

Words Matter

Rethinking the term
'International Student' in our
delivery of Student Services

Sandra Schinnerl, UBC



Focus of session

- Ask difficult questions about the language we use, the images we reinforce and the assumptions we hold when we speak of “international” or “domestic” students.
- Encourage reflection about the paradigms in which we operate.
- What purpose do the terms “international student” and “domestic student” serve in our practice and delivery of programs?
- How useful are these terms in our quest for “bringing an international dimension into the teaching, research and service activities into Canadian institutions?”



Sharing stories

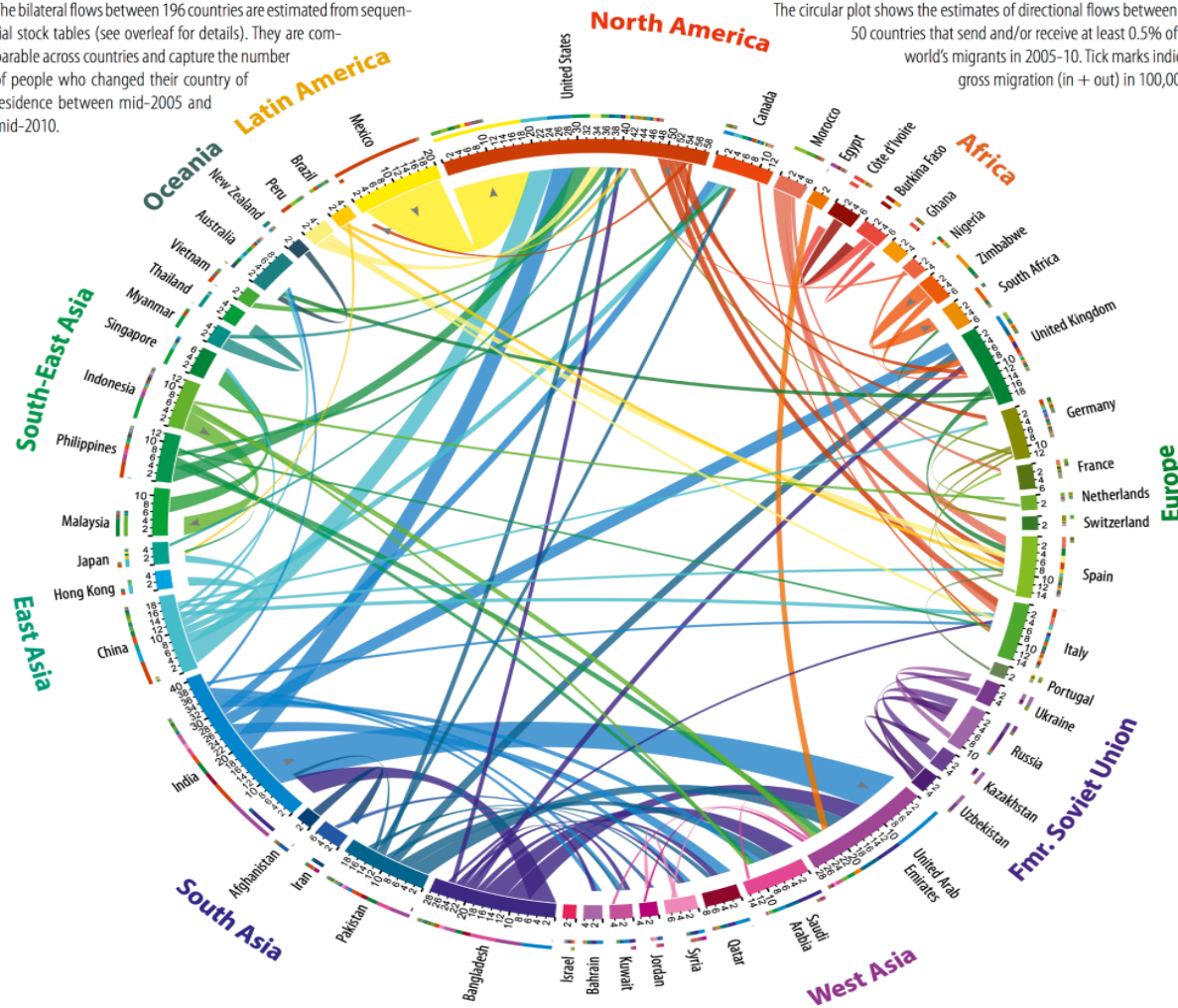
[Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story](#)

What comes to mind when you hear the term “international student”

1. Students
2. Colleagues in your institution
3. Community members

[MSU student video](#)

The bilateral flows between 196 countries are estimated from sequential stock tables (see overleaf for details). They are comparable across countries and capture the number of people who changed their country of residence between mid-2005 and mid-2010.



