pillow, 2003). We recursively informed our research agenda by teaching practice. We also kept our teaching practice updated by recent research. Positionality impacts the theoretical framework and topic the researchers select (Kang, 2020) and the epistemological and ontological orientation toward research (Corlett & Marvin, 2018; Holmes, 2020). Positionality also influences

methodological decisions such as participant selection and language selection to communicate with participants (Kang, 2020; Secules et al., 2020), as well as analytic and interpretive techniques (Berger, 2015).

Positionality as a Strategy to Establish Quality in Qualitative Research

Any proclaimed qualitative research requires making “assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15) and reflectively examine values, social position on the problem identified (Mertens, 2015) that go beyond the ethics section involved in each research project. The premise of qualitative research is that the researcher’s identity, views, assumptions, biases, and prejudices should be transparent as a part of an integral component of the qualitative research journey. Because duoethnography implies disclosing personal and professional information, we knew our conversations entailed an intimate process where we may feel vulnerable. It was essential to establish trust and rapport between us and accommodate our research interests and purpose throughout the data-gathering process.

We knew the importance of representing our voices with integrity and sensitivity. We shared stories that were truthful and real to stay away from discourses that functionalize perspectives and take away their implicit relevance. We want to reiterate our professional commitment to improving the educational outcomes of culturally and linguistically diverse students in Anglophone settings. Scholars who disclosed their positionality in academic papers claim that writing a positionality statement has been a means of representation and de-silencing the unvoiced marginalized scholar identities (Trinh & Herrera, 2020) and a means of interference with the hegemony of Whiteness, masculinity, and positivism of scholarship (Dobbs & Leider, 2020; Milner IV, 2007). We wanted to honor transnational voices and lived experiences to establish communication that entails respect, care, empathy, and compassion. We ensured this rigorous qualitative research possessed pro-social moral values, which are co-related to the premises of duoethnography. The prosocial value implied in this study is reflected by the moral investment of the emergent researchers during all research stages and the fact of sharing our stories and positionalities to disseminate the well-being of non-traditional students in postsecondary institutions.

Duoethnography as a Strategy to Critically Explore Fluidity in Positionality

Organizationally and content-wise, duoethnographies can take different shapes and forms: some researchers organize it in the poetry form (Park, 2013; Zhang, 2020), while others write in prose, i.e., conversation style (Trinh & Herrera, 2020) or narrative form (Lin et al., 2004). Some researchers present their dialogues as data excerpts in the analysis section; others use their data throughout the article. In this paper, we integrated both styles and kept our interaction fluid and dynamic. We explored the method's boundaries and found its boundless

affordances in style and genre (Yazan, 2018). Dialogic interactions with colleagues, course mates, friends, and allies expose how we position ourselves in cross-cultural settings (Yazan et al., 2022). Dialogic interactions with them can be intellectually stimulating, transformative, and challenging because stepping out of one's comfort zone and sharing vulnerabilities may be uncomfortable. Nonetheless, such dialogues can be productive for reflectivity and identifying one's positionalities in various educational and research contexts.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This duoethnography suggests that transnational emergent researchers in applied linguistics, more broadly, and multilingualism and critical language studies, more specifically, should raise awareness of their place in academic spaces and the rich perspectives and interpretations that they offer to the studies of identity development. Becoming a qualitative researcher requires an ongoing engagement with identity negotiation and interaction with prospective participants and their perspectives to pursue quality in educational research and add more nuances to the truthful representation of marginalized identities. In this regard, the findings shed light on the affinity and allyship that transnational scholars develop once they engage with the literature and contexts they teach as they reveal hidden curricula that keep minority students from attaining their educational and professional dreams and aspirations (Fox & Sangha, 2022). Other ways for exploring such prospective allyships and establishing solidarity groups can start from academic venues, such as sharing one's work in departmental-level roundtables or university forums and engaging in local or regional conferences. That way, institutional and educational dynamics can transform and become more inclusive.

Often, positivistic qualitative studies have made transferability a crucial measurement for evaluating the rigor and value of the research. However, inspired by duoethnographic methods, "generalizability does not rest with the researcher; rather, readers take what they read and generalize from particulars in one context, create a universal parallel connection, and apply these generated meanings to their contexts" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 93), we considered pertinent to capture and expose dominant discourses in English language teaching and research in our narratives through a dialogic exchange that moved from micro, meso, and macro-level perspectives. Hence, we aimed to add nuances to voices that have been invisible in sociocultural and political contexts in Anglophone post-secondary contexts. However, we admit that, due to its subjective nature, this duoethnography is rooted in our own narratives and confined to our own world, as with most autoethnographic studies.

Using duoethnography as a methodological avenue showcases the dynamic development of identities and positionalities of two emerging transnational scholars within academic and sociocultural contexts. It underscores the significance of extensive involvement in uncovering reflexivity and the adaptable nature of positionality, which is influenced by social, cultural, and political elements. We deliberated on becoming equity-oriented educators and

contemplating our educational experiences, proposing a more conscious awareness of the social identities and categories of the researcher. Additionally, duoethnography has the potential to unveil concealed curriculums that impede the educational advancement of minority students. In addition to mentoring and supervising students, we encourage university faculty to provide students with opportunities for auto/duoethnographic small-scale projects. Providing relevant literature, like ours, to their transnational students and aiming to replicate and explore their stories would not only empower their students' marginalized identities but also be a step toward recognizing emergent transnational scholars whose perspectives, lives, and backgrounds could be valued in meaningful ways. Despite challenging the primacy of generalizability in research, we hope that our duoethnography enables the readers to establish personal connections and meaningfully apply our findings to their circumstances.

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