Learning to Teach in the Global University: Multilingual International Teaching Assistants' Language Socialization into Academic Discourse Practices
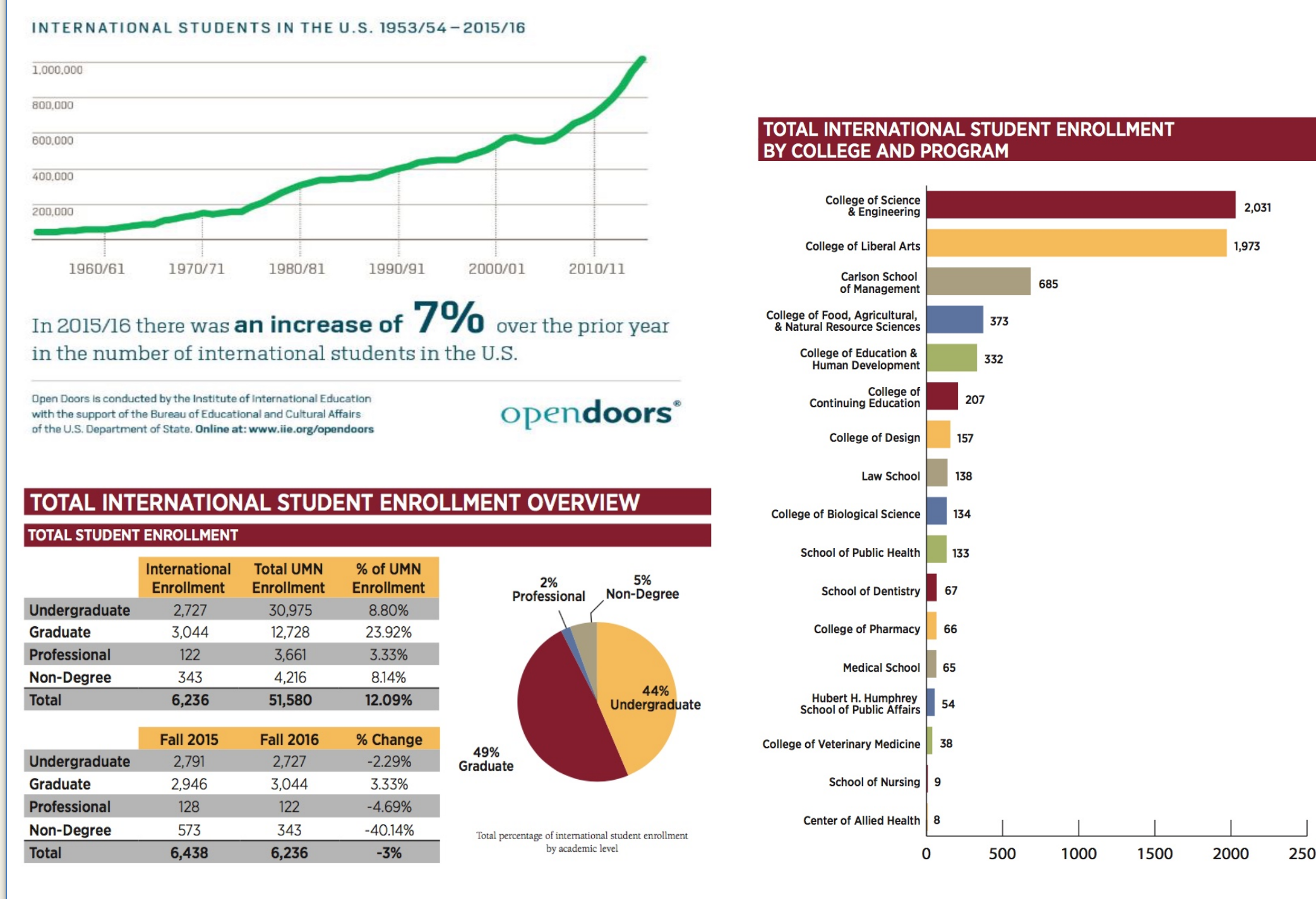
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Introduction

