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Bilingual Latino Middle Schoolers on Languaging and Racialization in the US

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Bilingual Latino Middle Schoolers on Languaging and Racialization in the US

by

Sarah Hesson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Sarah Hesson

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

Bilingual Latino Middle Schoolers on Languaging and Racialization in the US

by

Sarah Hesson

Advisor: Dr. Ofelia García

This dissertation explores bilingual Latino middle schoolers’ articulated understandings of their language practices as well as the links between language practices and processes of racialization and discrimination in the US. The research was conducted in the context of an after-school program whose explicit aim was to not only document students’ experiences, but to use those experiences as a basis for generating individual and collective critical understandings among participants. The findings of this case study center on the ways youth understand processes of racialization, translanguaging, and translation in the context of an English-dominant society, and how these understandings are connected to larger processes of discrimination and oppression, as well as resistance. The dissertation concludes by suggesting the need to center our understandings of bilingualism as well as language advocacy work on the lived experiences of bilingual youth and their communities. My hope is that this study will illuminate new possibilities for engaging with young adolescents in ways that foreground youth’s voices and experiences, generate opportunities for critical dialogue, and inspire social transformation.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.

Adrienne Rich, 1986, p. 199

Where I’m coming from

Even as a child, I could see the ways that certain people’s realities were privileged and given credence over others, and how this in turn led to greater life opportunities, fulfillment, and happiness. In the patriarchal society in which I grew up, and still live, I saw from a young age that male voices and experiences were valued over female, and obedient girls valued over inquisitive ones. My gendered experiences extended into most arenas of social life, and I was deeply affected by the sexism I encountered among my social groups and the larger communities I was a part of.

I grew up with both my parents and maternal grandparents, all of whom came from white, Catholic working-class families. My grandfather and his brother-in-law had a two-man business in heating and air conditioning, and my grandmother, who was an avid reader, worked as a homemaker and a caretaker for her five children. My dad worked in the cement and brick-laying business before obtaining his associate’s and then bachelor’s
degrees in nursing and biomedical engineering, respectively, and my mom was a nurse who earned her 4-year college degree while I was in middle school, before going on to complete her Master's degree when I was in high school. Thus my class background is varied; our family started out working class in many respects, then moved into the middle class as my parents obtained more education throughout my childhood. Even with greater schooling, however, as a family of six we struggled financially throughout my life, and even still, my parents’ goal of sending their four children to college has plunged them into lifelong debt.

In school I felt my social class, and I was keenly aware of the sense of privilege and entitlement I observed in those who had more. In high school and college, I had varied interactions with people of color and people living in poverty that led me to reflect more about the privileges I did enjoy that had previously been invisible to me. The more I was taught about the devastating effects of racism, poverty, and discrimination by those who had experienced it firsthand, the more I realized that despite my personal experiences with sexism and class inequality, I was an extremely privileged person in terms of my race (white), my home language (standard American English), my status as a US citizen, my sexual orientation as a straight woman, the educational opportunities I had been given, and the relative wealth my family enjoyed.

Reflecting on my own experiences of sexism and class inequality, as well as my experiences of privilege, and learning about the oppression and privilege of others, incited me to join in the struggle to shape a more equitable society. Before pursuing a doctoral degree, I worked in New York City public schools with emergent bilingual students and gained a greater understanding of bilingual, transnational communities in the US. Learning about the struggles of bilingual communities in New York to provide bilingual education for
their children, and joining in that struggle in a modest way through my work as a bilingual middle school teacher, gave me a greater understanding of the importance of community and solidarity in advocating for change. Presently, I hope to continue the struggle for educational equity for emergent bilingual students through my dissertation project.

The origins of this research project

The purpose of this research project is first and foremost to document how bilingual Latino middle schoolers express their understandings of their bilingual language practices in and outside of school, and how they situate these practices within larger processes of racialization, ethnicity, and social inequality.

My interest in this project began as a bilingual educator in New York City. I was new to the city and the bilingual community in which I worked. My own misunderstandings of bilingualism, bilingual communities, and the effect of processes of racialization within the community quickly bubbled to the surface. I was surprised that some of my students from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic appeared, in my eyes, to be African American, while others held their arms against mine to show their light skin. In the newcomer class where I first worked, I was delighted with the English words my students regularly sprinkled into their Spanish-dominant speech, and later, in the dual language setting where most students were US-born, I listened in awe as students, parents, and my Latino colleagues weaved in and out of Spanish and English like taxicab drivers finding the fastest route through dense traffic. I learned so much from both of these communities where I worked as an educator, about strong communities that have carved out space for themselves despite facing racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, and about the unique
challenges that Latino communities in NYC face. I see this research project as an extension of my continued belief and dedication to learning from the students, families, and communities I work alongside.

**Challenges facing Latino middle schoolers**

Designing programming and curriculum for middle school students continues to be a challenge nationally. Middle school students are often discussed among educators negatively, and there is little research that explores the capacities of middle schoolers for deep thought and action. Latino middle schoolers as a sub-group are particularly vulnerable, as elementary and middle school performance on state exams, and high school graduation rates for Latinos continue to lag behind the New York City average (notably, the New York City Department Education does not provide aggregated statistics on the performance of middle school students separate from “Grades 3-8” data).

By ethnicity, “Hispanic” students have the lowest graduation rate in NYC at 61.4% for the 2014 graduating class, as compared to a graduation rate of 63.8% for “Black” students, 80.7% for “white” students, and 82.6% for “Asian” students in the same year (NYCDOE, 2015a). Similar trends are observable in citywide data of Math and ELA exams for grades 3-8. While 34.2% of all students in NYC grades 3-8 scored at or above grade level on the NYS Math exam, only 23.1% of students labeled “Hispanic” scored at this level (NYCDOE, 2014). In English Language Arts, while 28.4% of all NYC students grades 3-8 scored at or above grade level in the NYS ELA Exam, only 18.3% of students termed “Hispanic” scored at this level (NYCDOE, 2014). These statistics demonstrate a continuing need to better understand the school experiences of Latinos in NYC.
**Student voices**

This project engaged Latino middle schoolers in an inquiry about their language practices and other social practices through an after-school program. Above all else, the project intended to foreground the voices of bilingual Latino middle school students. Very little research attempts to draw out and take as its primary object of inquiry the expressed understandings of bilingual early adolescents around their own language practices. However, the Latino population as well as the popularity of dual language bilingual programs are growing in NYC. According to 2010 US Census data, NYC residents of “Hispanic origin” made up 27% of the population in 2000, and 28.6% in 2010 (NYC2010, 2010). In January 2015, the chancellor of New York City schools Carmen Fariña announced plans to open 40 dual language programs in the 2015-2016 school year, 25 of which will be brand new and 15 of which will build on existing bilingual programs (NYCDOE, 2015b).

As both the Latino population and Spanish-English dual language bilingual programs in New York State grow in number, the importance of hearing from Latino youth about their experiences in these bilingual schools and in their bilingual communities is increasingly important to design language policy and pedagogy that fit Latino students’ needs and that speaks to the linguistic experiences and expressed desires of Latino families.

Further, not only are dual language bilingual programs growing in popularity, but increasing numbers of white middle class US Americans are choosing these programs for their children (McKay Wilson, 2011). Diversity in race, class, education, language, and immigration status also exists among the Latino population. Pratt refers to spaces in which diverse populations come together as contact zones (1991); dual language bilingual schools
in NYC are becoming such a site. Because of power dynamics based on race, ethnicity, class, language, and immigration status, dual language bilingual schools offer an opportunity to observe the interplay of power dynamics among diverse groups, in terms of the diversity within the Latino community as well as the larger population, and to document how Latino students express their experiences of being bilingual in the larger context of the US, but also how they understand these dynamics with classmates and within their neighborhood contexts. Recognizing that student experiences and school life happen within the context of family and community, family interviews will further inform the process through which language practices and ideologies are transmitted, sustained, and resisted.

Considering the power dynamics described above, in this study I recognize my position of power as both a teacher-researcher and a white, US-born, English-speaking woman as I undertake this inquiry. Further, this study was designed to foreground the expertise and experiences of students; while I am the researcher and bring my knowledge and expertise to the project, I am not the keeper of students’ knowledge and expertise. Rather, I aim to provide a platform for student voices, and an opportunity for other researchers, academics, and educators to learn from them alongside me. My hope is that this research will inform our understanding of the ways that Latino adolescents currently build language policy in the choices they make daily, and to show how the particular experiences within a community might inform top-down policy as well.

To this end, the framework of this project is grounded in the theory of dynamic bilingualism. By encouraging bilingual interactions, reading, and writing in the after-school program, and by drawing on my own bilingualism in both the after-school program and interviews, I hoped to ameliorate some inflections from the power dynamics between
myself and students. Further, my intention is also to push against the language binary that exists particularly in dual language bilingual programs by officially bringing dynamic bilingual practices into the school space, where normally these practices are limited to unofficial use. In this small way, the after-school program that I designed built on these dynamic bilingual practices. Noticing how this shift in language practices plays out will be an important dimension of the data collected throughout.

**Research questions**

This project is grounded in the following research questions:

1. How do Latino middle schoolers in bilingual education programs express their understandings of their language practices in and outside of school?

2. How do bilingual Latino middle schoolers articulate their awareness of the links between language, discrimination, and power in the context of an after-school program that is consciously oriented towards such critical investigations?

3. How are Latino middle schoolers’ language practices as well as their articulated understandings of language inflected with processes of racialization?

4. How do bilingual Latino middle schoolers demonstrate their capacity for resisting oppressive social processes and effecting social change?

I have several objectives related to this project. First, I hope to document how bilingual Latino middle schoolers express their understandings of their bilingual language practices in and outside of school. Second, I attempt to draw out students’ understandings of the connections between language, race, and ethnicity, and also to make these connections more visible to students through activities explicitly aimed at raising students’ critical awareness. Finally, I hope to show the possibilities for change that are resident within
projects aimed at raising students’ critical awareness, particularly middle school students, and in this case, bilingual Latino middle schoolers. My hope is that this project might serve, if not as a blueprint, then as a road sign pointing towards the ways we need to engage youth in critical reflection in order to show them their capacity to make social change.

**Overview of the dissertation**

Chapter Two of the dissertation outlines the theoretical framework underlying the project, and Chapter Three provides a detailed overview of the methodology employed. The three chapters that follow focus on different findings that are organized thematically. Chapter Four examines students’ understandings of processes of racialization, and centers around one codification brought in by a student, a meme of what many students described as a “Mexican” man. This chapter ties together understandings of race, language, and ethnicity.

Chapter Five analyzes students’ views of bilingualism, translinguaging, and speaking Spanish. This chapter highlights students’ bilingual identities and the challenges some students faced in Spanish-dominant contexts. In this chapter, I highlight students’ articulation of “language-dominant” spaces in which “mostly” one language is spoken, rather than “language-only” spaces, in which only one language is spoken. This finding has important implications for understanding the specific ways students use translinguaging, and also for designing pedagogical spaces that are resonant with students’ bilingual language practices. Chapter Six examines the theme of translation by focusing on one student’s desire to help translate for an English speaker, calling attention to how youth translation is often framed as translation for the Spanish-speaker but not the English-
speaker, and why those framings matter. Finally, in the conclusion of the dissertation, I look forward and ask what can be learned from the data presented here, especially in terms of creating spaces for young adolescents to engage in critical thought and social transformation. I argue here that it is necessary to shift away from a perspective of language as a resource and instead think about the ways that language is a lived reality for bilingual students and communities, and make this the starting point of the conversation when considering the reasons to sustain bilingualism through bilingual education, as well as how to do so.

