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## Academic Discourse Socialization, Scaler Politics of English, and Racialization in Study Abroad: A Critical Autoethnography

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### Abstract

In this age of rising animosity to newcomers in host societies, study abroad students are often reported to receive maltreatment and discrimination. To this end, I conducted a critical autoethnographic study that responds to the trajectory of my English language learning in the UK and explores my adjustment difficulties and factors such as racialized linguistic discrimination. It also reveals the types of agency that I employed in the process of academic discourse socialization and unpacks causes and processes of renegotiating and reconstructing my identity as a learner and user of the English language. The data for this study was gathered from Facebook posts, written assignment feedback, and my personal narratives and memory. The study reveals that upon finding myself in a community different from what I had imagined prior to my sojourn and with contested power dynamics between local peers and international students in classroom discourse socialization, I became disappointed and stressed and that, in turn, obstructed my learning process. However, my personal investment and agency later led me to develop my own community of practice with those who shared similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, I received what seemed to me to be racial discrimination based on my identity as a non-native speaker of English, which was the result of a scaler politics of English and perhaps blatant racism toward a student of a third-world country that saw my use of English as inferior. Therefore, the study invites institutions in host countries to reflect on their language orientation and how it is responsive (not responsive) to newcomers.

### Keywords

Study Abroad (SA), Critical Autoethnography, Community of Practice, Academic Discourse Socialization

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# Academic Discourse Socialization, Scaler Politics of English, and Racialization in Study Abroad: A Critical Autoethnography

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*In this age of rising animosity to newcomers in host societies, study abroad students are often reported to receive maltreatment and discrimination. To this end, I conducted a critical autoethnographic study that responds to the trajectory of my English language learning in the UK and explores my adjustment difficulties and factors such as racialized linguistic discrimination. It also reveals the types of agency that I employed in the process of academic discourse socialization and unpacks causes and processes of renegotiating and reconstructing my identity as a learner and user of the English language. The data for this study was gathered from Facebook posts, written assignment feedback, and my personal narratives and memory. The study reveals that upon finding myself in a community different from what I had imagined prior to my sojourn and with contested power dynamics between local peers and international students in classroom discourse socialization, I became disappointed and stressed and that, in turn, obstructed my learning process. However, my personal investment and agency later led me to develop my own community of practice with those who shared similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, I received what seemed to me to be racial discrimination based on my identity as a non-native speaker of English, which was the result of a scaler politics of English and perhaps blatant racism toward a student of a third-world country that saw my use of English as inferior. Therefore, the study invites institutions in host countries to reflect on their language orientation and how it is responsive (not responsive) to newcomers. Keywords: Study Abroad (SA), Critical Autoethnography, Community of Practice, Academic Discourse Socialization*

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## Introduction

“It was nice talking with you, Pramod! Your English is very good, and I appreciate that there was no grammatical inaccuracy in your language use. However, I noticed you occasionally used a **non-standard variety** of English that **we** don’t often use.”

This is a response from an interviewer that I received as part of my application for teaching English at an English language institute in Vancouver. Although I was offered to teach part-time, such a comment has been very usual in my life after I left Nepal in 2013.

Born to working-class parents and brought up in a small village in Nepal, pursuing a Ph.D. degree at one of the world-leading universities in Canada is something I had never thought about until I went to study for a MA in TESOL with Applied Linguistics program in the United Kingdom in 2013. However, my journey as an English language learner and teacher has not been very smooth, especially after I moved to the United Kingdom, where my identity as a non-native speaker became a source of contestation, discrimination, and stress. I have learned and used English since my childhood and taught English for about a decade in several countries, yet the authenticity of my English use is oftentimes challenged. I believe my English

use has changed at various degrees with my mobility from one country to another. For example, the type of English that I used in Nepal was largely changed after I moved to the UK; during my three years of stay, I worked very hard to fit myself into the local linguistic community. And, now that I am living in Canada, I think there have been some changes in my attempt to fit into the Canadian linguistic community. Yet, my English language identity of “Other” persists, leading to various forms of discrimination.

Over the last few decades, the number of study abroad (SA) students has hugely increased in the thrust of internationalization of higher education. In the field of English language teaching (ELT), there is a high demand of internationally accredited degrees in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), which is motivating many English language teachers from non-Anglophone countries to sojourn to Anglophone countries where they aim to develop both their teaching skills and English proficiency. This was also my motivation to pursue a master’s degree in TESOL from an English-speaking country, so I would upgrade myself professionally as well as provide honor to my parents with a degree from the UK. The surge in SA has received huge attention among applied linguists to investigate the process of target language learning during sojourns, including language learners’ beliefs (Amuzie & Winke, 2009), motivation (Allen, 2010), identity negotiation/construction (Ai, 2016; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004, 2008, 2013), lasting-impact (Garbati & Rothschild, 2016), and second language socialization (Wang, 2010) in SA. Applied linguistics researchers have adopted a number of methodological orientations to record SA experiences; however, there is a lack of *critical* autoethnographic research that potentially captures the everyday lived experience as well as power dynamics among different individuals and groups that are hard to address through conventional research methods (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017).

In this article, using critical autoethnography as a research method, I reflect on my personal experience of English language learning in SA, focusing on the intersectionality of identity (as a non-native speaker of English from a third world country), language socialization, and the hierarchical ideology of English. Against the traditional focus on “product,” Wang (2010) suggested to orient the contemporary SA investigation to the “process,” which focuses on what actually happens before, during, and after the sojourn. Following Wang’s (2010) suggestion, this critical autoethnographic study responds to the trajectory of my English language learning and academic discourse socialization before, during, and after my study abroad. It explores (a) the process of language socialization and employment of different kinds of agency and investment (Duff, 2002), (b) experience of inequality suggestive of racial discrimination against a student of color because of the “scaler” system of English varieties, i.e., the language ideology that positions one variety of English as more powerful than another (Blommaert, 2010; Pavlenko & Noton, 2007), and (c) renegotiation and reconstruction of social and linguistic identities (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2004; Norton, 2001, 2013). This study also addresses Dörnyei’s (2009) concern about individual learner characteristics, motivation, language aptitude and learning style, and learning strategies. I claim that this autoethnographic inquiry has enabled me to interrogate myself in terms of the complexity of learning both academic and non-academic English language skills, academic discourse socialization, and the development of a learning community in a SA context, which may resonate with and have relevance to many other sojourners’ experiences and practices. Since my critical reflection can represent many other sojourners’ experiences, it can inform pedagogical philosophies, probably Western ones, that translate importantly to actual classroom choices.

