This study addresses the representations about international students at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and the ways of representing, especially legitimations about the representations in the data.

Research Questions

What are the representations about international students in the data for international students, including news article, the letter in the welcoming letter for international students, and the interview with a Korean female international student?

How are the representations legitimized? What are differences, similarities, and relationships among the representations in the data?

Overview of Results

Representations in three types of data

Data 1: Welcoming letter
Data 2: News article
Data 3: Interview

Welcomed
Equal
Resistant
Collective
Isolated
Specific

Legitimations in three types of data

Data 1: Moral evaluation
Data 2: Expert endorsement
Data 3: Theoretical rationales

Moral evaluation
Expert endorsement
Theoretical rationales

Data 1
Data 2
Data 3

Welcomed
Equal
Resistant
Collective
Isolated
Specific

Results: Representations

1. Welcomed: warm, accepting, helping, and welcome (data 1)
   “We think you find this [the university] to be a warm and accepting community.”
   “WSS staff are here to help you in accomplishing your academic and career goals.”

2. Isolated: isolate, confine, lose out, and (don’t) reach out (data 2)
   “Students who confine themselves to their native cultures can lose out on important social experiences.”
   “They are isolated.”
   “International students are more confident and comfortable when talking among peers.”

3. Equal: both, both international and domestic students, they, and people (data 2)
   “It’s a problem with both sides,” Yu said, adding that she tries pairing with partners outside her friend circle. “People need to be more open.”
   “We always invite both international and domestic students to come to our events, so we can all promote the beauty of the culture.” Nguyen said.

Results: Legitimations

1. Moral evaluation: centrally, warm, and accepting (data 1)
   “We are delighted you have chosen Minnesota.”
   “The people of Minnesota place a high value on education and also realize the importance of diversity.”

2. Instrumental rationalization: help (data 1 and 2)
   “WSS staff are here to help you in accomplishing your academic and career goals.”
   “Our office provides: Information to help you adjust to the University and to U.S. culture. Advising and counseling services to help you maintain your immigration status. Educational and social programs to help you meet U.S. and other international students.”

3. Expert endorsement: the divide, student government leaders and international student groups at the University of Minnesota are trying to figure out what can be done to make foreign-born students feel more comfortable on campus.”

Discussion and Conclusion

We can see diverse representations and legitimations through three types of views. These representations of representations among diverse texts about international students tell us that the representations in the discourses in diverse texts don’t reflect international students’ experience. These representations in the texts are the result of the authors’/contextualization with conscious or unconscious specific purposes and contexts. So, it is necessary for us, as the readers of those texts about international students to be careful for not just accepting the representations, but also thinking about complex relationships among texts and their social/political contexts.

These legitimations are not only to positively describing in a welcoming letter and quoting expert’s opinion in a news article. Rather, we can’t settle for this discourse endorsement because, again, the discourse is not only language, but also social and political action.

These diversity and contradictions among discourses about international students are based on the limitation and possibility of language. Language can’t represent all of our social practices. At the same time, from the lack of language, it can make us focus on specific representations. Therefore, first, we need to understand limitations of language and also utilize the strengths of language while imagining and circumscribing alternative legitimations about international students.

References


Pihet, Hélène; Mays, Sue; & Sarre, Chris (Jan 2015). "Welcome and exclusion: an analysis of The Australian newspaper’s coverage of international students." Higher Education, 70 (1), 93-103.


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