**Conclusion**

This project seeks to foreground bilingual Latino middle school students’ language practices, as well as to uncover students’ understandings of the ways that racialization, ethnicity, and social inequality interact with and inform both their language practices and their understandings of them. This knowledge is critical to better understanding the experiences of bilingual Latino adolescent youth. At the same time, this project seeks to make visible for Latino student participants the unspoken ways that racism, xenophobia, and discrimination contribute to social views as well as their own understandings of language. In this way, the findings of this project examine not only what students know, but also the ways in which an educational program such as this one, aimed at raising students’ critical awareness, might contribute to a more just society.
Chapter 2

Critical Theoretical Perspectives

“Necesitamos teorías that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries – new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods.... We need to de-academize theory and to connect the community to the academy.” (Anzaldúa, 1990, pp. xxv-xxvi)

Language socialization and translanguaging

Languages are not static, autonomous codes, but rather “fluid codes framed within social practices” (García, 2009, p. 32). The idea of languages, then, does not capture the reality of linguistic communication so well as the idea of languaging, which focuses more on the ways people use linguistic features and codes to communicate with each other. Therefore, discussions of language acquisition must necessarily include the social contexts in which individuals acquire new linguistic features. The idea of language socialization captures the essentially social nature of language and provides the larger context that is critical to understanding and situating languaging practices.

In the context of bilingual communities, the term translanguaging refers to how bilingual people interact using their entire linguistic repertoire, rather than limiting themselves to using language practices associated with one standard language or another. García and Wei describe translanguaging as a process in which, “Bilingual speakers select meaning-making features and freely combine them to potentialize meaning-making, cognitive engagement, creativity, and criticality” (García and Wei, 2014, p. 42). In a translanguaging framework, the emphasis is not on languages as systems or structures, but
rather language-in-use, starting first with the speaker and the community, and examining language practices insofar as people use them to communicate meaningfully.

Schecter and Cummins (as cited in García, 2009, p. 318) state, “In contexts of cultural, linguistic, or economic diversity, where social inequality inevitably exists, these interactions are never neutral: they either challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the wider society or they reinforce those power relations.” This project draws on both sociocultural literacy and translanguaging frameworks to explore the social, economic, and political contexts in which Latino middle schools are educated, and to draw out the power dynamics underlying these contexts. Within my own work with students, these frameworks embrace dynamic and multifaceted linguistic and cultural identities, and explicitly examine and challenge oppressive power relations.

**Critical cultural perspectives**

Ramirez and Castañeda's (1974) notion of cultural democracy asserts the right of individuals to maintain their bicultural identities and languages. In the culturally democratic school environment, this means the right to be educated in one's own language and learning style. Thus, “an individual can be bicultural and still be loyal to American [democratic] ideals. Cultural democracy is a philosophical precept which recognizes the way a person communicates, relates to others, seeks support and recognition from his [and her] environment... and thinks and learns” (Ramirez and Castañeda, 1974, p. 23, as cited in Darder, 1991, p. 55-56). Cultural democracy leads back to Freirean notions as well, as it is only through open dialogue that students may develop the skills necessary for “critical
engagement with their world and a genuine sense of participation in a common democratic life” (Darder, 1991, p. 60).

Extending the idea of cultural democracy, Darder suggests critical bicultural democracy, in which students participate actively and freely in school, with support and encouragement, and develop bicultural voices to then use for their own empowerment (1991). Schools may be sites of oppression as well as sites of resistance and strength. Nurturing spaces of resistance not only cultivates strength to resist sites of oppression, these spaces may also actually replace spaces that were previously oppressive. Furthermore, oppression and its opposite may be understood not as mutually exclusive or a binary, but as a dynamic continuum requiring constant assertion and reinforcement. Thus, anti-oppressive spaces continue to be so through continuing dialogue and commitment from all members, as well as through a radical openness by all members to constantly assess their own actions with the desire to move towards increasingly anti-oppressive practices. No multicultural curriculum can replace “the dialogical participation of bicultural students in the process of schooling” (Darder, 1991, p. 118-119).

In this project, I sought to engage in dialogic research alongside youth, and consider such dialogue to be critical to the research process and to the creation of knowledge in this kind of research setting. At the same time, such dialogic relations must themselves be interrogated so as not to inadvertently reproduce unequal relations despite dialogic intent (Darder, 1991, p. 100). This intention stems from a larger issue in both education and research and recognizes the need to stop the perpetuation – often unintentional on well-meaning teachers’ parts – of racism through dialogue, especially where educators are of the dominant culture while students are from historically underserved communities. For
biculural students, “It must also assist them to identify the different ways in which their relationship with the dominant culture has conditioned them to take on contradictory attitudes and beliefs about themselves that can cause them to participate unintentionally in the perpetuation of their own oppression” (Darder, 1991, p. 121-122). As a white researcher, I enter into this project with Latino families and students with the intention to recognize and take as an object of inquiry and discussion the ways in which my own race, gender, class, and privilege play into the dynamics of the research. I intend to start from a position of humility, of learning from and working alongside youth.

**Latina/o Critical Race Theory**

Race is a significant factor in developing an understanding of the lived experiences of Latinos in the US, and a research framework inclusive of race and processes of racialization recognizes the continued significance of racial stratifications in the US in addition to considerations of Latino ethnicity, which are more typically addressed. The work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman has been recognized as the first to articulate Critical Race Theory (CRT), specifically within the legal system. Bell and Freeman observed that structural inequalities based on race were possible within US legal systems apart from considering individual racist acts and attitudes. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) build on this work to develop a critical framework of race within education. The foundation of their work includes 1. the recognition that “race continues to be significant in the United States”; 2. the recognition of US society as based on property rather than human rights, and 3. the use of the intersection of race and property as an analytical tool to better understand inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47).
Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) extends Critical Race Theory to develop a way of understanding the racialized experiences of Latinos, particularly in the US. Rather than seen as replacing CRT, LatCrit is typically seen as a complement to CRT in addressing race-related issues specific to Latinos. Rather than viewing race as biological or socially constructed, CRT and LatCrit scholars believe that using “race as an analytical tool... to compare and contrast social conditions, can deepen the analysis of educational barriers for people of color, as well as illuminate how they resist and overcome these barriers” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 66). CRT and LatCrit have several points in common. First, both “view racism as endemic to U.S. society and explore the ways that so called race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial subordination” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 65). Both frameworks recognize the pervasiveness of “racism, White privilege, and the myths of meritocracy, neutrality, and objectivity” institutionally, socially, and in everyday life (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 65). Finally, both LatCrit and CRT firmly believe that “providing a space for and utilizing the knowledge of marginalized people is vital for theory, practice, and social transformation” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 65). These theoretical frameworks foreground the knowledge of marginalized communities, and in this way, mirror the objectives of my own research project.

LatCrit highlights the importance of not replacing race with ethnicity as a way of understanding Latino/a identity and marginalization (Haney-López, 1998; Trucios-Haynes, 2001). Further, Urciuoli (1996) makes a distinction between racialization and ethnicization that is useful in thinking specifically about the processes of racialization as experienced by Latinos. Urciuoli (1996) defines the process of racialization thus: “Race discourses, or racializing, frame group origin in natural terms; ethnic discourses, or ethnicizing, frame
group origin in cultural terms. Racializing is defined by a polarity between dominant and subordinate groups, the latter having minimal control over their position in the nation-state” (p. 15).

Urciuoli (2003) puts forth the idea of a semiotic sliding scale, with maximum racialization at one end and maximum ethnicization on the other. Maximum racialization refers to “a state of social being whereby certain people are origin-marked as not deserving to belong to the nation holding sovereignty over them, by virtue of the conditions under which they came under the sway of that nation” (Urciuoli, 2003, p. 7). This understanding of race and ethnicity recognizes the social construction of both, naming them as processes rather than immutable categories, while pointing out the differences in the ways each concept is socially constructed and therefore socially enacted. Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari further this concept in their identification of “linguoracism” to refer to the process of racialization through language practices, rooting this process partially in discursive practices that take “cultural inheritance” as “biological inheritance” (2003, p. 91).

Flores and Rosa (2015) also make an important contribution to understanding the construction of race through the use of the idea of raciolinguistic ideologies to describe how language speaks race at the same time as race speaks language:

Specifically, a raciolinguistic perspective seeks to understand how the white gaze is attached both to a speaking subject who engages in the idealized linguistic practices of whiteness and to a listening subject who hears and interprets the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations as deviant based on their racial positioning in society as opposed to any objective characteristics of their language use.” (p. 151)
Within LatCrit, intersectionality extends beyond the black/white binary to include issues of immigration, race, class, gender, sexuality, and language. It offers raced-gendered epistemologies that “challenge Eurocentric epistemologies and dominant ideologies such as meritocracy, objectivity, and neutrality” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 65). LatCrit posits that there are other ways of knowing that Eurocentric theory does not address, ways that draw from experience as well as shared history of oppression and collective experiences. Delgado Bernal (2002) shows how Chicana/o experiences viewed through Eurocentric versus a critical raced-gendered epistemological perspective yields radically different views of what constitutes knowledge, “specifically regarding language, culture, and commitment to communities” (p. 105). Delgado Bernal defines critical raced-gendered epistemologies as offering “unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color” (2002, p. 107). She further highlights the importance of recognizing the multitude of voices and understandings within such an epistemology, and the many culturally specific ways that race and gender are braided together to form distinct positionalities and corresponding knowledges (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Finally, LatCrit uses counterstorytelling as a methodological and pedagogical tool, which might include “storytelling, family history, biographies, parables, testimonies, cuentos, consejos, chronicles, and narratives” (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 70). Counterstorytelling foregrounds experiences of racism and sexism not often heard, to challenge the dominant stories of those in power that typically espouse deficit ideologies of people of color and women. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify three types of counterstorytelling: personal narratives (told in the first person), other people's narratives
(mediated events told in the third person), and composite narratives (which take many voices together to discern patterns and larger histories). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) ask the question, “Whose stories are privileged in educational contexts and whose stories are distorted and silenced?” (p. 36). In drawing from their notion of counterstorytelling and asking myself the same question, I hope to contribute to a research base that privileges the stories of Latino adolescents on their own terms.

**Mestiza consciousness/ The Borderlands**

As LatCrit illuminates racialized dynamics in Latino communities and their particular effects on schooling, Chicana feminism likewise offers a way of understanding gendered experiences in Latino communities that take into account intersections of race, gender, class, and language. Anzaldúa explores the hybrid identity of *la mestiza* as “plagued by psychic restlessness,” as a result of being in a “constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways” (2012, p. 100). In the world of *la mestiza*, “rigidity means death” and the only solution is to maintain psychic flexibility while navigating often oppressive, hostile environments, which have also permeated individual consciousness.

The *mestiza* consciousness builds on this idea of *la mestiza*, and breaks down the “unitary aspect of each new paradigm” as well as the “subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner” while showing “in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 102). Thus, Anzaldúa’s work “recognizes the struggle and need to straddle cultures, languages, spirituality, and sexuality, *facultad* or the “ability to see beyond surface phenomena,” and *nepantla*, the exploration of “other ways of knowing and experiencing the world” (Elenes and Delgado Bernal, 2010, p. 72).
The *mestiza* consciousness is intimately related to Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands or *la frontera*, where identity and land are inextricably tied together and the borderland is both a reference to the physical, though historically shifting and contested, border between the US and México, and the abstract, though materially manifesting, borderlands that women of color occupy by being simultaneously *of* a culture and rejected *by* that culture as women and as people of color. To this point, Elenes and Delgado Bernal offer the concept of hybrid identifications, which refer to “the process by which marginalized groups construct alternative identities in order to negotiate distinct cultural milieus, including dominant mainstream cultural practices such as English monolingualism” (2010, p. 77). Similarly, Sandoval (2000) refers to “differential consciousness” as a “kinetic motion” that takes different viewpoints into consideration simultaneously to gain a fuller understanding rather than “binary oppositional contestations” (p. 44). In this sense, differential consciousness blends multiple understandings and recognizes the inseparability of different and even contradictory ways of knowing, seeing, and acting upon the world.