## **Language Learning in Study Abroad**

Scholars have reported a number of benefits for second/foreign language learners during SA. It is believed to provide learners with sufficient opportunities to immerse in the target speech community that facilitates learning a new language or a particular dialect of that language, a new culture, and communicative strategies (Garbati & Rothschild, 2016). Learners revisit worldviews as they encounter new perspectives in a SA context, where they tend to negotiate the new perspectives with the old to find balance (Kinging, 2013). Therefore, SA sojourners experience a great deal of changes in their attitude and beliefs about language learning, which Allen (2010) finds as an avenue for linguistic and cultural growth. Amuzie and Winke (2009) interviewed 70 English language learners in the United States in terms of the impact of SA on learners' beliefs, which revealed that language learners who had spent more than six months in SA experienced greater changes in learner autonomy (developing their language learning on their own) given that there may be more limited interaction with native-English speakers than they had imagined prior to their sojourn. They recognized the importance of learner autonomy as they were dissatisfied with the amount of English they had learned and the opportunities for communicating with native-English-speaking Americans did not come naturally.

Pre-sojourners often have a utopian perception of the host country, like Alice in Kinginger (2004) had romanticized France and French life where she thought "her social options ... [were] broadened" for learning French (p. 219). However, her fantasy was foiled as she began to face several challenges such as reconstructing her motives for learning French, negotiating her social and linguistic identity, and putting in a series of extra efforts. Like Alice, for me as an English language student-teacher, England was an ideal polity full of opportunities to develop English language skills and live the happiest life. This orientation was linked to the primacy of English to England and my experience of meeting with some British people in Nepal, who I then considered the politest human beings.

It is a common phenomenon that sojourners often face challenges of accommodating "to the practices of .... [the host] community and its regime of competency in order to function effectively within and beyond the community" (Fenton-O'Creavy, Brigham, Jones, & Smith, 2014, p. 45). In such processes, sojourners need to renegotiate their identity (Allen, 2010; Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2004, 2013) and take on several strategies (or investments) to overcome unforeseen issues of, for example, acculturation and ideologies of language variation. In line with many other sojourners, in addition to facing adjustment difficulties, I had to renegotiate my social and linguistic identity that led me to frustration and stress. Despite the struggle, frustration, and stress, I consider myself to have been successful in the acquisition of academic English language. This success can be verified with my present status as a doctoral student in a world-renowned university, where I did not have to prove my English language competency. Instead, my academic English skills provided full-funding for my doctoral study, which I may count as the acquisition of my economic, symbolic, and cultural capital. It, therefore, seems significant to revisit my sojourn experience in order to figure out those aspects that both obstructed and facilitated English language learning and academic discourse socialization.

## **Language Socialization and the Scaler of Politics of English**

This study is guided by the frameworks of "second language socialization" and the "scaler politics of English." First, the concept of language socialization (LS) is connected with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of receiving support and guidance from "more knowledgeable

others,” which can be instructors and more proficient peers, in the process of learning the language. Duff (2007) defines language socialization as:

The process by which novices or newcomers in a community or culture gain communicative competence, membership, and legitimacy in the group. It is a process that is mediated by language and whose goal is the mastery of linguistic conventions, pragmatics, the adoption of appropriate identities, stances (e.g., epistemic or empathetic) or ideologies, and other behaviours associated with the target group and its normative practices. (p. 310)

Although the process of language socialization can facilitate the target language learning, the imbalanced power relation of the interlocutors in the process of socialization can negatively influence language learning. In SA experiences in inner circle countries like the United Kingdom, USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (where English is used as the first language; Kachru, 1985), the process of language socialization is often challenged due to the ethnicity, race, and identity of learners (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Sojourners from non-English speaking countries, who have language user identities as non-native speakers, struggle in the language socialization process. For the purpose of this paper, I will use the term “academic discourse socialization” instead of language socialization to refer to the process of building a communicative repertoire to aid academic discussions, where language skills remain pivotal. The major goal of academic discourse socialization is learning to develop confidence—in addition to the linguistic repertoire and ability—in using the existing linguistic competence for academic participation in and beyond the classroom.

Further, it is important to discuss the ideology of English in a SA context, which creates unequal conditions of language learning experiences. Scholars like Canagarajah (2012) and Blommaert (2010) have used the metaphor of “scales” to map out how difference in English language varieties is ranked hierarchically. In other words, English as a global language has different varieties like British English, American English, Indian English, Chinese English, and Singaporean English, but not all these varieties receive a similar treatment. Therefore, regarding the scalar politics of language, Blommaert (2010) “suggests that we have to imagine things [e.g., the English language] that are of a different order, that are hierarchically ranked and stratified” (p. 33). He views scales as “power-invested” in that they incorporate a “deep connection between spatial and temporal features” (p. 34). Therefore, scales provide a framework to explore the power dynamics of different social and historical groups in terms of their linguistic features; for example, how English used by different groups of people can have different values based on the perception of who ideally owns English.

Canagarajah (2013) further defines the concept as “how resources that enjoy power and prestige in certain local contexts receive lower status as migrants move to other social contexts, especially in western urban communities” (p. 202). The scalar politics of English, therefore, provides an understanding of the process of inequality, especially for those whose variety of English receives lower value and recognition. For example, Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, and Riazi (2002), in their autobiographical narratives of SA sojourns, revealed that they were viewed as inferior, accented or non-competent English speakers by their classmates because they were not as interactive as their native counterparts. Consequently, they received discrimination based on their use of English. Although often ignored, what is also important in the age of mobility across societies is the intersection of “scales of English” with other social variables like race, ethnicity, gender, and country-of-origin, which provides a more nuanced understanding of injustice and inequality people receive who are foreign to the local people. For example, what I call here a “racialized non-native speakers” of English can be those people who do not only receive marginalization based on their English language use, but also because of their color

and country-of-origin. In other words, it is worth asking whether non-native speakers of English from South Asian countries receive an equal privilege in comparison to those White non-native speakers from European countries. Probably not!

