

# We are Fundamentally Different: Investigating the Language Ideologies and Language Practices of an International STEM Scholar

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## *Abstract*

This case study explores the experience of a Chinese-born postdoctoral STEM scholar, Miles, who has lived in the United States for six consecutive years. Our research illuminates Miles's complex identity-making process by taking a close look at his language practices and language ideologies. Guided by identity theory (Norton 2013; De Costa/Norton 2017), we investigated the ascribed and enacted identities negotiated by this international STEM scholar, and how these identities conform to, or contradict, his language ideologies. Our findings yielded three key insights. First, Miles's social experience resonated with Coleman's (2013) concentric circles model in that the difficulties he encountered in crossing symbolic boundaries ideologically divided 'foreigners' like him from 'Americans', which in turn contributed to the reification of a marginalised 'forever foreigner' identity. Second, on a linguistic level, we learned that Miles believed in a native/non-native binary opposition and subscribed to a racialised view towards his 'foreign' usage of English. Third, at a micro level, we found that Miles's translanguaging practices created transformative spaces in which he imagined a globally influential scientist identity for his future. Critically, he questioned English hegemonic ideologies at his workplace and in academic publishing. In sum, Miles's status as an international student during the first five years in addition to his work in a dominantly Chinesespeaking laboratory significantly hampered his socialisation ability, resulting in a solidification of his 'foreigner' and non-native English speaker identities. Nonetheless, through his translanguaging practices, he also enacted a competent and critical English language user identity.

## **Keywords**

L2 identity, ascribed language identity, enacted language identity, language ideology, translanguaging practice, transnational scholar