**Critical pedagogy**

Ira Shor describes critical pedagogy as a dialogic process of inquiry to develop critical literacy, “Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse"
This is the working understanding of critical pedagogy that I take up here in this study, as the aim of the after school program was not only to gather data, but to experiment with ways of opening up space for students to explore the world around them critically, for the purpose of positive social change.

Freire’s concept of banking education is also useful here, which Freire describes as an educational approach in which students are seen as receptacles for information, objects to be taught, while teachers are the subjects of the classrooms, full of the knowledge that they will impart to their students (1970). In this type of education, the primary focus is on what the teacher knows, and therefore, what the student does not know, but needs to learn. The student’s job is to passively gather the information given, and store it successfully for later recall. Freire (1970) notes of students, “The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them” (p. 73).

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire (1970) highlights the importance of students receiving an education that creates critical consciousness of their own oppression, and that fosters the critical thinking skills necessary to challenge their circumstances. Freire’s model, termed problem-posing education, focuses on the students as subjects, rather than beginning with the teacher or information she possesses that students in turn must acquire (1970). As such, students and the knowledge they bring to the classroom are at the center of their formal schooling. Through engaged dialogue, Freire suggests that the roles of teacher and student merge, so that both become active participants, both teachers and learners. In this way, “they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire 1970). I hope to align the methods of my own research with the tenets of critical
pedagogy, viewing myself and the students and families I work with as both teachers and learners in the process.

Darder (1991, p. 88) writes, “In the concrete context, students can be perceived as subjects and objects in a dialectical relationship with the world.” In this context, then, students both shape and are shaped by their world. Darder continues, “In the theoretical context, they play the role of cognitive subjects of the subject-object relationship that occurs in the concrete moment (1991, p. 88). Here Darder points to the process of metacognition that students can engage in to analyze and understand the discursive nature of their place in the world. Finally, Darder links the concrete and the theoretical in Freire’s notion of praxis, “In this way, they are able to return to a place where they can better react as subjects against an oppressive reality. This represents a vital point in the unity between theory and practice (Freire, 1985)” (Darder, 1991, p. 88). In my own research, my hope is to provide this space for students and families to reflect on the concrete realities of their linguistic, racial and gendered lives and that these discussions might draw out existing sustaining practices as well as contribute in some way to the nurturance of cultural and linguistic practices in the community.

Conclusion

Taken together, these critical theoretical perspectives laid the groundwork necessary for imagining and designing the after school program upon which this dissertation is based. In making sense of the data, these same perspectives offered tools of analysis and critical lenses through which I could understand and situate individual
student perspectives and experiences within collective forms of oppression but also resistance.

Anzaldúa writes, “To have theory meant to hold considerable evidence in support of a formulated general principle explaining the operation of certain phenomena. Theory, then, is a set of knowledges” (1990, pp. xxv-xxvi). The sets of knowledges presented here do not imbue students’ experiences and utterances with meaning; rather, as these theories interact with data in the chapters that follow, my hope is that new meanings are discursively made. That is, students’ experiences and utterances will inform these theories and make them new, and likewise, these theories will offer new ways of looking at youth actions and speech. The youth that participated in this project brought sets of knowledge with them, and by bringing that knowledge together with the theories laid out here, I hope to generate new ways of looking that ultimately honor the lived realities of Latino bilingual youth.
Chapter 3
Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was first and foremost to document how bilingual Latino middle schoolers express their understandings of their bilingual language practices in and outside of school, and how they situate these practices within larger processes of racialization, ethnicity, and social inequality. As noted above, my research questions are as follows:

1. How do Latino middle schoolers in bilingual education programs express their understandings of their language practices in and outside of school?

2. How do bilingual Latino middle schoolers articulate their awareness of the links between language, discrimination, and power in the context of an after-school program that is consciously oriented towards such critical investigations?

3. How are Latino middle schoolers’ language practices as well as their articulated understandings of language inflected with processes of racialization?

4. How do bilingual Latino middle schoolers demonstrate their capacity for resisting oppressive social processes and effecting social change?

Within these larger aims, I had several specific objectives related to the research questions guiding this project. The first aim was to document the ways that bilingual Latino middle schoolers talk about their bilingual language practices in varying contexts. Second, I aimed to document the collective understanding of the connections between language, race, and ethnicity that students built over the course of the after-school program. Finally, I hoped that this case study would illuminate new possibilities for engaging with young
adolescents in ways that raise students’ critical awareness and inspire social transformation.

**Research design**

This qualitative research project took the shape of an after-school program with middle school students at Bilingual Community Dual Language School\textsuperscript{1}, a K-8 dual language bilingual school located in upper Manhattan of New York City. The bulk of the research for this project was completed over an 8-week period at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. I met with eleven middle school students twice a week for sessions of ninety (90) minutes each. Over the course of this after-school program, I guided conversations, projects, and activities relating to students’ language use in and outside of school.

Methods, which I discuss in further detail in the section *Data collection*, included a variety of project activities during the after-school sessions as well as entry and exit interviews with students. During the after-school sessions, students created a number of artifacts which were then used for group discussion, interviews, and to guide their final presentations; these artifacts were also analyzed in conjunction with other data after the completion of the project. Student-created artifacts included language journals that documented their own thinking and observations, short videos through platforms including Instagram and Vine, peer interviews, and final projects. The variety of methods used during the after-school program aimed to provide multiple avenues through which students could articulate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

\textsuperscript{1} This is a pseudonym.
In addition to the after-school program, I conducted student-researcher narrative interviews before and after participation in the after-school program. These interviews provided baseline data about students’ expressed understandings of language use, and allowed me to analyze each student’s understandings in greater depth and in a different context than the group-oriented after-school program. Finally, my own field notes as well as audio recordings of the after-school sessions played a large part in analyzing the discourses, themes, and stories that emerged from the interviews and the group after-school sessions.

The analysis of data, which I elaborate in the section *Data analysis*, includes thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis methods. First, I wrote analytic memos in addition to observational field notes throughout the period of data collection. After the completion of the project, I undertook the thematic narrative analysis of student-researcher and student-student interviews to identify overlapping themes across interviews as well as individual and collective stories within the texts. I also used thematic analysis methods to analyze observation field notes and student-created artifacts including language journals, drawings, posters, videos, and final presentations. Finally, I triangulated data using student interviews, student artifacts, and observation field notes.

Using a variety of data collection and analytic methods, this project seeks to highlight the voices of middle school students and foreground their experiences of bilingualism in school and their communities, as well as to uncover students’ understandings of the ways that racialization, ethnicity, and social inequality relate to the language practices they use and observe. This knowledge is critical to better understanding
the experiences of bilingual Latino adolescent youth in general, and to learn more about the experiences of Latino middle school students in bilingual programs specifically.

**Participants**

The participants of this study, eleven total, were selected from a pool of interested Latino students in grades 6-8 at Bilingual Community Dual Language School (BCDLS). BCDLS is a K-8 school located in upper Manhattan. Though it shares the building with another school, BCDLS itself is a fully bilingual school. There are 432 students in total, with two classrooms of about 24 students per grade. Twenty-three percent of students at the school are designated English Language Learners, and 88% of students are Latino. According to reports such as the Quality Review, last reported in 2011, and the Progress Report 2013-2014, the school is serving its students as well or better than other schools in the city, including their English Language Learners (NYCDOE, 2015c).

This dual language bilingual school maintains a language policy that strictly separates the two languages spoken throughout the day, as is common in dual language bilingual programs. While the specifics of the policy vary by grade, each student is to spend about half their time at the school speaking Spanish only, and half their time speaking English only. Before and after school, as well as recess and lunch, do not have a strict language policy, and students may use all their language practices as they see fit. In the middle school, students alternate languages by unit of study, which typically last two to four weeks. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Five of this dissertation, many students struggle to maintain the policy, and language practices in actuality are more fluid throughout the day than the strict policy would suggest.
Although some students at the school are non-Latino, this study included only Latino students. Within the group of students that expressed interest in participating in the after-school sessions, I aimed to select students that reflected the diversity of genders, ages, grades, and ethnicities present at the school. I aimed to recruit students who did not participate in the existing after-school program or other after-school activities. Selection criteria also included the ability to participate in the group meetings twice a week for 8 weeks, lasting 90 minutes per session, on Mondays and Wednesdays, and having parental consent for all students, and student assent from those 12 and older. All Latino students in grades 6-8 at the school site were informed of the project through a flyer and consent form that was distributed to each homeroom by the researcher and sent home with students. I also attended a Parent-Teacher Association meeting and announced the program there.

Students who did not already attend an after-school program at the school during the same time frame were given preference, out of deference to the already-established schedule and routines at the school. In addition, students had to be self-described as Latino and come from a Latino household which is Spanish-speaking, English-speaking, Spanish and English-speaking, or multilingual in indigenous or additional languages.

Students were invited to join the after-school program three weeks prior to the start date. All students who applied and were interested were able to join the after-school program, with the exception of one student whose parent wished to enroll him about halfway through the program, but who was not interested in attending.

The chart below briefly describes each participant. I chose to include the parents’ country of origin as well as students’ descriptions of themselves to better represent each participants’ unique history.
As shown above, all students were US-born, although this was not at all a requirement of joining the program. The largest number of students identified as Dominican-American, with the second largest group being students whose families were from Mexico. Overall, the group was fairly diverse, both in the countries of origin of their families, and in the ways they self-identified. As will be apparent throughout the dissertation, these differences shaped the experiences and understandings of language, race, and ethnicity that students discussed in the after school program, and taken together helped the group build knowledge that was specific to the diversity within their school and neighborhood community.

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2 Luz and Monica are sisters.


**Data collection**

To be sure, participant observation and ethnographic interviewing remain at the methodological core of all the studies described above. To be involved directly in the activities of people still seems to be the best method we have for learning about the meaning of things to the people we hope to understand. Only by watching carefully what people do and say, following their example, and slowly becoming a part of their groups, activities, conversations, and connections do we stand some chance of grasping what is meaningful to them.

(Eisenhart, 2001, p. 23)

The methods of data collection chosen for this study reflect the central position that student voices will occupy. The variety of data collection methods further reflect the importance of students having the opportunity to reflect on the questions at hand through multiple modalities and in conversation with the researcher and their peers. This project was completed over an 8-week period at the end of the 2014-2015 school year, from the beginning of May 2015 to the end of June 2015.

**After-school program**

The bulk of the data collected in this research project is from the after-school program in which I met with eleven middle school students twice a week for ninety (90) minutes per session, for a total of fifteen sessions. Over the course of this after-school program, I guided conversations, projects, and activities relating to students’ language use in and outside of school. Methods included keeping language journals, conducting community walks to document language in the neighborhood, making short videos, performing skits, peer interviewing, drawing, and other classroom activities. These methods were used to engage students and provide multiple avenues through which students could articulate their thoughts, ideas, and feelings.
The after-school program was designed to be interactive, engaging, and multimodal, not only to collect data in a variety of ways, but also to offer students a creative, multi-faceted pedagogical space. To this end, the curriculum I designed was

1. Focused on youth’s experiences
2. Multimodal
3. Social justice oriented
4. Collaborative between peers and researcher
5. Activity-centered

These aspects of the curriculum speak to the tech-savvy world students both shape and inhabit, as well as present them with opportunities to explore their identities as bilingual, young adolescent Latinos in NYC. Middle schoolers are struggling to make sense of who they are in a social context. This curriculum speaks to where middle school students are developmentally, at the same time as it asks students to examine the world around them more closely, turning their critical lenses both inside and out.