Finally, although both Blommaert and Canagarajah describe the scalar system in relation to economic migrants' language socialization and power relations, I have used the scalar perspective of language use, in conjunction with racial discourse, and "ownership" of English to explore how second language learners of English shuttling across Anglophone countries for language and academic learning are likely to face language biases and racialization in the process of language learning and academic discourse socialization.

### **Critical Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is one of the postmodern methods that is highly personalized in style and draws on researchers' own experience which broadens understanding of their particular disciplines. It has been perceived both as a "process" and a "product" that not only explores underlying social constructs but also establishes written scholarship (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography combines "autobiography" (writing about "self" based on memories and past reflections) and "ethnography" (exploring cultural experiences; Adams et al., 2017). In Canagarajah's (2012) words, it refers to views of the self (auto), social/cultural construction (ethno) and written artifacts (graphy). So, autoethnography can be defined as a formal and structured self-inquiry of socially embedded meanings that produces legitimated written discourses. Lately, autoethnography has received a greater recognition as a research method since, as Adams et al. (2017) argued, autoethnographers speak against and deconstruct taken-for-granted and discriminatory cultural perceptions. It is significant as it "'gives voice' to previously silenced and marginalized experiences, answer[s] unexamined questions about the multiplicity of social identities, instigate[s] discussions about and across difference, and explain[s] the contradictory intersections of personal and cultural standpoints" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 14). Similarly, it aims to "articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience" and "describes moments of everyday experience that cannot be captured through more traditional research methods" (Adams et al., 2017, pp. 3-4).

However, there are limitations and controversies that such "narratives are shaped by and imply an analysis of experience" (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 261), and scholars have doubts about how this enhances understanding of particular experiences and differences. In response to which, Lin et al. (2002) view that:

we can draw on or choose from different cultural storylines available to us. For instance, we can reproduce the pervasive storyline in academic disciplines, adopt the voice of the "objective" researcher, and write in a style that upholds the canons of scientific writing practices. (p. 228)

Further, integrating a critical praxis into autoethnography can provide more nuanced and valid understandings as it "legitimizes first-person accounts of discrimination and difference" and allows "the critiques of colonialism, racism, sexism, nationality, regionalism, and ethnocentrism" (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 237). Ellis and Bochner (1996) also argue that critical narratives appeal subtly to "women, people of color, [and] marginal voices" (p. 18). In other words, intersecting the components of identity, power, and privilege, critical autoethnography builds up a ground for "ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain" and addresses the "politics of positionality" (Madison, 2012, p. 5) that requires autoethnographers to make explicit their privileges and/or marginalization and "take the responsibility for [their] subjective lenses

through reflexivity” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p. 15). Intersectionality provides a necessary heuristic for critical ethnographies to explore the nexus of power dynamics, privilege, marginalization, layered identity positioning, and identity factors like race, gender, ethnicity, class, age, and sexual orientation (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). It also helps to theorize the interconnection between “identity categories and individual differences and larger social systems of inequality and this illuminates the complexities of the lived experiences” (Jones, 2009, p. 289).

This study has adopted a critical autoethnographic approach that has combined both my personal narratives and cultural critiques that allowed me to interrogate my academic and cultural experiences from the inside out. The integration of a “critical” approach into autoethnography has helped explore power dynamics between different groups (i.e., local native English students, native English-speaking teachers, and non-native English-speaking international students) and different varieties of the English language (i.e., British English and other World Englishes). It has helped to offer a critical analysis of my lived experiences of feeling discriminated against because of my identity of “racialized non-native speaker” of English with a South Asian ethnic background and a citizen of a third world country, and partly due to the “scaler politics of English.” Moreover, memories and perspectives are often ideologically mediated and may include biases. Therefore, instead of grounding my narratives in random memories, I collected data from the Facebook posts and written assignment comments and feedback to develop narratives.

### **Pre-Sojourn Experience**

In the early 1990s in a rural part of Nepal, it was beyond the financial means for a manual worker in a factory to send his children to private schools, but my father made all his efforts to have me admitted in a locally-run English-medium private school. My sisters were, however, sent to a public school where education was completely free. My parents, despite the high cost, sent me to a private school because of their belief that English-medium education provides better quality education and it leads to upward socioeconomic mobility. I studied my first three years of schooling in English medium, which literally imbued the basics of English literacy in me. Since that English-medium school could not remain open for some reasons and it was completely beyond my parents’ capacity to send me to an English-medium boarding school in a city, I was transferred to a Nepali-medium public school in grade four. As Nepali was not my home language, I struggled to integrate myself into the school curriculum and instruction, which did not sufficiently motivate me to learn other academic subjects. At the same time, it was obvious that I was better than my other classmates at English skills, which developed my identity as a *janne manche* (an intelligent person), also leading me to receive much appreciation from teachers. This experience also led me to consider English skills as my cultural capital in the school, which was the reason English became my favorite subject.

Even later in my high school, I was always noticed for having better English skills, although I was good at mathematics and science, too. After graduating from high school, my parents could not afford engineering or medical studies, which most parents in Nepal aspire for their children. I, then, opted for English language teaching as the specialization of my undergraduate degree in Nepal. At the same time, I wanted to further enhance my English skills, so I joined an English language center. After learning English for about eight months, I became a part-time English language teacher at the same language center. By this time, I had already become a proficient English speaker. I was often respected for my better pronunciation and accent in English. For example, one of the lecturers in linguistics class once said, “I can’t believe that you studied from a Nepali-medium public school as your pronunciation is better than most of us.” Despite this, I still wanted to develop my English but there was a lack of

“community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991)—which stands for a group of people who share a common interest in a particular domain. Although the instructors used English as a medium of instruction, Nepali and Bhojpuri remained the most used languages among peers and for non-academic communication. Speaking in English with peers and for non-academic purposes was considered showing off. In many non-English speaking multilingual societies, there is a lack of English language exposure and opportunities for language production, which are actually very important for second language acquisition, but a learner can potentially play an agentive role in creating a “community of practice” for themselves given their high motivation.

