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From Linguistic Imperialism to Linguistic Conscientización: Enhancing the preparation of bilingual teacher as social communicators and language mediators

The preparation of bilingual Latino/a teachers for a multilingual/multicultural world requires an examination and understanding of their linguistic repertoires and ideologies (Flores & Smith, 2007; Flores, Ek & Sánchez, under review). This is both necessary for their own development as language teachers and as educators of future students' whose backgrounds, home cultures, and home language varieties exist in a complex and changing ecology. If left unexamined, future bilingual educators have the potential to perpetuate the same linguistic imperialism that was imposed on their own acquisition of Spanish and English—a devastating practice that continues to recycle misinformation about language learning. Our qualitative research study, therefore, examines the hegemonic language ideologies that Latina/o bilingual teacher candidates bring with them to the university setting. In addition, as teacher-educators, we critically examine the classroom strategies we employ to pedagogically address such notions as linguisticism (García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008); cultural and linguistic encapsulation (Irwin, 2003; Kubota & Catlett, 2008); and linguistic *conscientización* (Schwarzer, Haywood & Lorenzen, 2003).

Data collection spans over three years and includes student assignments, audio- and/or video-recordings of classroom discussions, and a demographic survey from over 120 Latino/a university students preparing to become bilingual teachers in Texas. Our study's participants come from different immigrant backgrounds, such as: long-term Tejanas, bordertown second-generation Mexican-Americans, *Fronterizas* who grew up on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border, Mexican nationals, South American immigrants, *Puertorriqueñas*, and self-identified Chicanas. Findings point to the ways in which educational and religious institutions, as well as society in general, exacerbate linguistic imperialism; how teachers in preparation unwittingly convey hegemonic views about language learning in the classroom; and the collective teaching approach that teacher-educators employ to dismantle students' hierarchical beliefs about Spanish language varieties.

This presentation examines how bilingual teacher candidates utilized research methods to explore various communities within an urban South Texas setting. Equipped with qualitative research tools, these teacher candidates documented local community members' perspectives on language and local print environments. The candidates interviewed community members and business owners in predominantly Latino immigrant neighborhoods and conducted language attitude surveys at six elementary schools where they interviewed parents, school staff, and teachers. Our findings indicate that Latino/a communities are not monolithic with respect to language ideologies. Rather, there is some ambivalence toward bilingualism and bilingual education, often couched in explanations of "Spanish as important" versus "Spanish as necessary," which reflect dominant ideologies. Undergirding our study is the notion that bilingual Latinos/as are not immune to dominant linguistic ideologies that reify the hegemony of English while stigmatizing Spanish. Such attitudes countered the teacher candidates' expectations that community members would have more vocal support for bilingualism and bilingual education. Thus, we seek to provide teacher candidates with an effective tool that can help them critically examine their own and others' linguistic ideologies for the benefit of their future students.

To shed light on the links among language, literacy, and ideology, our conceptual framework includes sociocultural theory, New Literacy Studies, and the language ideologies paradigm. From a sociocultural perspective, language and literacy are socially constructed tools that support cognitive processing (Vygotskii & Kozulin, 1986) and social interaction (Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006) while standing as cultural artifacts (Dyer & Friederich, 2002). Indeed, language is the preeminent meaning-making tool for learning as a socially-mediated activity (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1987). In addition to language and literacy, humans surround themselves with culturally-embedded signs and symbols that evoke meaning (Cope, Kalantzis, & New London Group, 2000; Lynch, 2007). All communities and cultures have unique language and literacy knowledge and practices (Heath, 1996, p. 479).

Sociocultural theory provides a productive framework from which to study questions of language and literacy for Latina/o immigrant students because it highlights the inextricable links between language and literacy. For bilingual Latino communities, families, and students, any discussion of literacy must necessarily include a treatment on language given that issues of language are at the center of literacy and biliteracy teaching and learning. To better understand the situation of Latino languages, including Spanish and its dialects, we use a language ideologies framework that sheds light on historical and current attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives on Spanish.

Language Ideologies

Rooted in linguistic anthropology, the language ideologies framework (Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998; Wortham, 2001) is particularly productive for examining the complex linguistic situation of Latinos/as in the Southwestern United States. Woolard (1998) observed that ideologies about language are never just about language alone: "Rather they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology" (p. 3). Linguistic ideologies are about consciousness, subjective representations, beliefs, and ideas that are rooted in, reflective of, or responsive of the interests of a particular social position (Woolard, 1998). Because language ideologies can be tools in the contestation of power, they can legitimate asymmetrical relations of power (Woolard, 1998). This definition of language ideologies is useful for illuminating how in the US, English is privileged over Spanish and how institutions uphold its status.

In the Southwest, the Spanish language existed long before the 1848 Mexican-American War, as these territories were part of Mexico. Upon signing the Treaty of Guadalupe, Mexicans living on the north side of the Rio Grande, which was now US territory, faced tremendous discrimination that included hostility toward the use of Spanish despite having been granted full US citizenship. It was not long before overt discrimination became evident in public schools, as Mexican children were harshly disciplined for speaking Spanish. The hopes embedded in these acts were to eradicate the Spanish language completely. "In many ways, the campaign to remove Spanish from public schools in the Southwest was merely the regional expression of a national campaign" (San Miguel, 1999, p. 43).