The goal was for students to direct their own learning in many ways. Whereas I asked guiding questions and pushed our conversations as they unfolded, students brought the raw materials, questions, observations, and language practices into the room. To this end, the study started off by giving students ethnographic tools to better understand the language practices they observed around them. Students practiced noticing, recording, and analyzing the language practices around them, and these observations informed our discussions, which in turn led to collaborative and critical understandings. The process of the program is described below.
Curriculum outline

1. Ethnographic training

The program began by asking students to start noticing more keenly the language practices that they engage in and observe in their communities. At this stage, I gave students ethnographic tools and exercises to increase their awareness and capacity to document the language practices they observed in different settings. We also practiced noticing language together as a group through neighborhood walks, conversations observed in the school, and other cultural artifacts brought in by students.

2. Building language awareness (Data collection)

At this stage we went on walking trips around the school and neighborhood, as well as in other areas of Manhattan, to observe and record language practices. Students also brought in observations recorded in their language journals. We then used these observations to talk about how people engage with language and to theorize on the why. Observations also included language practices found in multimedia such as song lyrics, YouTube clips, Vine videos, memes, and Instagram, to name a few.

3. Transitioning from language awareness to examining power dynamics within language (Data analysis)

This stage of the project did not chronologically follow the stage described above, but rather was intimately intertwined with the process of data collection. As students collected data, they immediately worked to make sense of it, which then influenced the kind of data they then collected. As these stages developed concurrently, so did students’ thinking and analytical skills. They noticed issues of
linguistic discrimination, racialization, ethnicity, and class, and I sometimes supplemented the discussions with new or possibly unfamiliar terms, such as “prejudice,” “perpetuating stereotypes,” and “linguistic discrimination,” that helped students to think conceptually about what they were seeing.

4. **Examining power dynamics within language (Data analysis)**

At this stage we were able to focus in on one particular cultural artifact, or codification, and use that as a turning point in our discussions around racialization, discrimination, and language. This codification was brought in by one of the students and shown to a friend after the program was finished for the day. The image became a site of deep inquiry for the group, and sparked dialogue that unpacked the image as well as the feelings it provoked. In this stage of the process, students were able to apply their developing analyses to a particular cultural artifact, allowing them to engage in a targeted critique of social inequality.

5. **Drawing conclusions about the relationship between language, discrimination, and power (Findings)**

Students looked back over analyses and pulled threads and common themes from our conversations and the artifacts they had been creating, such as drawings, reflections, and videos. They were also able to apply their critiques to a range of cultural artifacts, to analyze poetry, articles, and songs that addressed discrimination and racism, and to produce artifacts that reflected their own beliefs and unique positionalities.

Each session of the after-school program centered around specific questions that aided in answering the larger questions of the project. I included a variety of modalities across
the curriculum to offer students different ways of expressing themselves, and as an attempt to approach the subject from a variety of angles, keeping in mind that different approaches would lead to different expressions. My hope was that students’ varied articulations taken together would create a more complex, nuanced composite of their understandings and experiences, and at the same time, that the variety of forms of participation would allow each student to voice their unique experiences as well.

The activities were open and creative in an attempt to provide each student enough flexibility to find meaning and expression in each session. Modalities varied within the sessions from reading and writing, speaking and listening, visual art, movement, technology, social interaction and solitary introspection. While not all these activities would resonate with all students, my hope was that the variety of activities provided over the course of the eight-week program would allow each student to find modes of expressing their unique experiences and understandings.

Language journals were at the core of the project, especially in the beginning. The journals gave students the opportunity to use writing and drawing informally for self-reflection and community observation of language practices. Each student had two language journals – one served as the “class notebook” and the other, a smaller notebook, a place to record observations in the field. Classroom journals were a place for students to explore ideas, hypothesize, assert their opinions, and analyze data. They provided a reflective space for other activities completed in the after-school program, and also provided data for the completion of other activities, such as skits and the creation of cartoon scripts. These activities offered students different modalities through which to
explore, observe and record language practices, and offered an alternative method of processing observations, thoughts, and reflections beyond just writing.

Interviews

Two types of interviews took place over the course of the study – student-student and researcher-student interviews. Between the researcher and student, both entry and exit interviews were conducted at the beginning and the conclusion of the study. All of the researcher-student entry and exit interviews, which lasted about twenty minutes each, were transcribed completely as well as coded for emerging themes, which were then analyzed using narrative analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis.

Mishler (1986) defines interview using the terms speech events and speech activities. He borrows the term speech event from Hymes (1967) who describes this as, “‘activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules for the use of speech,’” underscoring the intimate relationship between the social and the linguistic (as cited in Mishler, 1985, p. 35). Speech activities is Gumperz’s (1982) term, referring to any number of social interactions that require language, including, for example, conversation, storytelling, or interviewing (as cited in Mishler, 1986, p. 35).

This social understanding of interviewing necessitates that an interview not be a series of prescribed questions isolated from each other, but rather a more organic experience that is viewed not as a one-way endeavor but as a social transaction between the interviewer and interviewee. Thus, interviewing becomes a conversation in which interviewees develop “narrative accounts” (Reissman, 2008). In this formulation of an interview, “two active participants... jointly construct narrative and meaning” (Reissman,
2008, p. 23) and the interview follows rules of conversation. This means that interviewers essentially must give up control, in favor of more open-ended questions and a willingness to truly listen and let the interviewee guide the conversation, to “[follow] participants down their trails” (Reissman, 2008, p. 24).

The student-student interviews took place during the first week of the after-school program. These interviews were meant to pique students’ curiosity, get them thinking about questions they have related to bilingualism, and to help them feel more comfortable speaking about the topic. This was also an opportunity for me to learn about students’ interests and what was important to them in regards to the topic of language without directly asking them. The information students gained from this process was content-based (e.g. the answers they receive), procedural (e.g. learning how to conduct an interview), and linguistic (e.g. noticing the language practices they and their peers used in asking and answering questions).

The researcher-student narrative interviews took place in the first weeks of the program and after the study concluded. During the first and second weeks of the study, I conducted interviews with students at the school depending on their availability. Questions focused on drawing out students’ expressed understandings of their own, their family’s, and their communities’ language practices in and outside of school, as well as how they saw their bilingual practices in the future (See Appendix A). These interviews provided initial data and background information about students and their expressed understandings of language use, and allowed me to analyze each student’s understandings in greater depth and in a different context than the group-oriented after-school program.
The researcher-student interviews conducted at the end of the after-school program allowed me to explore topics in greater depth, as well as ask students directly about their experiences of participation in the program. These interviews allowed me to examine how students’ responses may have shifted, and in what ways, and ask students additional questions about the process of participating in the after-school program.

*Field notes through participant observation*

The artifacts created through the after-school activities, coupled with the interviews, comprised two components of my data collection. The third component that allowed me to triangulate this data was my field notes and audio recordings that resulted from participant observation. This data played a significant role in analyzing the discourses and themes that emerged from the group after-school sessions.

I took field notes consistently immediately following each after-school session, as well as after each observation at the school. The field notes were meant to be as descriptive and objective as possible. When adding my interpretation to an event, I separated it within the field note so each part was as clear as possible. Field notes were always taken before listening to the audio recording of the session. Upon re-reading field notes or in order to reflect further on themes that were emerging during the data collection period, I also wrote reflective memos on emerging themes, feelings I had in relation to particular sessions, challenges, plans for future sessions, and preliminary analysis. In addition to field notes, upon listening to the audio recordings of each session, I marked some passages of the sessions for transcription, although not all of the sessions were transcribed completely.
In the introduction to the volume *Ethnography unbound*, Burawoy notes, "The dialogue between participants and observer extends itself naturally to a dialogue among social scientists—a dialogue that is *emergent* rather than conclusive, *critical* rather than cosmetic, involving *reconstruction* rather than deconstruction" (emphasis added, 1991, p. 6). Through participant observation over the course of my study, I hoped to delve deeply into the lifeworld, as Burawoy calls it, of the students I worked with, and through this active observation, to better understand how these students made sense of their experiences with language and situated those experiences in larger social contexts. While this case study was not an ethnography, the design was strengthened through the use of such ethnographic methods, and in particular Burawoy’s description of the emergent, critical, and reconstructive dialogue between participants, observers, and researchers.

In leading the after-school group, I was not an impartial observer, but rather accepted and examined the role I played as both a teacher and a participant observer in interactions with youth, which Burawoy calls, “the distinguishing feature of all social science... without which there could be no social science” (1991, p. 3). Rather than minimize my impact on the study, I sought to fully recognize my role in the process, and to bring to my analysis a critical lens that examined the data collected as well as my role and bias in both collection and analysis, as I will discuss further below.

In examining the question of whether a researcher should distance oneself from participants to gain perspective and objectivity, or rather immerse oneself to strive for empathy and understanding, Burawoy suggests, “neither distance nor immersion but dialogue... to discover and perhaps change our biases through interaction with others” (1991, p. 4). Through the field notes I made over the course of the after-school program, I
intended to both document as faithfully as possible what happened in each session, as well as separate out my own judgments, thoughts, and analysis from these observations.

Whereas the audio recordings of each session aided me in this process, I also fully accept that my own positionality resulted in my noticing certain aspects of the data and not others. Through a willingness and a commitment to continually confront my own perceptions I began to recognize and situate some of the bias I brought to the project. In addition to my own reflections, student input throughout the project was essential to informing my analysis.

The following table shows how the research questions of the project connect with the data collection and methods of analysis chosen, which I further elaborate in the next section.

Table 1. Summary of Research Design

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<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do Latino middle schoolers in bilingual education programs express their understandings of their language practices in and outside of school?</td>
<td>- Observations in after-school focus group (8 weeks)</td>
<td>Thematic narrative analysis of one-on-one and peer-to-peer interviews</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Student-created artifacts (language journals, posters, photos, videos)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Student interviews (one-on-one with researcher, peer-to-peer) pre- and post-participation</td>
<td>Thematic analysis of observation field notes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- School observation of participants (supplementary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How do bilingual Latino middle schoolers articulate their awareness of the links between language, discrimination, and power in the context of an after-school program that is consciously oriented towards such critical investigations?</td>
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In addition to the data collection specific to my research questions, before beginning the after school program, and throughout the rest of the school year, I also engaged in participant observation in students’ classrooms, helped around the school, and attended schoolwide events. Beginning in February 2015 and leading up to the start of the after school program in early May 2015, I visited the school about once per week to observe in middle school classrooms as well as assist with whatever the school needed. Much of the help I gave was in one fifth-grade classroom where a long-term substitute teacher had taken over for the remainder of the school year. After the after school program began in May, I continued to observe in middle school classrooms and to help in the fifth-grade class about once per week. In addition, I attended events such as “color wars,” which is a competition between the middle school grades, a schoolwide variety show, a school field trip that many participants of the after school program attended, and eighth-grade 3. How are Latino middle schoolers’ language practices as well as their articulated understandings of language inflected with processes of racialization?

- Observations in after-school focus group (8 weeks)
- Student-created artifacts (language journals, posters, photos, videos)
- Student interviews (one-on-one with researcher, peer-to-peer) pre- and post-participation

4. How do bilingual Latino middle schoolers demonstrate their capacity for resisting oppressive social processes and effecting social change?

- Observations in after-school focus group (8 weeks)
- Student-created artifacts (language journals, posters, photos, videos)
- Student interviews (one-on-one with researcher, peer-to-peer) pre- and post-participation

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graduation. These additional observations allowed time to build relationships with the school community, to speak with teachers about my project and answer any questions, to better understand the structures and routines of the school, to give back to the school community, and to observe middle school students in their everyday classrooms.

**Data analysis**

**Introduction**

Gloria Anzaldúa says that “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (2012, p. 81). A. L. Becker (1995) notes that learning a new language is not just understanding a new code of communication, but rather is learning “a new way of being in the world” (p. 227). Anzaldúa captures the intimacy and deeply personal relationship we have with language, while Becker points to the social relations that exist within languages, relations that language-in-use has the power to conjure, constitute, maintain, or resist. Both of these quotes together approach an understanding of language as deeply personal and at the same time inextricably social. The methods of data analysis that I have selected for this study attempt to capture this complex relationship.