This was, at least, true in my case that I was instrumentally motivated to develop my English language skills and to seek a “community of practice,” with whom I could practice my English language skills. As advised from one of my teachers, I then chose to become an English language teacher at a private English-medium school, which became a community of practice for me. I had enough opportunities to practice my English language skills with other teachers and students. This sustained participation in the English-speaking community and facilitated my English language learning and developed my teaching skills too.

I developed my identity as an English language learner and teacher that obliged me to further enhance my English language skills. Beyond the domain of the school that I worked for in Nepal, there was little or no chance of exposure to English language and space for developing my linguistic skills. I then decided to develop my receptive skills through watching English news and reading English newspapers and magazines, where I was strategic in learning as I used to note the pronunciation of the news readers and worked on the words and phrases that I found unfamiliar in newspapers and magazines. In addition to checking the meaning of unfamiliar words in dictionaries, I would check the phonemic symbols for those words. Unlike many other learners, for example, Ai (2016), I did not fear “losing face,” and I practiced my oral English based on my own dictionary learning. So, the use of these agencies was my personal investment in learning English, and I was successful to some extent given that my university examiners liked my spoken English and appreciated my pronunciation and intonation. Therefore, it can be argued that personal investment with certain second language learning strategies (e.g., creating a community of practice) facilitates target language learning, beyond the formal classroom instruction.

After I completed my master’s degree in English language teaching specialization and I became a lecturer, I received higher prestige in the society and people valued my views because teachers of English language are deemed more intelligent, which became both my cultural and social capital. This is, in fact, true in many parts of the world; English is perceived to provide symbolic and material benefits as a consequence of English being vested with higher prestige (Sah & Li, 2018). With the enjoyment of such capital, I thought of furthering my study abroad, especially in a Western country, which would provide me with opportunities for supplementary development in the English language while allowing me to build my cultural capital and economic status. England was my ideal destination because of three reasons: (1) my university courses taught me that the “Received Pronunciation (RP),” that is imperative to the British English, was the most prestigious and so-called “correct form” of English, which I wanted to acquire; (2) most Bollywood movies picture romantic scenes in London and Scotland that symbolize the romance and beauty of those locations, and I wanted to witness them; and (3) most teacher trainers I encountered in Nepal were British who I thought were very knowledgeable, and, to me, were very polite and friendly. The university courses influenced my view of language to believe that the RP variety was a more legitimate form of English, which led me to want to study this variety in order to become a legitimate speaker of English. I had imagined having people around me using the RP variety that I often heard from the BBC

program presenters. So, with these expectations, I decided on making the UK as the country of my sojourn.

### **Journey to My Imagined Community**

It was late September of 2013, I made my first ever journey to a Western country to study an MA in TESOL. I landed in Manchester with full of excitement for my new life and fear, in the meantime, as I had not known anyone in the UK. However, I was highly motivated and enthusiastic about my further academic journey. My first surprise was the “horrible” weather of the UK, chilly and drizzling, but the first fragrance of autumn air was so fresh that I inhaled and embodied deeply, and I still feel it.

On the first day at my university, I met with the course leader who appeared to be very polite and welcoming that day. My first impression was fabulous until the moment someone asked, “You okay?” seeing me standing in the administration office. I could not understand the pragmatic meaning that she was asking me if I needed any help—she was offering to help me. I replied, “I’m fine, thank you” as I thought she asked me how I was doing that day. Seeing me still standing there, she asked again, “Do you need any help?” but with a kind of expression that she found it funny that I could not understand her English. Soon, I realized “You okay?” was a very common idiosyncratic expression that people normally used. Although I thought it was a shame for me that, as an English language teacher back in Nepal, I could not understand that simple expression, this was literally my beginning of learning the local variety of English spoken in this university town.

The imagination of the use of RP among British people, which I had learned from the BBC, seemed to be different in the context I found myself in. This was different than the kind of community I had desired for myself, in which I would have opportunities to listen to and speak the RP variety. Nevertheless, I decided to stay there and continue learning English. After a few days, I was sitting in the university foyer where some local students were having a chat. I overheard their communication where every sentence that they used was filled with the “f” word, for example, “I f\*\*\*ing can’t wait to finish the f\*\*\*ing term to get away with all these f\*\*\*ing assignments” (showing their frustration). Although such kind of language was very common there, it was another surprise for me because the use of “f” word was not acceptable in Nepal. As an English language teacher, I was aware and conscious about my own language learning, and I became determined not to pick up those language usages that I thought inappropriate for my personal and professional career.

In the first few months, I experienced difficulty to understand the local variety of spoken English and, therefore, I tended to avoid any communication with people outside my classrooms. Nevertheless, I was aware that I needed to interact more with local English speakers in order to upgrade my English. While I was not yet confident enough to interact with native English speakers outside my classrooms, I could understand my instructors because they seemed to use more standard (formal) British English. During study abroad experiences, sojourners have more socialization activities beyond these academic discourses. Hence, I had relatively more encounters with the variety of English that those local students used. Pavlenko and Norton (2007) believed that not all newcomers in Anglophone countries aim to speak Standard English. But I had expected to develop the RP in order to gain linguistic capital by speaking like the BBC. At this time, however, I was frustrated to figure out the form of English that the local people used was far different from what the BBC speaks.

### ***Academic Discourse Socialization: Power Dynamics, Struggles, and Injustice***

As Duff (2007) argues, a successful language learning involves explicit or implicit socialization into relevant local communicative practices that is mediated through linguistic and social interactions with the local community members. So, it is important to explore how SA students, as newcomers, are explicitly or implicitly socialized into the local linguistic and cultural community, and how such processes of socialization influence their evolving identities. Specifically, in this section, I will discuss the ways my interaction with peers (both local and foreign) and instructors during classroom academic discourses determine my membership of that community, leading to a particular belief about myself and my counterparts.