- An increasing number of multilingual international students are hired to teach undergraduate or graduate-level courses as international teaching assistants (ITAs)

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S. 1953/54 – 2015/16

In 2015/16 there was **an increase of 7%** over the prior year in the number of international students in the U.S.

opendoors®

TOTAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY COLLEGE AND PROGRAM

TOTAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT OVERVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Language Socialization

- Focus on processes of linguistic and cultural development in and through the use of language
- Assumption: Larger social structures and sociopolitical ideologies, referenced through the use of language, shape processes and practices

LS in Academic Contexts

- For ITAs, critical to competent participation in academic contexts is to learn how to use diverse linguistic and nonverbal resources to teach discipline-specific knowledge
- More studies needed to uncover instructional and interactional challenges facing multilingual ITAs and university students on U.S. campuses


Methodology

Research Questions

- What instructional and interactional challenges do multilingual ITAs encounter in classroom problem-solving activities?
- How do multilingual ITAs engage with these challenges?

Critical Ethnography

- Micro-level socialization practices and macro-level institutional and sociopolitical ideologies
- *Why* ITAs need to teach this in this way
- *How* ITAs negotiate linguistic forms and nonverbal expressions to construct their teaching styles

Research Context & Participants

- Graduate-level University Teaching Practicum class at a U.S. Midwestern University for ITAs to further develop linguistic and discipline-specific knowledge required for teaching in higher education
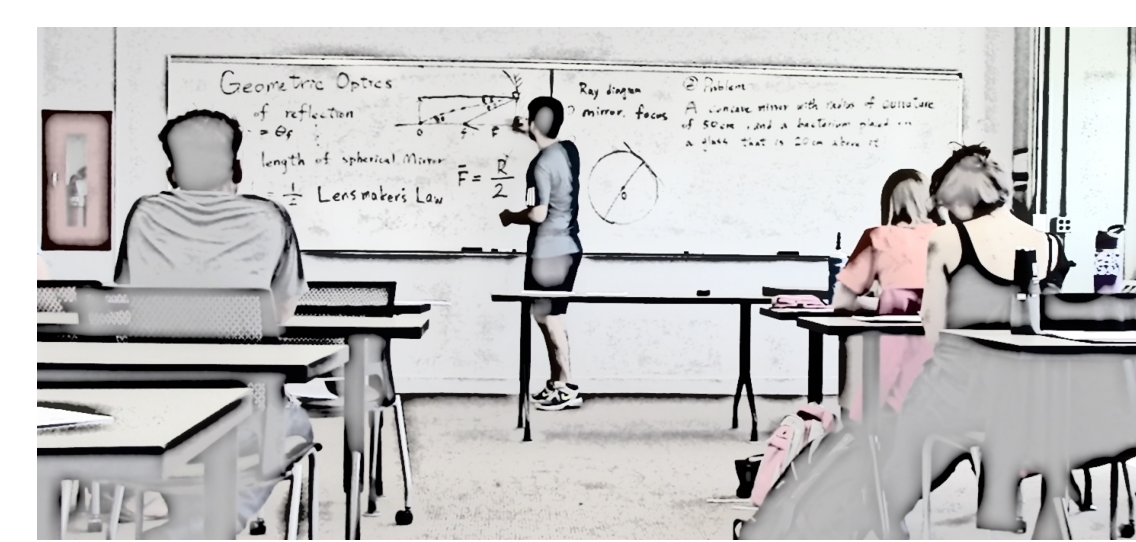
| Name (pseudonyms)	Department	Year in program	Course taught
Abhi (India, male)	Physics	1st	Introductory Physics for Science and Engineering
Henry (Taiwan, male)	Physics	1st	Introductory Physics for Science and Engineering
Kelly (Taiwan, female)	Physics	1st	Introductory Physics for Science and Engineering
Manan (Bangladesh, male)	Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics	1st	Dynamics
Valentina (Argentina, female)	Physics	1st	Introductory Physics for Science and Engineering