The analysis of data (as shown in the chart above) includes both thematic narrative analysis and discourse analysis of student-student and student-researcher interviews; thematic and discourse analysis of observation field notes and student-created artifacts; and triangulation of student interviews, student artifacts, and observation field notes to determine significance.

The combination of these methods allowed me to examine multiple layers within the texts, and at the same time see the fabric created by the interweaving of these strands.
Thematic analysis draws out what themes come up across data; narrative and discourse analysis address how these themes are constituted by and across individuals; and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theorizes on why – Why this theme, articulated in this way, at this time? In the following sections, I explore each of these data analysis methods and further consider how and why I used each.

**Thematic (narrative) analysis**

Thematic analysis is used to make sense of data collected through observation field notes and student-created artifacts. Taken together with narrative analysis, it also informs my approach to analyzing interviews. Maxwell (2005) lays out a multi-stepped approach to analyzing qualitative data using these methods that was useful to my data analysis. The first step in his approach is simply reading the data, then writing memos and taking notes on what themes begin to emerge. After this initial step, he outlines the following three options: writing memos, categorizing strategies (e.g. thematic analysis), and connecting strategies (e.g. narrative analysis) (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). Writing memos in this capacity both records and facilitates thinking and analysis. I wrote memos the first time I read through the data, and also used memos as an ongoing strategy to record and facilitate my thinking as I analyzed the data using other methods.

The categorizing strategy of thematic analysis rearranges data into themes that “facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). After writing initial memos, this was my next step in beginning to make sense of the data. Categories within this layer of analysis were organizational, substantive, and theoretical (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). That is,
organizational categories represented topics I predicted would emerge in the data, such as “racialization,” “language practices,” and “ethnicity,” to name a few. Substantive categories were those found in the texts themselves, emic in that they emerged from the discourse of participants. Theoretical categories, etic in that they are more abstract in nature and coming from me, the researcher, drew on theoretical concepts and particularly focused on power relations embedded within the texts and themes that emerge. While all analyses inform each other, this last category of thematic analysis connects directly with discourse analysis, which I describe further in the next section.

Finally, the connecting strategy of narrative analysis is primarily relational and seeks to understand the data in context (Maxwell, 2005). I used this strategy specifically with interviews, to have a clearer picture of how participants framed different themes, and to gain information based on the narrative as a whole. Reismann (2008) offers a simple definition of narrative by connecting it to oral storytelling, in which, “a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meaning that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story. Events perceived by the speaker as important are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (p. 3). Hill (2005) offers, narratives “make public the covert underlying presuppositions that organize the worlds in which speakers live” (p. 157). Taken together, these two definitions suggest that narratives are crafted and performed based on audience and other contextual factors, and at the same time implicitly reveal speakers’ underlying ideologies about how the world works. Narrative analysis thus has the potential to reveal individual ideologies and processes of sense-making within a specific context. By noting
and analyzing the continuities and discontinuities within and across texts, narrative analysis also offers the potential to understand larger stories and histories.

Eisenhart (2001) notes, “By focusing on the nuances of speech, the local context of its production, the order of presenting story elements, and the connections made to broad social discourses in collected narratives, these researchers are able to reveal some of the intersections of cultural, social, and political influences in individual lives” (p. 23). Thematic narrative analysis, then, takes the micro as its object of study, but also considers the macro, the context in which the data is produced, and how that context may shape what is articulated and how it is articulated. The connecting strategy of narrative analysis relates to Gee’s discourse analysis tools, which I discuss in the next section.

**Discourse analysis**

While thematic analysis “chunks” the data and narrative analysis examines individual stories, as well as begins to locate them within larger social contexts, discourse analysis has the potential to further extend both the micro- and macro-examination of data. Discourse analysis was used in my study to analyze student-created artifacts, including language journals, posters, photos, and student-made videos; student-student and student-researcher interviews; and participant-observation field notes.

Gee’s simplest definition of discourse analysis is, “the study of language-in-use” (2011, p. ix). He elaborates, “Better put, it is the study of language at use in the world, not just to say things, but to do things” (ibid, p. ix). Thus, discourse analysis relates to both thematic and narrative analysis, but is distinct in its focus – instead of categories as in thematic analysis, or relations as in narrative analysis, discourse analysis centers on how
language is used to build or break down ideologies, to form or dissolve relationships, to maintain or resist power dynamics. This layer of analysis enabled me to make sense of how themes and relationships are emerging in texts, as well as why.

Gee (2011) offers several discourse analysis tools that were useful in my analysis. Two of the most useful tools were the Identities Building tool and the Relationships Building tool. The Identities Building tool examines what kinds of identities the speaker is enacting or trying to evoke, and how the speaker is positioning others through speech and act. The Relationships Building tool asks how speakers are using words and grammar to build, change, or maintain relationships to others, to social groups, or even institutions (Gee, 2011, p. 199). These tools offered a way of examining how students understand their own identities, position themselves among others, and both articulate and act out their relationships with peers, family, myself as researcher, and others.

In addition, The Social Language tool was useful to think about the ways students use language in both the interviews as well as in interactions with peers and through journaling and other artifacts (Gee, 2011, p. 200). This tool specifically examines the use of social languages, including the mixing or alternate use of various languages. This tool is especially appropriate in this context as the study focuses on language use and students engage regularly in bilingual language practices, or translanguaging. Taken together, these tools provided ways of focusing my attention in data analysis, and provided grounding questions as jumping off points in beginning to make sense of a variety of data points. In the following section, I discuss how I further examined macro structures, particularly as they relate to power relations that emerged from the data.
Connecting micro and macro

While the data analysis methods outlined above begin to reveal the relationship between the micro-environment of the research study and larger contexts, none of the methods outlined above explicitly seeks to unearth larger relationships of power within discourse. The extended case method is a useful framework to think about how to integrate data collected at the research site with the larger social context in which the site is embedded (Burawoy, 1991). According to Burawoy, the extended case study “examines how the social situation is shaped by external forces, or, in the terms of C. Wright Mill’s sociological imagination, tries to connect ‘the personal troubles of the milieu’ to ‘the public issues of social structure’” (1991, p. 6). This framework starts with both the micro and the macro in mind, and enters into the research with the assumption that in order to understand the local, the researcher must consider the broader context. In my study, as I entered into my data collection and especially my data analysis, it was critical to consider the ways in which the school, NYC, US, and even global contexts shaped students’ experiences and responses.

In order to maintain sightlines to both micro and macro contexts, I employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as outlined by Norman Fairclough as a lens through which to filter all analysis. Fairclough defines CDA as, “analysis of the dialectical relationships between discourse (including language but also other forms of semiosis, e.g. body language or visual images) and other elements of social practices. Its particular concern is with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life...” (2003, p. 205). The changes Fairclough is referring to are social, economic, and political changes being shaped by, and also shaping neoliberalism; the work of CDA is to uncover
the role of discourse in changing the landscape, and to glean information from discourse about this new and shifting landscape as well.

Fairclough (2003) outlines three ways that discourse relates to social practice – as “a part of the social activity within a practice,” in “representations,” and in “ways of being, in the constitution of identities” (p. 205). Further, particular social practices taken together create social order (Fairclough, 2003); thus, using CDA as a lens allowed me to connect discourse to social practices, and then to social order, effectively linking the particular discourse and themes that emerged in the study to larger social and power dynamics. While Fairclough’s method of CDA recommends starting with a social problem rather than traditional research questions, combining Burawoy’s extended case method with Fairclough’s definition of CDA allowed me to document what emerged in my local research site while maintaining a broader, critical perspective. Thus, I started this study with traditional research questions, but through the use of CDA as outlined by Fairclough, I also viewed my site right from the start as embedded in larger contexts of power, contexts without whose consideration I would not be able to successfully answer my research questions.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the design of this study that are important to recognize. First, the data collection period was relatively short. I observed in the school for a total of five months, and the after-school program took place over the course of two months. In this short timeframe, some students may have found it difficult to become comfortable enough to discuss personal and sensitive topics. Further, because of the short
time frame, it was not possible to fully implement an “action” component at the end of the project as originally hoped. While students did complete “final projects,” they were not able to share them with an audience beyond the participants of the program.

Secondly, I am English-dominant, and as such, often chose to speak English during the after-school program. Although students had the choice of using all their language practices, my tendency to speak mostly English may have influenced students’ language choices as well, especially because I was the teacher, and as such, occupied a position of power. While students reported using Spanish more in small groups, I observed that students tended to speak more English in the larger group; students also recognized this tendency.

Finally, upon reflecting on the project after its completion, I realized that while I had the opportunity to interview each student, and students had the opportunity to interview each other, I did not provide students with the opportunity to interview me. Adding this component to the project would have potentially shifted power dynamics between myself and the student participants, and would have given students the opportunity to see me in a more human and vulnerable light. This data would also have given me an additional opportunity to reflect on my positionality in the research, to reflect on how students saw me, and to analyze my own responses to further reflect on how I saw and positioned myself.

**Generalizability**

Qualitative research is often viewed on a case-by-case basis, with little to no room for applying the lessons learned in one context to other similar contexts. However, in this
study, I draw on Eisenhart’s idea of theoretical generalization to think about the ways in which the data collected from this study might contribute to reimagining and reconstructing existing theories. Eisenhart’s focus on theoretical inference (2009) suggests that rather than seeking to make claims of replicability or generalizability of the particular ways that individuals act, speak, or understand language, claims of generalizability should be limited to theoretical additions to the field, in terms of refining, refuting, or otherwise engaging with theoretical knowledge.

Referring specifically to some critical researchers, Eisenhart suggests that, “reconstructive analyses of multi-voiced texts can illuminate underlying theories (general assumptions) at work in the social and communicative connections that constitute everyday life” (2009, p. 64). This notion is particularly salient in my research as the multi-voiced texts produced by students may contribute more generalizable knowledge about the ways students understand, enact, and articulate their language practices, as well as situate those practices within the larger contexts of social inequality in the US.
Chapter 4
Unpacking perceptions of language, race, and ethnicity

Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to highlight Latino adolescents’ understandings of the ways that raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) inform their own and others’ perceptions of race, ethnicity, and language, and work to marginalize and dehumanize some while benefiting others, namely those who fit within the paradigm of the white standard-English-speaking American. After a brief review of relevant literature, I will first focus on students’ varied reactions to a prompt asking that they reflect on an experience related to language, race, ethnicity, immigration, or wealth that made them feel bad or uncomfortable. Events that unfolded in this session will lead into the next section of the chapter, which focuses on students’ reactions to a meme of a “Mexican” man, and identifies differences in the reactions of the Mexican American students as compared to students who identified as Dominican American or Ecuadorian American.

Drawing attention to students’ diverse reactions provides insight into differences in how students experience being Latino in their communities, and also sheds light on the ways that students connect visual and linguistic markers with ethnic and racial identity. Orelus (2013) and Coloma (2008) highlight the importance of using voice to exercise agency and resist oppressive forces such as racism, linguicism, and linguoracism. To this end, I theorize on the students’ reactions to a meme of a “Mexican” man as a pivotal moment in the after-school program, in which students demonstrated their abilities to explicitly connect their understandings of language to understandings of race and ethnicity.
The diversity of Latino communities

As G. Cristina Mora explains in her book *Making Hispanics: How activists, bureaucrats, and media constructed a new American* (2014), the racial category “Latino” or “Hispanic” is relatively new, and largely a US phenomenon. While this term has been used since the 1960s to secure rights for many Latino US Americans and residents (Mora, 2014), a major downside of the current popularity of the term is that it obscures the actual diversity of people that fall under it. Thus, in venues ranging from popular media outlets to academic literature, Latinos are often discussed as though they were one group within the United States, but the reality of Latino communities is much more diverse. The US Latino population is comprised of Puerto Rican and US-born Latinos, as well as immigrants from countries as diverse as Mexico, Cuba, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and many more South and Central American countries as well. The educational experiences, social class, language practices, and racial identities of Latinos are also diverse, and depending on where in the US Latinos live, their experiences and communities may be vastly different. Thus, when considering the strengths, needs, or challenges of specific Latino communities, it is imperative to take into account the unique composition of that community, as well as the individuals that comprise the collective.