"Words matter in the migration debate"

Rob McNeil, Head of Media and Communications
Migration Observatory, Oxford University.



Words to describe people moving across borders

- Alien
- Asylum seeker
- Exile
- Expat
- Displaced person
- Dreamer
- Foreigner
- Foreign worker
- Immigrant
- Migrant/ Economic migrant
- Refugee
- Legal vs. illegal
- Regular vs. irregular
- Documented vs. undocumented













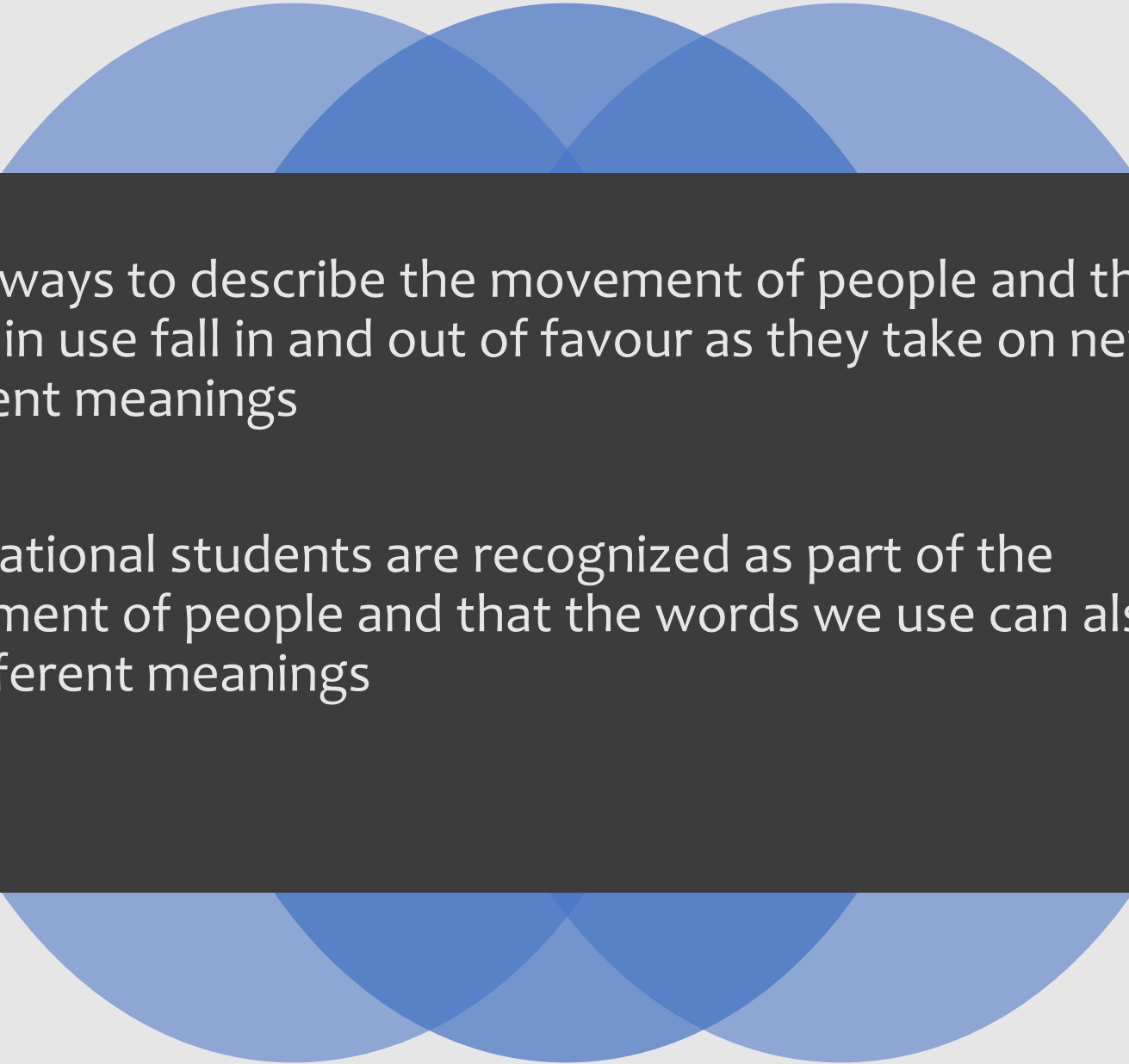




Words we use

- Foreign student
- Exchange student
- Visiting student
- International student
- ESL/EAL student
- Visa student



- 
- Many ways to describe the movement of people and the terms in use fall in and out of favour as they take on new or different meanings
 - International students are recognized as part of the movement of people and that the words we use can also take on different meanings