Findings

- **A major challenge facing ITA participants is the *Initiation-Response-Evaluation* in instructional interaction**

> *Initiation*, including clarification of the question → *Response*, including rephrasing or acknowledging students' responses → *Evaluation* of students' answers

- **Instructors explained the unspoken ideologies underlying legitimized linguistic forms in higher education contexts** (Excerpt 1)
- **ITAs negotiated alternative ways to construct their voices and teaching styles as competent members in disciplines** (Excerpt 1)
- **Nonverbal expressions commonly used to more effectively verbally initiate, respond, and evaluate students' questions and answers in instructional interaction** (Excerpt 2)

**Excerpt 1: Is it Okay to say, that's not quite right? Or is it too harsh?**

1	Student 1	If the answer is wrong, how do you give feedback politely?
2	Martha	How do you give <feedback politely> to incorrect answers?
3		What do you guys think?
4		(inaudible)
5		(0.4)
6		What do you think?
7	(1.0)	
8	Student 2	I would say- I would say, well, I have another idea
9	Martha	I have another idea, that ↑might work
10		What else?
11	Valentina	Is it Okay to say, that's not quite right?
12		Or is it too harsh
13	Martha	Okay. Say that's not <↑quite ↓right> (0.2) is actually good
14		Because that's <soft>
15		Would you add- would you add quite in there?
16	Valentina	I think so
17	Martha	Then it's not like (.) <WRONG>
18	Students	@[@
19	Martha	[So, ↓yeah, actually, that's not ↑quite ↓right, ↑that's not ↑quite ↓right, is Okay
20		
21	Valentina	But if in class, someone can answer-
22	Martha	-↑Yeah-
23	Valentina	-Someone can say-
24	Martha	↑Yeah, so, ↑yeah
25		So that's not quite ↓right, can anyone help her, help us figure out, wha- what
26		part of that was not right?
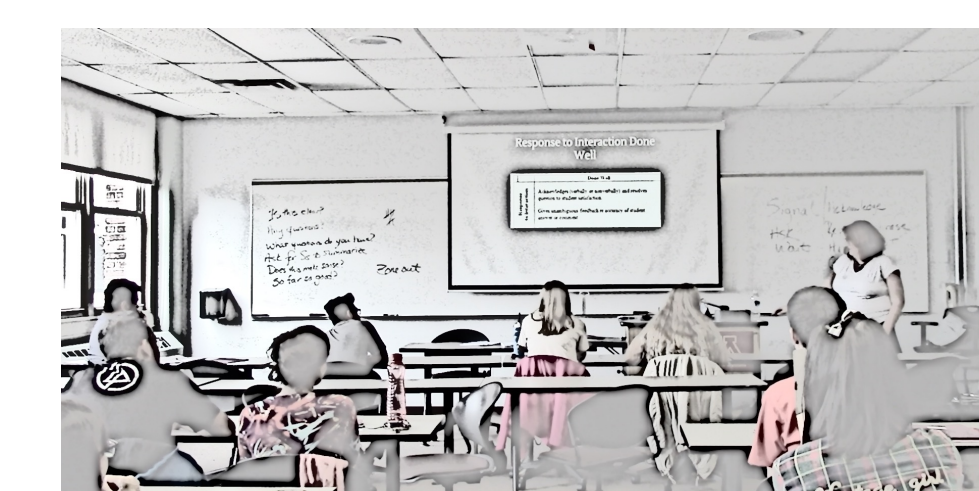
Findings

Excerpt 2: You mean that?