In the first term of the program, I took three courses and the contents of those courses were very similar to those I had studied in my previous master's degree in Nepal, but the organization of the courses and classroom practices was completely different. In Nepal, we never discussed topics in the classroom, and it was all about the teacher giving one-sided lectures. But, here, nearly fifty percent of the class time was allocated for discussion, which created opportunities for academic discourse socialization, meaning that I had opportunities to develop my communicative repertoire to participate in academic discussions. In the beginning of the term, I was very enthusiastic about my learning.

However, such enthusiasm could not last long because of my consistent failure in successfully participating in classroom discussions. The discussions were organized in two ways. First, there was an open-class discussion in which the teacher raised an issue and any student could volunteer to share their thoughts. Such discussions were, nevertheless, very much dominated by the local (British) peers, who always fought for a chance to speak and they, of course, used a local (Northern) variety of English that was difficult for me understand. Meanwhile, the teachers, who were also British, and those local peers often discussed ideas based on local situations that were foreign to me as well as other international students. Although there was little space for international students to participate, I tried to share my experiences at several occasions, which unfortunately received insignificant attentions. I always wondered why there was a relatively very low response to what I tried to share in the classroom. In contrast, if my local classmates shared anything, they received greater attention by instructors. In the meantime, I was often asked to repeat what I had said. They did not seem to understand my English because, perhaps, my English did not make much sense for them as I used a different variety of English that used more words and needed more time to produce.

In the second format of discussion, we discussed ideas into different smaller groups, in which I began to avoid local peers and looked for other international peers who were mostly from China and the Middle East. I actively shared my views and experiences with them and there was higher cohesion in our group. Although we used to have some meaningful discussions in our group, we often remained quiet during open class discussions. And, such discussions dominantly occurred between the local peers and instructors because of their mutual linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This typical classroom structure that positioned local peers, their use of English, and their knowledge with more value, created unequal power dynamics in classroom discussions. In this structure, my identity as a legitimate and confident speaker of English changed to a less efficient speaker, which also led me to believe that I was, as what Duff (2002) calls, "intellectually inferior and socially inconsequential" (p. 290). In Nepal, I was an experienced English teacher and was given high respect for my English proficiency, which was challenged in this environment. So, my imagined community of which I found to be a legitimate member based on my past skills and knowledge could not validate my history and identity. In this regard, Kinginger (2013) argues that "the negotiation of identity often takes place in contexts

of unequal relations and can be interpreted in terms of ... nationality, gender or social class” (p. 341).

My loss of confidence became a significant obstacle in my further academic discourse socialization and, as I was still inclined to reject the local variety of English, my learning of English did not progress. In a SA context, it is essential for newcomers to become a legitimate member of a community of practice and, as Lave and Wenger (1999) confer, to seek “access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of community” (p. 100). However, this could not become the case for me. My non-participation in academic discourse socialization, although scholars like Norton (2001) argues as inevitable, became a barrier. This experience of mine, here, makes a link to what Duff (2007) argues for placing a greater attention on a critical analysis of power relations and structures in the community practice and in the classroom.

Further, it is often found that non-participation sometimes leads to marginalization and some kinds of punishment (Norton, 2001). In my silence I felt punished, probably not because of instructors’ intention, but because of the structure that, in effect, silenced foreign students in the class discussions. For example, in one of the courses, we were graded for in-class and online discussions. Although I was very active in the online discussion and always posted my comments, I received a below-average grade. The instructor’s feedback was:

You have contributed to the online discussion but your classroom discussion is expected too. You do not often participate in class discussions; that means you are not learning.

(Assignment feedback)

As said earlier, this “non-participation” was the result of my previous educational background in which we never had discussions in the classroom. There was also little or no space for non-native English-speaking students to participate due to the native speaking students’ dominance of time and attention in the classroom. As it was the first semester, it took quite a long time for me to understand the classroom discourses.

During the first semester, I got my result for a module called “Language Analysis,” which was my favorite one and I was very good at it. I had got only 66%—that left me with a huge surprise. After I received my answer sheet, I went to the library and re-read my answers. I realized that most of my answers were correct. I then decided to meet with the tutor to request that he recheck the answers. However, the tutor did not agree to do so, and I asked another tutor to read the answers and grade them. I was later given 85% by another examiner. This led me to believe that the first tutor was not an accurate grader and perhaps he was biased toward me.

Finding a very low score was not a major concern in the first place, but I was disappointed as the tutor insisted my grade to be right and did not accept to review my answer-sheet unless I strongly opposed the grade. This raises a lot of questions: What made him think that I only deserved 66%? Did he stereotype that international students could not get 85% which is much higher than a distinction grade? Was this the result of his failure to acknowledge my personal and cultural characteristics, that is, less talkative in comparison to my British counterparts? So, this led me to believe that his giving me a lower grade was not merely a human error. This incident led me to believe that the teachers stereotyped me as less competent because they perceived my proficiency in English, content knowledge, and critical thinking to be limited since I did not speak often in the class and I came from a third world country, of which educational quality is often doubted (which I recognize may not necessarily be the instructor’s intention).

This again added to my belief that my identity as an intelligent, confident, and competent speaker of English in Nepal was challenged; I felt like a dull, less confident,

incompetent speaker of English. This “imposed otherness” (Lin et al., 2002, p. 303) undercut my sense of my identity that limited my process of academic discourse socialization. I believed that it was an unfair treatment and that made me angry and frustrated, but I was also intent to not look down upon my potential. My motivation was a great investment here. Although I employed my own agency to move across the scales of English in this socialization process, as Canagarajah (2013) asserts, it is difficult for a newcomer to change “the order of indexicality,” that is, the hierarchy of language and knowledge in this case. I, however, tried to resist my marginalization at several occasions. Being unsatisfied with a below-average grade for classroom participation, I wrote a formal email of dissatisfaction to the course leader that led to a meeting with the instructor, course leader, and myself. This meeting turned out to be very contested with a decision of the course leader, after reviewing the assignment, to eventually increase my grade. Unfortunately, however, I developed a complicated relationship with the instructor—she started ignoring me. Also, this incident significantly influenced my other possible opportunities while I was in the program. I will come back to this in a further section.