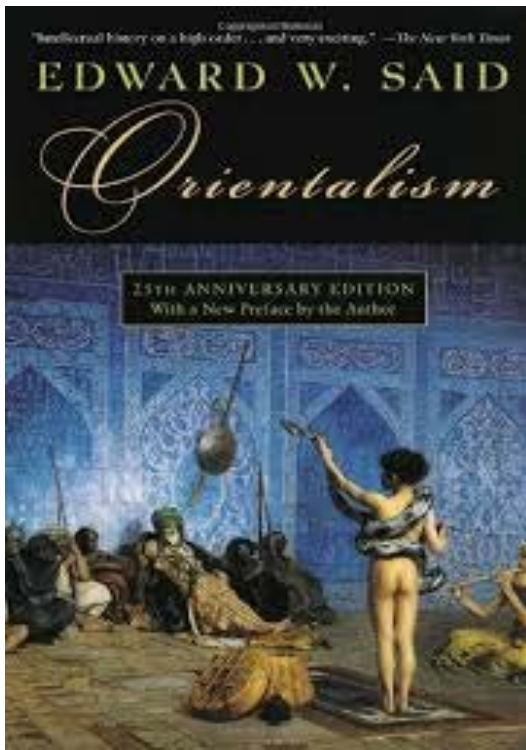
Historical context:

- What is the historical legacy of the term “international student” within the Canadian context?
- How does it impact our current use of term? What has changed?
- What remains constant?



Conceptual Frameworks

Orientalism



"Orientalism" is a way of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences of peoples and cultures of the Orient (the East) as compared to that of Europe and the U.S (the West).

Conceptual Frameworks

“Social imaginary” refers to a collective understanding about how the world should be and how we should live (Taylor, 2002).

Global Social Imaginary



Dominant global imaginary

- Stein and Andreotti (2016) use the dominant global imaginary rooted in western supremacy as a lens to examine international student recruitment and international student experience on Canadian campuses.
- They consider how this imaginary shapes three dominant racialized tropes about IS which frame them as:
 - (1) as “charity”
 - (2) as “competition”
 - (3) as “cash”
 - (4) as “citizen”



How do these discourses influence our perspectives of international students?

- International students as instrumental to government policy/national benefits/institutional funding
- Contradictory perspective - welcoming but cautious
- They are to be made “more like us” as they are here to gain from our advanced society/educational institutions



Who is
international?
Who is
Canadian?

The labels used for international and Canadian students are inclusive of very diverse groups, *often sharing similarities **across** rather than within these stated identities.*

“International” is not just about what is “*out there*” but “in fact *in here*”

Is the traditional dichotomy between “domestic” students and “international” students applicable/useful?

Who is international? Who is Canadian?

- The administrative and policy definitions of “international” and “domestic” students are not the functional descriptions used by students
- Many have difficulty identifying “international” students from “immigrant” students
- Others regard all visible minorities on campus as international students
- Others consider all immigrants to be international students



Student Services

- Does the distinction of who is and who is not an international or Canadian student serve us well as student service professionals in the current university context?
- Does the word “international student” hold the kind of imaginaries we wish to reinforce?



Beyond the traditional dichotomy?

Language support

- When studying in English is new or recent

Academic support

- When the pedagogical approach to learning is different

Transition and acculturation support

- When the social and cultural expectations are different

Administrative support

- When maintaining status to study and work is required





A different perspective?

Three different levels of diversity.

1. **structural** as defined by the changing demographic mix and level of racial/ethnic diversity in the student body.
2. **classroom diversity** –which refers to its representation in the curriculum, learning about diverse people and gaining experience with diverse peers in class.
3. **informal interactional diversity** which relates to the frequency and quality of inter-group interaction, the majority of which will take place outside the classroom and will be central to meaningful diversity experiences.

Caruana and Ploner (2010)

Other models?

- Internationalisation strategy should be linked to, and benefit from, the broader celebration of diversity across the institution and to policies and practice which enhance the diversity of the home student population. (Jones and Lee, 2008)
- Internationalisation as a subset of an equity and diversity agenda.
- Some institutions are challenging categories and labels used for students according to their funding streams and focusing instead on sharing resources and expertise across various university divisions.

Questions to leave you with...

- How useful are the current labels/terminologies we use in differentiating students in our policies and practices as student service professionals?
- Can we avoid falling prey to the pull of orientalism and a imperialist global social imaginary?
- Is there a way we can (re) imagine and (re) configure our geographies- structural, systemic and mental to work at more integrative international education experience models for all of our students?
- How might we view all of our students as educational border crossers?
- Can we work with all students remembering that while they cannot be removed from the political and national contexts from which they come they all have multiple and contradictory identities that are in relation(ship) to each other?

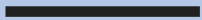


..... as well as a quote

‘Responding to the diversity of international students and responding to the diversity of home students are in fact not two agendas but one.’ *Jones and Killick, 2007, p. 110.*



THANK YOU.



Sandra.Schinnerl@alumni.ubc.ca