9	Valentina	Uh, I'm sorry. Did you mean that, when, did you mean-
10		Your questions is, when this is positive, is this repulsive force?
11	Student 1	<Uh,> Yes.
12		When the repulsive force is positive, and when the attractive force is negative
13	Valentina	>Yeah,< But- but I don't quite understand is, is, you're
14		(0.2) what you're talking about (.) eh (.) <where> positive
15		<Which one> are you saying that is positive when it is repulsive
16	Student 1	Oh, k and q 1 and q 2 ((Student 1 is pointing the equation on the board.))
17	Valentina	Oh, yeah, I understood
18		(0.2) Student 1 is asking, when this is positive, then the repulsive force is
19		positive
20		(0.4) You're asking that? Is always like that? ((Valentina is looking at Student 1 for a confirmation check.))
21		
22	Student 1	Yeah
23	Valentina	You mean that? ((Valentina is looking at Student 1 for another confirmation check.))
24		
25	Student 1	Yeah ((Student 1 is nodding his head.))
26	Valentina	Yes, you're- that's correct ((Valentina is nodding her head.))
27		(0.4) When this thing <here> is positive, ((Valentina is using the marker to
28		circle the equation on the board.))
29		then the force of q2, eh, goes away from q1, so it's positive ((Valentina is
30		looking around the class.))
31		And when the thing <here> is negative, ((Valentina is using the marker to
32		circle the equation on the board.))
33		then the force towards q1, the force of q2 wants to go towards q1
34		that means, that's <u>attractive</u>
35		OK? ((Valentina is looking at her students for a confirmation check.))
36	Students	Yes ((Some students are nodding their heads.))
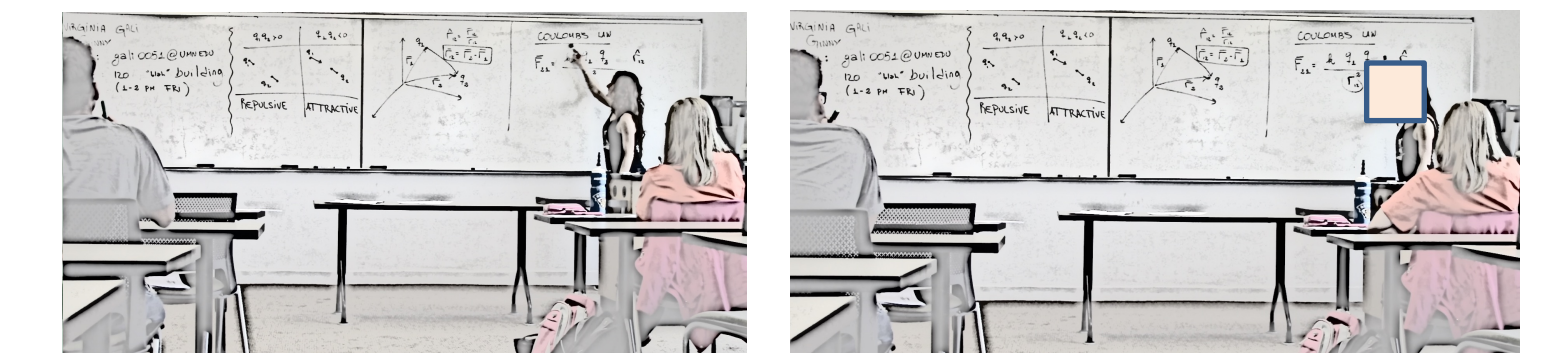
Implications

- Multilingual communicative repertoire often used by ITAs to negotiate alternative ways to construct teaching styles as confident and proficient members in disciplines.
- ITAs' target language competence for instruction (particularly vocabulary) and pragmatic proficiency relevant to U.S. classroom interactions (specifically I-R-E exchanges) were highly influenced by their prior academic discourse practices.
- Juxtaposition between content experts and language novices creates interactional consequences for ITAs' instruction and situated identities as course instructors vulnerable for negotiation of their disciplinary knowledge and memberships.

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