### *The Scaffolding of Community of Practice, Investment, and Identity*

Following the result of a failure in the classroom academic discourse socialization, I sought opportunities to participate in local students’ groups. I tried to create opportunities to assert myself into the native-English speaking group because “access to peers [is] important not only for language learning but for social affiliation” (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 317). This was my first effort to gain access to my peer networks, which Norton and Toohey describe as “intellectual and social” resources, which is an investment for the academic discourse socialization. Although I was never asked to join them for the out-of-class socialization, I tried to mingle with my local classmates. Lave and Wenger (1991), as cited in Duff and Doherty (2014, p. 336) confer the benefits of a community of practice that “learning results from sustained participation in communities of practice, where more expert members apprentice (i.e., socialize) newcomers into the knowledge and skills of the group.”

On a few occasions, I went out for lunch with my local classmates, but I always felt left out in the discussion. It was obvious that they often talked about the local incidents and cultures and, as I was not aware of the culture, it did not allow me to contribute my views. Similarly, they used lots of local slangs that were again culturally-loaded. As a newcomer to their group and culture, I always expected them to integrate me into the discussion by simplifying what they were talking about. I was looking for more negotiation in terms of language use and topics for discussions, but, because perhaps I was the only non-native speaker in that group, it did not seem okay for them. Whenever I asked them to simplify the language and tell me in detail about what they were talking, they did it for that particular instance and continued the regular pattern of discussion. They felt bothered if I asked them to simplify time and time again. This experience aligns with other SA research (e.g., Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004, 2008, 2011, 2013) that the expert members (i.e., local people or native speakers of the language) do not often socialize newcomers to their groups.

Moreover, although we used the same language, we used different dialects with different features. Both dialects were legitimate per se. However, my British colleagues, who were established members of my new community, expected me to speak their variety of English and know their culture. They often tended to correct my accent and language use, which I never found to be incorrect but just a different variety. However, they found my variety of English as inappropriate, which shows that they considered their variety of English to be more legitimate. This was rather frustrating for me as I wanted to be recognized as a legitimate speaker of English. There was a need for a negotiated arrangement for socialization to occur, but it did not happen. Finally, despite my strong motivation, I failed to integrate because, as

Kinginger believed, the access to the language socialization is “shaped not only by learners’ own intentions, but also by those of the others [established members]” (2004, p. 221). So, my attempt to use the first “human agent” (Norton & Toohey, 2002), i.e., my native-English speaking peers, in the process of academic discourse socialization was unsuccessful because of the identity conflict and cultural differences between myself and my local peers. This experience again showed that linguistic and cultural differences and the “unequal relations of power between language learners and target language speakers” (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 312) obstructed my language socialization.

So, finally, I gave up the idea of integrating myself into their group. However, I still kept on searching for a community of practice because, as an experienced language teacher, I was aware that I needed opportunities to practice the target language. In my cohort, there were a few non-native English-speaking students who became good friends of mine without much struggle. I began socializing with them. For example, I posted an expression of my excitement on Facebook that I went out to see a movie with two of my Middle Eastern classmates.

Going to watch an Arabic movie ‘Wadjda’ tonight as a part of Preston’s International Film festival. Wow! It’ll be a great fun and experience for me, the first ever Arabic movie for me. Manal [pseudonym, a friend from the Middle East] will be accompanying me and the movie is in her native language.

(Facebook post, October 2013)

Similarly, I went to participate in an Indian cultural ceremony with my Indian friends, which I also posted on my Facebook wall. A Facebook photo caption as:

Returning from the ‘Dandiya dance’ [A type of dance Indian people perform].

(Facebook post, October 2013)

I started socializing with people who shared the same identity as non-native English speakers and international students in the UK. There were several mutual aspects; for example, similar sociocultural constructs and emotions. I watched a movie in a language that I did not understand and went to a dance show that I had never a taste for, but I enjoyed and could connect with my friends. People who share the same ground have a mutual identity that fosters the connectivity leading to socialization. As we did not know each other’s first language, English acted as the lingua franca for us. We often organized off-class academic socialization, in which we not only practiced the English language but also enhanced disciplinary knowledge by sharing and caring. We shared a common identity, and I always realized that we had a balanced power dynamic. Unlike local colleagues, none of us was dominating one another, but we collaborated our situations and needs. This facilitated mutual learning—our social network created a scaffolding for learning the target language, in addition to social, cultural, and emotional sharing. Therefore, it can be concluded that the international students who share the same identity, cultural and linguistic orientation, and emotion can build up their own social network, which ultimately develops a scaffolding for their target language learning and academic discourse socialization.

### ***“Scales” in the English Language and Academic Injustice***

In this section, I will present two incidents of the scaler politics of English that had asserted British English with more legitimacy and power, which became a cause of my marginalization in that environment.

In the second term of the program, I took a course on “World Englishes” that changed my perspective toward the ownership of English and the legitimacy of different varieties of English. While I began to appreciate the local variety of English, I had already started appreciating my own variety of English, that is, Nepali English. Although I believed English started spreading from Britain, it no longer only belongs to the British but to everyone who speaks it (Sah & Upadhaya, 2016). I was no longer living in the imagined community of the BBC English, which had a significant positive impact on my motivation to further enhance my English skills in the local environment. With the positive change in my attitude toward the local variety of English, I consciously started noticing how local native speakers pronounced certain words and I copied and practiced those pronunciations. I believe that I dramatically changed my English in terms of pronunciation and accent, which was the result of explicit investment and change in my attitude. However, it was obvious that I still carried some features of my previous English and I always appreciated that. This experience may be true with many other SA students that becoming positive toward the local language, culture, and knowledge benefits in the attainment of their SA objectives. One can employ their agency to fit into the local context in order to receive symbolic and material gains, but, as Blommaert (2010) and Canagarajah (2013) contend, there still remains a question if the changed or modified linguistic repertoire of newcomers is recognized or their native identity in terms of nationality and language, for example, continue to become a cause of marginalization. It is possible that although newcomers speak English like the locals, the marginalization will persist because of their identity of “Other” based on race, ethnicity, and country of origin—and, at least, it seemed true in my case.