In *The trouble with unity: Latino politics and the creation of identity* (2010), Cristina Beltrán suggests that rather than attempting to clearly define the term “Latino,” we instead sit with its contradictions and ambiguity, recognizing that the construction is not static or absolute, but rather fluid, complex, and furthermore “as a site of permanent political contest” (p. 161). Beltrán states, “Rather than striving to uncover the unitary core that binds Latinos, scholars and advocates should embrace, rather than resist or deny, the
instability and incompleteness of the category ‘Latino’ (2010, p. 161). While Beltrán focuses
on political identity, her insights are applicable to understanding the shifting, complex
terrain that US Latino adolescents stand on as they negotiate how to situate themselves in
varying contexts.

Keeping this diversity in mind is at the forefront of my own research agenda. Just as
educators advocate for standards, assessments, curriculum, and pedagogy that emerge
from their knowledge of the students in their classrooms, I feel that it is essential to build
my knowledge as a researcher with the Latino individuals I work with. The need for
understanding students’ lives is well documented in both research and classroom settings.
Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez recognized the importance of connecting classroom
learning to students’ lives in their seminal work on the funds of knowledge that families
bring to the classroom (1992). Freirean pedagogy likewise emphasizes an approach that
builds curriculum based on the experiences that students bring into the classroom (1970).
The results of such investigations would not be applicable to all Latino communities, or
even all Latinos within the community where I conducted my research, but by viewing the
articulated experiences of students as typical, though not stereotypical, the findings of the
study may be interpreted generally without being viewed as universal. By bring this
understanding to the findings of the study, I hope that my research will foreground the
distinct voices of a number of Latinos in a way that will contribute to the fabric of our
understanding about the Latino educational experience in the US, and highlight ways that
we can move forward collectively while attending to difference.
**Latino racial identity**

Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2010) highlight the complexity of Latino racial and ethnic identity, underscoring the actual diversity of the seemingly monolithic category Latino, as well as the ways in which racial identity markers are constructed, further diversifying Latino experience of identity. In this way, the making of race and ethnicity is not a simple fact, but rather a complex, and ongoing, discursive process.

Fergus (2004) points to a tension between the subjective (who one thinks one is) and the objective (who others think one is), highlighting the interplay between the internal processes of identity formation and external, socially imposed identities. Similarly, Nagel (1994) asserts that ethnic identity is “the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual’s self-identification and outsider’s ethnic designations – i.e., what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is” (p. 154). Thus, self-identity is shaped by social constructs and vice versa, and at the same time, self-identity may not align to social constructs of race and ethnicity. Further, this process does not look the same in all places, depending on sociohistorical and geopolitical factors. Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2010) push back against the construction of race in the US, questioning how racial boundaries are made and by whom. It is not only important to consider how these boundaries are continually constructed, but also to ask the questions of who benefits and who is harmed by these designations.

Flores and Rosa highlight not only the role of language in racial formation, but also the ways in which perceptions of race influence perceptions of language practices. “Specifically, a raciolinguistic perspective seeks to understand how the white gaze is attached both to a speaking subject who engages in the idealized linguistic practices of
whiteness and to a listening subject who hears and interprets the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations as deviant based on their racial positioning in society as opposed to any objective characteristics of their language use” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 151). Complexion as a racial marker visibly precedes speech, and the important work of Flores and Rosa highlights how visual cues inflect speech with processes of racialization regardless of actual aural cues.

In the US, racist ideologies that have worked to marginalize and oppress African Americans also negatively impact the lives of Black Latinos. Though Black Latinos have higher educational attainment than White Latinos, they have higher unemployment rates, a lower median income, and higher poverty rates than White Latinos, which corresponds with Black-White success in the US for non-Latino groups as well (Logan, 2003). Under the US Black-White binary, some Latinos might “pass” as white, affording them some of the privileges of non-Latino whites, while Latinos with darker complexions suffer under the same racist ideologies that have historically barred African Americans from countless opportunities (Fergus, Noguera, and Martin, 2010). Thus, the external social view of another’s race significantly impacts the lived experience of race by individual Latinos, based on their complexion: “Such differences in the latitude of ethnic options demonstrates the boundary of individual ethnic options and the significant role outside agents play in restricting available ethnic identities” (Fergus, Noguera, and Martin, 2010, p. 178).

In addition to navigating the Black-White binary that casts Latinos inside or outside lines of privilege, when considering Latino racial identity, various other factors add to its complexity. These factors include language, immigration status, and nationality, which are typically not considered in conversations around race (Fergus, Noguera, and Martin, 2010).
Further, while Latino racial identity is marked in the US by the Black-White binary, at the same time “historic contradictions and inconsistencies in the treatment of Latinos should force us to rethink the narrow restrictions created by the Black-White paradigm of race” (Fergus, Noguera, and Martin, 2010, p. 173). In the 2010 US census, the government explicitly pulled out the question of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origins, and specified that “For this census, Hispanic origins are not races,” so that while categories such as “Mexican,” “Puerto Rican,” and “Cuban” were not considered races, “Japanese,” “Chinese,” and “Filipino” were (United States Census Bureau, 2010). This would suggest a racially diverse understanding of the backgrounds of people from Spanish-speaking countries, but a racially homogenous understanding of virtually every other “non-white” or “non-Black” country in the world. It further suggests that Latinos can be identified racially through the Black-white binary, whereas others cannot. Latinos in the US challenge and disrupt the binary construct of race, but these “gray” areas have yet to fully enter into the conversation both in terms of how such inconsistencies shape the experiences of Latinos, but also in how the increased Latino populations in the US may contribute to a shifting notion of race itself within the US.

**Latino racialization and ethnicization**

If Hispanic origins are categorically defined as “not races” by the US Census Bureau, then how are Latinos racialized in the US? Racialization is a discursive process whereupon a subject’s own view of their race, others’ perceptions of their race, and social contexts all interact to racialize the subject (Urciuoli, 2003). This process is ongoing, as actions, events, and perceptions continually work to enforce or counter perceived racial identities. Urciuoli
(1996) defines the process of racialization as conceiving of a group’s origin in "natural terms," while ethnicization conceives of origin in “cultural terms” (p. 15). Urciuoli further highlights the vulnerable position of racialized people in relation to the nation-state, placing maximum racialization on one extreme of a semiotic sliding scale, and maximum ethnicization on the other (2003). Under this construction, racialized people can be seen as being marked as undeserving of belonging in the nation-state, a marginalized position that holds serious and material consequences for their lives.

Thus, US Americans of African origin are racially marked by their history of slavery. Latino communities may be similarly racialized through their histories of colonization, slavery, and oppression by the US, including those with ties to Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Mexico, or Guatemala to name a few. On the other end of the scale, maximum ethnicization refers to those who are not considered completely “white” but who have come to be accepted as much closer to “white” by US American standards, such as eastern and southern Europeans (Urciuoli, 2003). This understanding of race and ethnicity recognizes the social construction of both, naming them as processes rather than immutable categories, while pointing out the differences in the ways each concept is socially constructed and therefore socially enacted. Namely, racialization carries graver consequences; while both processes are inherently saturated with dynamics of unequal power relations, processes of racialization lie at the far end of that spectrum, and become powerful mechanisms of “other”-ing and exclusion.

For Latinos, language plays an important role in racialization as well. Urciuoli (2003) documents the linguistic experiences of Latinos in the US in school and their communities, noting that bilingualism is only acceptable and celebrated if the language
other than English leaves no trace in English speech and writing. The strict separation of languages signals control and self-improvement, as well as middle-class ways of enacting language (Urciuoli, 2003). Mixing languages, then, signals the opposite of these positive traits, and instead calls forth a racialized image of an “other” who is not like the rest, who does not conform to middle class standards of identity performance, and who is therefore inferior (Urciuoli, 2003). Finally, “...though ‘having’ Spanish is part of the diversity resume, the Spanish they ‘have’ indexes a sociolinguistic history that is racialized.” (Urciuoli, 2003, p. 20). This linkage indicates that the unequal valuing of linguistic practices in the US does not only follow a market-driven mentality that seeks out the most valuable resources, but that racialized patterns are also a critical factor in determining whose language practices count, and whose are discounted.

Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari refer to the process of racialization through language practices as “linguoracism,” and identify the process in discursive practices as “realized partly by representing cultural inheritance as resembling biological inheritance” (2003, p. 91). Although language is often a primary marker of race, as well as a primary way racial categories are discursively maintained, it is often omitted from discussions of racialization (Macedo, Dendrinos, & Gounari, 2003). Darder (2011) calls attention to how racialized views of emergent bilinguals affect their access to an equitable education by devaluing the resources students bring to school and by limiting the communities’ participation in important policy decisions that affect their children’s lives, educational opportunities, and economic success. As cited above, Flores and Rosa (2015) link processes of racialization to the marginalization of certain language practices, namely the language practices of racialized bodies, but also investigate the ways that racialized bodies “speak”
language, informing our reception of language. Recognizing this discursive process is critical to understanding perceptions of non-standard languaging practices, and to dismantling racialized linguistic discrimination.

“Forcing you to become what they want and not what you are”: Students’ experiences of racialization

In thinking through the ways in which race and ethnicity relate to language practices in this study, I turn to two consecutive sessions that were pivotal to the conversations and understandings developed collectively in the after-school program. Though I entered into this project with the goal of exploring the ways that students understand language as it relates to race and ethnicity, I did not know where in the curriculum, or how, these themes would take shape. The sessions I will describe below started with an explicit question I asked students to reflect on – to think of an experience related to language, race, ethnicity, immigration, or class that made them feel bad or uncomfortable. Students took this question in many different directions over the course of the class period, but it was a photograph that a student pulled up on her phone to show her friend after class that ultimately pushed the conversation forward. This chapter, then, explores the racialization of language practices in the context of an after-school program, through my lens as a researcher, and through the lenses of the students. The chapter also examines pedagogical decisions and reflects on what happens when students’ questions and experiences are allowed to shape classroom curriculum and pedagogy.

The first of the two sessions I will discuss here took place about mid-way through the eight-week after-school program. Up to this point, I had focused students’ attention on
how they used language and the kind of language they observed in their communities through the use of language journals, peer interviews, and neighborhood walks. In the course of these conversations and activities, themes emerged in students’ writing and conversation almost immediately pertaining to the link between language, race, and ethnicity. Thus, students were well primed through their own lived experiences and the conversations we had in class leading up to this session for me to guide their thinking more explicitly towards the intersections of race, ethnicity, and language.

I started off the session by asking students to respond to the following prompt: “Reflect on an experience you had that was related to one of these things that made you feel bad or uncomfortable.” Then I listed, “language, race, ethnicity, immigration, or wealth/money”. I told students they did not have to write about every factor listed, but could choose one or several to write about. I listed some examples of incidents they might write about based on prior conversations or incidents students had brought up, including some of the most poignant moments that had occurred in class – Jorge’s encounter with a political cartoon, Luz’s experience in a Mexican restaurant, and Chris’s question to the class, “Why do people live with their own kind?”

In what follows, I focus on three students’ reactions to this prompt, to illustrate the diversity of experiences in the room.