The US, with its longstanding Americanization project, has never accepted the indigenous or immigrant languages of its people; in fact, "throughout the 20th century, until the 1960s, use of a language other than English was regarded as evidence of retardation and a major obstacle to success in US society" (Hakuta & Díaz, 1985, as cited in Worthy, Rodríguez, Assaf, Martínez, & Cuero, 2003, p. 278). Therefore, it was not surprising to find that "teachers [were] being told to speak only English to Spanish-speaking students, to punish the use of Spanish in school, and to encourage parents—many of them limited in English proficiency—to speak/teach their Spanish-speaking children English" (García, 1999, p. 144). The "No Spanish Rules" prohibited "the use of Spanish in the classrooms, at lunch time, and on the playgrounds" (Acuña, 1988, as cited by MacGregor-Mendoza, 2000, p. 356) and the violation of the rules were often punished physically with the use of switches, rulers, or kneeling (Guajardo, Sánchez, Fineman, & Scheurich, 1998).

This historical linguistic violence toward Spanish and its speakers continues today (Ek & Sánchez, 2008). Furthermore, language has become a proxy for race (Gutiérrez, et al. 2002), or as Urciouli (1996) explains, "Whenever English speakers complain about the 'unfairness' of hearing Spanish spoken in public spaces or in the workplace, they racialize Spanish by treating it as matter out of place" (p. 35). As evidenced by a slew of policies that our nation has witnessed—including laws that make English the official language, anti-bilingual education measures, and growing movements to make English-only constitutional—indigenous and immigrants populations, and their languages, continue to be targets of hostility.

Similar to how Spanish is stigmatized, literacies of working-class Latino communities are often denigrated particularly because these literacy practices do not map onto what are considered good literacy practices. Sociolinguistic studies show that within any society certain forms of language and literacy are privileged while others are devalued (Cooney & Akintude, 1999; Richardson & Lawrence-Brown, 2004). While schools readily acknowledge and value the literacy behaviors of mainstream, English-speaking families (Gee, 1996), this is not true of minority families (Purcell-Gates, 2007). Yet, people of different social-cultural groups use written and spoken languages in ways that are unique and valuable in their culture (Brice Heath, 1996b). Despite empirical studies indicating its importance (Allen & Labbo, 2001), schools have been shown to ignore or deprecate the literacy knowledge of poor or working-class communities, and those where a minority language is commonly used (Gee, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002). This attitude is indicative of a "deficit ideology" (Sleeter, 2004) which devalues the capacities of minority parents and their communities. Bourdieu (1977) and Willis (1981) shed light on the cultural and linguistic differences between middle-class and working-class whites highlighting privileged youth's advantages over working-class youth. By upholding the value of white middle-class practices while devaluing minority and working-class ways, middle- to upper-class and white become synonymous with "correct" practices.

There is a large body of evidence that suggests benefits for teachers and instruction when they are knowledgeable of the linguistic and cultural strengths of their students (e.g., Bartolomé & Leistyna, 2006; Gunderson & Siegel, 2001; Wayman, 2002; Zentella, 2005). When teachers lack the appropriate cultural and linguistic awareness of the communities they serve, there can be a devastating effect on the learners (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). The literature on diversity preparation reports varying degrees of success with teacher candidates and issues of multicultural education (e.g., language diversity, cultural diversity) (Burant, 1999; Burstein & Cabello, 1989; Gutiérrez-Gómez, 2002; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Burstein and Cabello (1989, p. 9) argue that: "Teachers, as others, frequently try to achieve a 'cultural fit.' That is, they try to fit students into their own cultural system." Even when teachers are of the same ethnicity as their students, they may be unaware of their language or cultural ideologies (cf. Dee & Henkin, 2002; B. Flores & H. Smith, 2007; Flores, 2001). As Flores and Smith (2007) found, all teachers, of any ethnic background, must engage in critical reflective practices that explore their preconceived notions about language-minority children and their communities. Lack of knowledge of the language and literacy practices found in culturally and linguistically diverse communities contributes to the problem of teachers trying to fit students into the dominant culture.

Within the last twenty years, researchers have focused on the learning and development of culturally and linguistically diverse students in out-of-school settings and have found that kids accomplish a great deal in these settings that contrast with their underperformance in formal schooling (Hull & Schultz, 2001). In addition, scholars have urged educators to recognize children's accomplishments and leverage them in the classroom. Of import to these studies has been a focus on a multiplicity of literacies that are enacted in various sites including technology, popular culture, and cultural objects.

It is our hope that such research will shed light on how teacher educators can better prepare bilingual educators to effectively mediate the tensions among the multiple language varieties that often exist in today's bilingual/multilingual classrooms. By providing teacher candidates opportunities to contest deficit language ideologies, we can begin to reverse the linguistic imperialism espoused and perpetuated by larger cultural, political, and economic forces and institutions, thus better serving the needs of immigrant and language-minority children in this country.

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