While I had changed my ideology about the ownership of English, and I strongly believed all varieties of World Englishes are legitimate in their own rights, I found it disappointing to receive relatively lower grades in my World Englishes assignment because I used a different variety of English from the British English. The instructor feedback was:

The use of English still makes it hard for the reader. Ironically, it is the influence of another variety of English which causes difficulties, but British English was specifically stated as a variety this essay needed to be written in as a key graduate attribute is to write in good standard and academic English of the country studied in (i.e., the UK). I have given extensive feedback as I know you wish to continue developing your skills in this variety.

(Assignment feedback, 15 May 2014)

In terms of my proficiency in writing as appropriate, Dr. Trump (pseudonym for the tutor) thought that it was “unsatisfactory” because I used another variety of English than the British English. I found it quite ironic that while we extensively discussed the legitimacy of all varieties of English in the World Englishes course, I was criticized for using my own variety of English, which Dr. Trump seemed to perceive as a non-standard variety. Dr. Trump may have a point to critique my work because the assignment specified British English to be used, but I believed that the requirement was problematic and biased for international students. How could international, non-native English-speaking students be expected to write in complete British English, giving up on their native variety of English? I had exercised a certain variety

of English for about 20 years, which was expected to change in a few months' stay at a British university, which did not sound realistic. Also, it was not that I did not attempt to use the local British variety I had developed, but some features of my Nepali English were obvious in the assignment. So, it will be safe to say that the instructor was not positive toward Nepali variety of English and, perhaps, toward me as a person from Nepal.

Such a requirement is assimilatory in nature that requires newcomers to forget their native identity in order to integrate into the target society, which contradicts with social justice orientation of World Englishes that we discussed in our classroom. Nevertheless, I am not advocating to be ignorant of grammatically inaccurate use of language but still want to resist comments like, "We (referring to native English speakers) do not use this phrase," meaning any phrases that are foreign to the reader can be claimed as non-standard. If I, as a user of Nepali English, am inclined to learn the British variety of English, there is nothing wrong for the user of British English to learn Nepali English or, at least, appreciate it. I believe this could move toward balancing power dynamics and disrupt the ideological issue of target language community exerting power by taking on a "gatekeeping role" to decide on the non-native speakers' use of the language.

Further, Dr. Trump assumed that I wanted to develop my skills in the British English. It may be helpful for me to understand the forms of the British English, at least for the sake of good grades and "as high mobility resources [that] allow mobility across situations and scale-levels" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 12), but it is significant to understand "whose interests these rules [features of British English] serve" (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 18). The question, therefore, arises if I need to reconstruct my linguistic identity to meet the interests of the British institutions. "No"—especially in the era of globalization that the degree of physical mobility is very high for different purposes such as study, work, and business, and an individual cannot keep reconstructing and renegotiating their linguistic identity with the mobility. However, I must stress that "in many English-speaking contexts, the ownership of English by white immigrants is contested to a significantly lesser degree than that language racialized newcomers" (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007, p. 594).

There was another incident of the scalar politics of English. After I completed all my coursework, I began my dissertation research that collected data from Chinese ESL students who had come to our department for a summer ESL course. The department was also looking for ESL instructors to teach in that program, mainly from the MA TESOL students. Several students from our cohort applied including me—the only one non-native English-speaking international student. I was interviewed but I was not offered the opportunity. My native English-speaking counterparts were hired. I approached the department seeking feedback on my application and I was told that I spoke with an accent and I would not be a good model for ESL students. This feedback made me very curious and angry in the meantime that the same department trained me to become an ESL teacher and, overall, I had received very high grades. And, how can my teaching qualification be measured by my "accent"? The courses I took at the department had, in fact, taught me that the accent does not matter.

This experience aligns with Blommaert's (2010) argument that "Big and small differences in language use locate the speaker in particular indexical and ascription categories" (p. 6). It was obvious that I spoke differently with some different accent from the standard British English, which positioned me as an "Other." So, as Canagarajah (2013) discusses, my use of so-called less prestigious variety limited my mobility and while those who spoke the prestigious variety jumped the scales. This also makes significance to the field of TESOL that while we are explicitly discussing and publishing research in terms of advocating equity for non-native speaking teachers, there is not much change when it comes to hiring those marginalized teachers. Accent can never be a criterion for evaluating teaching qualification—it is something that we all embody differently. And, this difference should be respected and

recognized. It is, meanwhile, true that some speakers' accent makes it difficult for listening, but as long as it is comprehensible, it should not be considered as a problem.

This is not the end of my story of teaching and learning English in Anglophone countries. I am now a doctoral student in a highly prestigious university (University of British Columbia) of Canada and I am engaged in teaching different applied linguistics and sociolinguistics courses as well as occasional ESL courses. I still receive several biased and racial comments based on my identity of a non-native speaker of English and a person from South Asian background, despite all my efforts and investment in accommodating my linguistic practices to the local.

### **Discussion**

Following my narrative of pre-sojourn learning experience, I seemed to be a strategic learner. My instrumental motivation supported my learning opportunities. Like other learners, for example, Ai (2016), I was not worried about losing face and practiced my oral English even when it may have been considered ostentatious. In addition, I used different strategies while looking for exposure (input) and a community of practice, for example doing an extensive and analytical reading of newspapers, watching English news channels and using dictionaries for both exploring meanings and pronunciation of words, and working in an English medium school. This was my "secret wisdom" of self-learning the English language (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 259). It supports the possibility of learning a language, literally, without any instruction if the learner is strategic enough.