The first student reaction I describe is Jorge’s. Jorge was not sure what to write about, so I suggested the cartoon he had described to me in his entry interview. He agreed, and so using his previous description, I pulled up an image on my phone that I suspected was the cartoon he had seen. The cartoon is pictured below:

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3 Jorge is a US-born student who considers himself Mexican. Luz is a self-described Mexican American student, also born in the US. Chris’s family is from Mexico, but he was born in the US and describes himself as American.
When I showed the image to him, Jorge physically jumped back in his seat and his eyes grew wide. He gasped and confirmed that that was the cartoon he had seen (Field notes, May 27, 2015). I asked if he wanted to hold onto the phone as he wrote so he could look at the image but he said no, he knew what it was. He sounded resolute, and in that moment I realized that the image had left a very strong impression on him, not just intellectually, but emotionally (Field notes, May 27, 2015). During this session, Jorge wrote (spelling altered for readability):

“During library time, ...the library teacher showed us a picture in the SmartBoard of Mexicans entering in a house of the window and Americans on the door. The Americans were saying that “we’re going to have extra visitors for Thanksgiving”. That made me feel bad because I’m a Mexican, but not all Mexicans are poor. I’m not poor so, I don’t think that picture should be posted on the internet.” (Student notebook, May 27, 2015)

As students finished writing, I invited them to either act out or illustrate what they wrote about. Jorge chose to draw a cartoon that illustrated the event, which is shown in Figure 4.2 (Student notebook, May 27, 2015):
Figure 4.2: WHAT

The last frame in the drawing captures the look that was on Jorge’s face when I pulled up the cartoon on my phone. Jorge’s large, surprised eyes in the final frame as compared to the second frame reveal the strong impact the cartoon had on him. The first two frames show a typical classroom and the traditional student-teacher relationship, with the teacher at the board teaching, and the student in his seat, engaged and happy to learn. The third frame zooms in on Jorge, and suggests that seeing the cartoon led to a personal, emotional experience. The classroom drops out of the frame and Jorge’s emotional reaction is front and center. He is not even sitting in a seat anymore; he is portrayed simply in white space. The short paragraph and accompanying illustration Jorge produced reveal several ways that Jorge feels marginalized or misrepresented. First, Jorge refers to the white people in the photo as “Americans” in contrast to describing himself and the brown people in the photo as “Mexican,” despite the fact that Jorge was born in the US. Further, Jorge interprets the cartoon as portraying Mexicans as poor, and feels misrepresented in this, suggesting that while he does not necessarily challenge the notion that “Americans” are equated with whiteness, he does take issue with the idea put forth in the cartoon that Mexicans are poor. Finally, in his concluding comment, Jorge notes that this image should not be posted on the Internet because it is untrue; this is a direct commentary on the
perpetuation of stereotypes, and an expressed desire to be accurately represented in the media.

Angie also illustrated her reaction to the prompt I had given, focusing on her experiences as a Dominican-Peruvian-American, and the racial and ethnic ambiguity that others read in her appearance. Her illustrations are shown below in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 (Student notebook, May 27, 2015):

Figure 4.3: Everything is based on looks
(Text along side: “Made me feel upset b/c everything is based on looks”
Text within the drawing:
Title: “Country”
Subtitle: “Eyes”
1st person: “ARE YOU MEXICAN”
2nd person: “no, I’m peruvian & dominican”)

1st person: “ARE YOU MEXICAN”
2nd person: “no, I’m peruvian & dominican”
Angie explains this more and theorizes on the impact of these experiences in her exit interview. When I ask the question of whether she can think of an example of someone being treated badly because of how they speak, Angie asks if she can give an example of someone being treated badly because of how they look instead. She lets me know that the example she has in mind is referring to herself, and is the same topic she wrote about in her notebook. Below is an excerpt of the conversation during my interview with her (Exit interview, Angie, June 25, 2015):

Angie: So, I was walking... kicking the ball... And there's this kid, um, I think he was my neighbor... And he just walked up to me, he's like, "Oh hey, I'm the new neighbor."
Are, are you, um, are you Asian?" And I’m like, "No." And I just started laughing a little bit. I’m like, "No, I’m, um, I’m this and this and that. I’m Dominican and blah blah blah." And he’s like, "Oh, oh. I thought you were Asian." And then he walks away... I’m like, "Oh, that’s weird." And later, like, one month later I decided ... to go to this restaurant with some of my new friends, like, I guess. And... one of my new friends said, "Oh, um, are you Ecuadorian?" I’m like, "No, I’m Dominican and I’m Peruvian." And then she ... she said, "Oh, sorry." And, um, later, later, later, later, ... like three months later, I went to a piano concert to see my piano teacher play an awesome song... And then this random person walks up to me and he’s like, "Oh my god, you look familiar. Are you a Mexican or something?" And I’m like, "Noooo!" ...I’m like ... I was about to flip a table. And, and he’s like, "Oh my god, I’m so sorry." And then he walks away... And I, and I ... And ever since someone asks me, "Oh, where are you from?" I always say ... I almost almost scream that, that I’m Dominican and I’m Peruvian. And if someone says, "Oh wow, you look Asian." I just walk away. And like, I hate you, forget you. Bye.

Sarah: How does it make you feel to have those experiences?

Angie: Mmm, it made me feel a little bit upset because they, there, there’s, they’re being like, they’re like, Oh, because she has eyes like this, oh, she’s Asian. Oh, she’s Ecuadorian. Oh, she’s Mexican. And it sort of angers me because they, couldn’t they just ask, Oh, where are you from? Instead of, Oh, are you Mexican?

In the events that Angie describes, her increasing frustration is apparent as she accumulates experiences in which strangers, acquaintances, and friends make assumptions about her racial and ethnic identity based on her appearance. The capitalization of the question “ARE YOU MEXICAN” implies an aggressive tone, while Angie’s answer, all in lowercase, suggests a diminished sense of identity. In the following scene, the question is in lowercase, “Are you Asian?” and Angie’s answer is capitalized, “NO”. Finally, in the third frame, Angie is silent. Her shift in answers over the course of these three drawings suggests a shift in her feelings towards the questions. Her increasingly short answers suggest a decreased tolerance and patience with the questions asked of her. While the questions

4 Here and throughout the dissertation, I will refer to myself as “Sarah” in all transcripts.
directed at her do not necessarily carry an underlying derogatory tone, the questions themselves are aggressive in their demand to know the student’s background, as though the perceived racial ambiguity on the part of the questioner warranted and justified asking this information of Angie. The entitlement of the question itself suggests a kind of entitlement to racial clarity, which at its core, is an ongoing effort to maintain the “purity” of whiteness by systematically categorizing the “other”.

When asked what she would say back to the people that ask her these questions, Angie responds emphatically, “Don’t do that.... It makes people feel bad about themselves. Don’t do that” (Exit interview, Angie, June 25, 2015). After describing another experience of a dark-skinned Dominican friend being mistaken for African American and feeling bad about it, Angie reflects,

... It’s like, it’s like everyone’s thinking, Oh no, because you look like this you are this and you are that because you look like that.... No arguments, just you’re, you are this. You go in this group right now.... It’s like, it’s like they’re forcing you to become what they want and not what you want, like, what you are, basically” (Exit interview, June 25, 2015).

What Angie describes is a kind of racial aggression and determination of others to see her in a way that is incongruent with how she sees herself. This refers not only to others’ false assumptions about her background, but also to the very act of asking and the message that the question communicates to Angie –that others perceive her as racially ambiguous. Their questions make her cognizant of the ways she is judged and misperceived, and their questions force her to participate in their judgment. Adrienne Rich describes the effects of not being “seen” by society, “When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are
dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing” (1986, p. 199).

In the last cartoon, Angie says nothing in response to the question, “Are you Ecuadorian?” Likewise, in the telling of these anecdotes in her exit interview, she states that now if someone comments that she looks Asian, “I just walk away. And like, I hate you, forget you. Bye.” (Angie, exit interview, June 25, 2015). While her silence is an act of resistance, it is also cause for concern. On the one hand, Angie refuses to be complicitous in racial stereotyping; on the other, she has been effectively bullied into silence about who she is rather than drawn out and “seen”. Rich continues, “Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard” (1986, p. 199). Given her options, Angie has developed a way to refuse what she feels is unfair, and yet as researchers and educators, we must work to provide more tools and opportunities for young people to speak back to the kind of injustices described here so that silence is not the only possibility they see. Rehearsing a new discourse in response to such oppressive events, as I prompted Angie and others to do during discussions and reenactments of these moments, is one such step towards shifting students’ experiences and possibly diminishing the negative impact of such moments on students’ lives.
The third experience that I will highlight in this section is Isabel’s reflections on being told that she “talks like a white girl”. Isabel wrote the following in her notebook (May 27, 2015):

![Handwritten note](image)

Figure 4.5: Why do you talk like a white girl?
(Text above picture: “I also don’t like when people call me white when they know I’m not.”
Person 1: “Why do you talk like a whit[e] girl?”
Person 2: “I’m not white!”)

Isabel’s experience was one that the students acted out in the second part of the activity.

The following is a transcript of the play (May 27, 2015):

Isabel: Hi girl like I’m so excited for the cheerleading squad. Yay!
Monica: Why do you talk like a white girl?
Isabel: Well you know I’m Latin, like why do you say that to me? [Pretends to cry].
Monica: Can you believe this girl?! [Laughs]. You know what, I feel bad for her. I’m sorry, I just wanted attention.
Isabel: It’s alrighty.

Afterwards, Isabel explained what happened to her in real life; the events were very similar to the way they portrayed the experience in the skit. I asked students if they
thought there was such a thing as talking like a white girl. The following conversation ensued (May 27, 2015):

Isabel: People think that I like um, I like talk like a white girl because...
Joanna: [Interjected in the background as Isabel speaks] You're white.
Isabel: ...I say like a lot [laughs] and like I have this voice, but I don't really know like how can you sound like a white girl or how can you sound like a African person, so I don't, I don't really get it.

Isabel theorizes that the reason others perceive her speech as “white” is because she says “like” a lot, and because “like I have this voice”. Joanna’s interjection posits an alternate theory about why others perceive Isabel as “talking like a white girl” — *because she's white*. However, there are several ways to interpret the suggestion that “you're white”. One way to understand Joanna’s comment is that she is referring to Isabel having light skin, and suggesting that others perceive her speech as white because they perceive her skin to be white. This connects to Flores and Rosa’s argument about raciolinguistic ideologies reading race into language, regardless of the actual speech uttered (2015). Thus, talking like a white girl becomes defined as anything that someone with light skin says, rather than being defined by the objective characteristics of an utterance. Another way to understand her comment is that when Joanna says “you’re white,” she is referring to multiple factors that identify Isabel as white, including her speech, her appearance, and perhaps even her preferred activities, which according to the skit include cheerleading.

That Joanna made this comment is significant because she could also be described as “sounding white” by the standards Isabel puts forth — saying “like” a lot and having a certain kind of voice. However, because of Joanna’s darker complexion, she may never have been identified by others in this way, as “sounding white”. Isabel’s theory is that she is accused of talking like a white girl because of the way she sounds. Joanna’s counter-theory
is that Isabel is accused of talking like a white girl because she is white. The girls’ varied interpretations of the same event can be seen as intimately tied to the unique positionalities and experiences of each. Both voices are significant in that they shed light on constructions of racial identity and call into question the validity of such constructs.

At the end of this session, Isabel wrote the following in her notebook (Student notebook, May 27, 2015):

![Image of Isabel's notebook entry]

Figure 4.6: People put other people in a box

(Title: “Questions or thoughts”
Title of 1st drawing: “People put other people in a box”
Labels on 1st drawing: “White,” “Black,” “Other”
Title of 2nd drawing: “Media and society put a image in our minds”)

The ideas that Isabel writes about here indicate an understanding that her experience of being accused of “sounding white” is not limited to the interaction between her and the offending individual, but rather is systemic and symptomatic of a larger project of racialization.
This conversation leads to critical questions about the construction of racialized bodies in the US, and the role that language plays in those processes. Who benefits and who is harmed by the influence of raciolinguistic ideologies in the process of positioning self and others racially and ethnically? How does mislabeling others take away that person’s agency for self-definition while further securing one’s own position? How do adolescents find ways not just of defining themselves according to what society tells us is good, but redefining what society tells us is good, specifically in regards to labels they take on such as Dominican, Mexican, or immigrant?

