Processes of Identity Construction for Generation 1.5 Students in Canada

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Abstract : The number of adolescent children accompanying their immigrant parents to Canada has steadily increased since the 1990s. Much of the applied linguistics literature on these so-called 'Generation 1.5' youth has focused on their deficiencies as academic writers in US Rhetoric and Composition and ESL contexts in higher education and the stigma of ESL in US K-12 contexts. However, the literature on Generation 1.5 students and identity in Canadian higher education is limited. This qualitative study investigates the processes of identity construction of three Generation 1.5 students studying at a university in Metro Vancouver to find out what types of identities and representations of self and other they make relevant, the meanings they attribute to their identities, and what motivates them to construct these identities. The study analyzes the accounts and experiences of the participants in interviews, focus groups, and texts and as 'culture-in-action,' positing that they constructed identities as social categories associated with the languages and social practices of their countries of birth, in liminal spaces among a continuum between Canada and their countries of birth, and a spectrum of related cultural representations. Ideas and beliefs associated with broader 'macro' social structures in Canadian society related to language, culture, legitimacy, immigration, power, distinction, and racism were shown to be transcended in and through their representations of themselves and others. Data suggest that moving to Canada caused participants to experience discontinuities between their cultures, languages, and social practices, and in some cases a conflicting sense of self. The study brings implications for finding ways to understand the complexity of immigrant students, avoid reifying and generalizing about them, and not see them as stuck-in-between or lacking.
Keywords : culture-in-action, generation 1.5, identity, membership categorization analysis

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