Most sojourners develop their own imagined community before their sojourn and upon finding themselves in an actual community different from what they had imagined, they may feel frustration and stress (Kinginger, 2004, 2008). This was also true in my case that I had imagined people in Britain using the RP that would provide me with enriched exposure to the variety that I considered to be ideal, but in fact, they do not use such variety in their daily communication. Upon arrival to the imagined community, I lost my confidence and grew frustrated and stressed. Therefore, my findings add to existing literature (e.g., Harkonen & Dervin, 2016; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004, 2008). It can, thereby, be worthwhile to organize orientation sessions for newcomers before and after their sojourns, so they become aware of the target community and the stress may be lessened.

There are several factors that obstruct the academic discourse socialization of racialized non-native English-speaking international students that often results in the loss of confidence in both target language learning and usage. The use of the native variety of English in classroom interaction, which receives the highest level of authority and power, leads newcomers to feel inferior and remain quiet. This, eventually, produces "non-participation" of these vulnerable groups. Although the classroom structure (driven by authority and power) inherently obstructs the participation, the Othered members are punished for non-participation that creates educational inequality and injustice. This situation is caused by instructors' and native peers' failure to recognize and acknowledge the linguistic, cultural and education difference. Hence, it seems important that instructors need to reflect on and (re)evaluate the variety of English they use in the classroom and make the classroom interaction more inclusive of students from diverse backgrounds.

Several learners use their personal strategies as a form of investment. Non-native speakers of English language, who have been teachers and studied second language acquisition theories strategically, use their metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge in the process of academic discourse socialization. For example, my awareness of the interaction hypothesis (a theory of second language learning that suggests that learning is promoted through face-to-face interaction) strategically oriented me to look for social networks and develop a community of

practices in the process of language learning. However, access to the socialization process is often beyond the learners' willingness and is shaped by more authoritative and powerful agents (Kington, 2004). Although Duff and Doherty (2014) stress that learning outcomes be dependent on more expert members socializing newcomers into communities of practice, in the case of SA, these expert members do not often tend to integrate newcomers into their group. So, newcomers seek people sharing similar identity and emotional experiences to build up the community of practice where there is no power imbalance and authoritative conflicts. Rather, they complement each other's academic and emotional needs.

The hierarchal ideology of the variety of language, especially of a global language like English, influences the language socialization process and learning outcomes, thereafter. Blommaert's (2010) metaphor of "scales" can explore how such ideology is creating academic injustice, especially in terms of grading non-native learners' essays. So, the scales show how hierarchical ideology about the English language is turned into inequality. The inner circle varieties of English are often regarded as normative forms, authoritative and powerful that undermine the legitimacy of other World Englishes that pose inequality and injustice for the speakers of World Englishes. The fact that English was originated from Britain and became global thereafter, may mean that the British feel they have more authority over the English language. On the other hand, the scale system has a relatively higher level of discrimination to racialized non-native speakers than White non-native speakers (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

The number of SA sojourners is increasing every year and it is, therefore, important to look for conditions leading to successful outcomes. Most English as additional language learners employ different types of agency in the process of language learning and academic discourse socialization, but they face more obstacles during their sojourn. The outcome of language learning is the result of a scaffolding of learners' agencies, ownership of the language, and associated identity (Lin et al., 2002; Norton, 2001), which need to be valued and addressed in academic discourse socialization and language learning. So, the participating institutions can play a crucial role in supplementing sojourners' learning experiences. The host institutions need to re-evaluate their own ideological constructs about the English language that warrants all varieties of English at the same scales. This will eventually promise all English learners' equal access to the language and ensure justice to SA sojourners. In order to do so, it is critical that instructors and members of the host community should identify the linguistic, cultural and educational differences and acknowledge and appreciate sojourners' identities in ways that will ease the complexities of adjustment in the target society. To support this, Norton (2013, p. 168) draws the attention of different stakeholders to "do justice to the complex experiences of language learners across historical time and social space."

Finally, although this study documents experiences of a SA student in terms of language learning and socialization, it makes some significant statements in the age of rising animosity to immigrants and refugees. It is likely that a large number of international students settle permanently in the country of sojourn, and it is the responsibility of host countries to ensure their immigrant policies and social discursive practices are more responsive to newcomers. As Li and Sah (in press) conclude their extensive review of immigrant and refugee language policies and programs of several developed countries, the standard language ideology (in job market, for example), monocultural social discourses, and the practice of "power in their politics discourses that reaffirms the dominance of local citizens and the supremacy of the national language and culture" should be re-examined.

### **Final Notes: Writing a Critical Autoethnography**

When I first asked a professor in my department who read an earlier draft, I was told that it would not be possible to publish an autoethnographic account dealing with such issues

of TESOL. It was an indication that it is difficult to accomplish an autoethnographic piece as it is an ideologically challenging genre of qualitative research, especially for new scholars. And, the complexity is even higher when we integrate a “critical” dimension to it. Despite my previous experience of writing qualitative reports, it required multiple revisions—sometimes the comments frustrated me but finally I appreciated them a lot—in order to eventually make the paper a sound critical autoethnography (CA). First, for any novice writers, it is important to understand the difference between critical biography and autoethnography. In the latter, as it has been my major learning in this writing process, it requires us to go beyond the “personal” to make it more explicit the integration of the “cultural” and the “auto” parts, which then should be reflexive in writing. It is, in fact, not easy to research oneself. When a person of color or someone who has been subjected to racism/marginalization writes a CA, it produces anger and frustration and tends to put one-sided blame on those who have been involved in the process of marginalizing (Harkonen & Dervin, 2016; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004, 2008). Here, it is necessary to be able to convert those anger and frustration into a meaningful “voice” of the minoritized, avoiding personal attacks to people in power; it is more a system than a person that plays the part. So, a critical autoethnographer’s job is to challenge the dysfunctional system of power through powerful personal narratives. A CA should become the voice of the author that potentially reflects the voice of many others who have been put into the same shoes. In the meantime, we need to be sophisticated in terms of “systematicity and methodological rigor” (Wall, 2006, p. 8) that helps develop trustworthiness of our data and narratives among the reader.

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