My intention with this session was to provide a space for students to think explicitly about the relationship between race, ethnicity, language, immigration status, power, wealth and privilege. One theme that ran throughout the session was the ways in which identity markers, including speech, dress, skin color, language, and even hobbies, were operating in students’ lives and the world around them to define and categorize people, and how these definitions worked to advantage some and disadvantage others. At the same time, the experiences students wrote about reflected their particular standpoints and experiences. These experiences had as much to do with their own personal histories, as they had to do with socially constructed racialized identities and geopolitical histories of diverse groups in the US. Jorge’s experience, then, emerged from his particular standpoint as a self-identified American-born Mexican; Angie’s from others’ inability, but also need, to racially and ethnically label her; and Isabel’s from others’ perceptions of her as white despite her own identification as Latin.
“Chu said there would be tacos”: Unpacking prejudice through codifications

The next section of this chapter focuses on the class session that followed the one described in the previous section, in which students engaged in the process of unpacking the meaning behind a negatively charged meme that Joanna came across online and showed her friend Yanetsy, both in the after-school program, after the session described above\(^5\). The following paragraph is from field notes I took after the session (Field notes, 5/27/15):

> After class was over and we were packing up to leave, I saw Yanetsy showing a picture on her phone to Joanna. She and Joanna were laughing and Joanna said that's what Yanetsy thinks of Mexicans! loudly across the room for everyone to hear. The girls were laughing at the picture (cracking up really) and showing it to friends. I walked over and asked a couple times to see the picture and Yanetsy showed it to me. When I said I don't get it, I don't think that's funny, actually I don't think it's very nice, another student agreed with me, saying yeah, I don't get it either (I think this was Joanna). That's when Yanetsy said it out loud in a stereotypical Mexican accent. I walked away, wondering what else to do or how to incorporate this into the next session.

The picture was a meme (an image with text superimposed) that Joanna had actually brought up on her phone to show Yanetsy. When I noticed them, Yanetsy had Joanna’s phone and was showing the meme back to Joanna and both were laughing about it. The meme is shown below in Figure 4.7:

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\(^5\) Joanna and Yanetsy are both US-born Dominican American youth.
The meme depicts a heavy-set man with brown skin and short black hair. He has a pained expression on his face. The image includes his head and shoulders, and he appears to be shirtless. Above the image are the words, “Chu said there would be tacos” and below the image are the words, “July to me”. The spelling of the words attempt to imitate what some might consider to be a Mexican accent in English, exchanging “you” for “chu” and “you lie” for “July”. The extremity of emotion that the man displays is juxtaposed with the words, which suggest that his pain is due to being told there would be tacos, when in fact there are none. The image, then, uses a mixture of signs based on common stereotypes to convey a “Mexican” man, including the reference to tacos, the photo of the man with brown skin and facial features that some may associate with being Mexican, and the use of accented English.

As is apparent in the memo above, my initial reaction was disappointment. I was disheartened and angry that the students were being insensitive, and I felt that I had failed to navigate the situation adequately, and that further, I had allowed a situation to occur that may have left certain students feeling bad – in this case, students from Mexican
families. I saw this incident as a failure on my part to create a safe and respectful environment. In another sense, I also understood why Joanna would bring up that image following our conversation in class. Despite their laughter, the image embodied many of the themes we were discussing, and hit on the complexity of identity construction, at the same time as it displayed a kind of discrimination present in the US that targets Mexicans and Mexican-Americans more so than any other Latino group. So, I shifted my plans for the following class so that we could talk about this meme as a group.

For the following session, I came to class prepared with not only the meme of the “Mexican” man, but also a second meme that I created to focus students’ attention on the ways they might subconsciously connect the image of the man with the language surrounding the image. The second meme is pictured below in Figure 4.8:

![Image of a woman crying with the caption “CHU SAID THERE WOULD BE TACOS JULY TO ME”](http://tarheelteaparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/woman-crying.jpg)

**Figure 4.8:** July to me, altered
(Caption reads, “CHU SAID THERE WOULD BE TACOS JULY TO ME”)

The second meme leaves the words from the first meme intact, but changes the image of the man to an image of a woman with light skin and blonde hair. I created this meme because I noticed that many students in the class connected whiteness to the idea of
being “American”. In some contexts, students used the word “American” as a stand-in term for “white,” and also associated standard US English with white Americans. I wanted to create an image that was incongruent with some of these ideas, in order to disrupt those connections and also give students the opportunity to reflect on why they assumed the man in the original meme was Mexican. My hope was that these images together could lead to a conversation about the connections students saw between language, race, and ethnicity, and specifically, how language was used in the meme to racialize the man.

Beyond the intellectual discussion I hoped to initiate among the group, even more importantly, I wanted to create a space in which the Mexican American students in the class who had seen the girls showing the image back and forth the previous class could express their thoughts and feelings about the image, and in doing so, speak back to the prejudice and marginalization embodied in the meme. By juxtaposing the second meme alongside the first, I hoped to more explicitly address underlying raciolinguistic ideologies, and to expose the discursive process of racialization, in the photo and in society.

Using the memes in this way is based on Freirean pedagogy, in which the classroom becomes a site for examining everyday experiences of students through the use of codifications (1970). Freire writes, “For the learner to know what he did not know before, he must engage in an authentic process of abstraction by means of which he can reflect ... on forms of orientation in the world. In this process of abstraction, situations representative of how the learner orients himself in the world are proposed to him as the objects of his critique” (1985, p. 50-51). The codification, then, “mediates between the concrete and theoretical contexts (of reality)” while at the same time, “as knowable object,”
it mediates between those engaged in the dialogical process of meaning-making (ibid, p. 51).

What follows below is a detailed account of how events unfolded in the class, complete with several sections of students’ reactions transcribed. My intention with providing this level of detail for this session is to highlight students’ diverse reactions, as well as to provide a possible blueprint for how the process of Collaborative Descriptive Inquiry (CDI) might be used in conjunction with a codification to unpack racism and prejudice pervasive in students’ lives.

I told students that we were going to look at a meme that Yanetsy and Joanna were looking at last week, and that the meme was intended to be funny, so they might giggle a little when they see it at first, but that we were going to study it seriously. Several students asked if it was ok if they laughed and I explained that the image was intended to be humorous, so it would understandable if they giggled a little bit when they saw it, but I also conveyed that because we were looking at the meme to study it, and also because some might find the image personally offensive, that it was important to treat the image seriously. I made this caveat because I was trying to anticipate their reactions to the meme, as well as recognize the current mood of the class, which was the light, giddy, silly atmosphere of a middle school classroom in early June. They looked at the meme and many students giggled; Isabel advised others to “be professional”.

For this portion of the class, I planned to use the Collaborative Descriptive Inquiry (CDI) model described by García and Traugh (2002) in which participants each have a turn to speak, focusing first on the descriptive before moving to analysis. The process slows down the conversation, and makes participants aware of being descriptive rather than evaluative.
This shift, then, also has the effect of showing participants the assumptions they mobilize in the process of making sense of the world around them, and opens up space to evaluate those assumptions and to name them. The procedure of CDI is also helpful in equalizing the voices in the room, ensuring that everyone has a turn, and that no one dominates the conversation. While CDI does not take away the possibility of a biased text, it does seek to unpack any text according to each perspective in the room.

CDI is also well aligned to critical pedagogy, or as Freire terms it, problem-posing education. Freire explains, “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (1970, p. 83). CDI begins with a question, text, or image at its center, much like the process of problem-posing that Freire (1970) and Shor (1992) describe in which the teacher starts with a codification related to students’ lives. After presenting the codification or topic, everyone present takes a turn describing what they see, refraining from making interpretations of any kind. This not only creates a common understanding among the group as a starting point for a deeper conversation, it also reveals the underlying interpretations, biases, and assumptions that take place subconsciously and names them explicitly.

After this process of description, everyone in the circle takes another turn to begin to interpret the codification. The structure of the conversation makes the process different from a typical classroom discussion. Though participants may build on each other’s statements, there are not direct responses to each other’s comments typical in a classroom
discussion. The procedure also slows down the dialogical process, and helps to maintain focus throughout the conversation (García & Traugh, 2002; Shor, 1992).

I first explained to students that we were going to unpack the meme together, that we were going to describe it first, and that they were not to give their opinion about it, but rather just describe what they saw. I told them to imagine that someone can't see the screen, and that they need to describe what the image looks like to that person. Two students raised their hands immediately, and I advised them that they could put their hands down, because we would go in a circle, and everyone would have a turn. Monica and Isabel had their hands up to start, so I chose Monica to start because she is Mexican-American and the image is targeted at this group. I mention these details to highlight the process of CDI, in which everyone takes a turn in order, one by one, and to show how I attempted to facilitate in a way that privileged the group that was being targeted, in this case, Mexican Americans.

What follows is a transcript of the CDI process (06/01/15):

Sarah: Ok so we're gonna unpack this together, but the first thing we're gonna do is just describe what you see, mm k? So without, you're not saying your opinion about it, if you like it or don't like it, if you think it's funny or not funny, you're just describing, like imagine that somebody couldn't see the screen, so you were describing in as much detail as you can what you see in the picture. ok so you're just describing, so somebody doesn't see it, so you're trying to describe to them what it looks like. What would you say? And so what we're gonna do, you can put your hands down, because actually everyone is gonna have a turn. So the way that we're gonna do it is we're gonna start somewhere, so both Isabel and Monica had their hands up, so we could start somewhere there, and then we're just gonna go around in a circle, and you can add to what people say that they see. Ok? So if somebody already said something, you didn't necessarily have to say it again, or if you think it's important, then you could say it again. Ok? So who wants to start? Alright let's start with Monica and then we'll go this way around, ok?

Monica: Ok so I see...
Yanetsy immediately begins to crack up to the point that you can't hear Monica speak.

Diana: Yanetsy calm down.

Isabel: Can we start?

Sarah: Yeah, Monica, start.

Monica: Ok, so what I see is this, a Mexican guy who has an accent.

Sarah: Ok and then when you’re finished saying what you want to say, you can turn, you can look to the person next to you so that they know it’s their turn.

Isabel: Ok so I see a Mexican, or you know Latin, a Latin older guy, crying, or like constipated or something [many laugh but Isabel is serious] and then it’s saying like... some Latin people do have like an accent so like it’s saying like chu lied to me, there would be tacos. July to me, yeah. Like, it’s like they had a really funny accent so people are making fun of that, yeah.

Sarah: So what you see is words here that are written in a certain way like to make an accent or something.

Isabel: Mm hmm.

Luz: [Says something inaudible and others laugh]. And um also I think that you see my mom doesn't know English, and um she probably talks like that, so they’re saying that people talk like that, people that are learning English.

... 

Diana: Ok so what I see is the background is kind of gray-ish and green-ish, and then like the man as you see uh his face I don't know it's like he’s crying too much, just for one little thing he’s crying [people suppressing laughter in the background]. And then he looks like he has no shirt on, so that makes it kind of worse. So then he, they describe him as Mexican, I say describe him because of the words because they say July, wait no chu said there would be tacos July to me. So then uh he's kind of chubby, well he’s chubby alright! [Many people laugh again, Yanetsy especially. Another student says no repeatedly.]

Jorge: I think I know why they put up, they put tacos because Mexicans eat tacos and... [Edwin says under his breath “a lot of tacos”]. [Pause]. I just see uh...

Sarah: Is there anything else you wanna add?

Jorge: Um...
Sarah: So they specifically said tacos because they're referring to a stereotype that Mexicans like tacos?

Jorge: And that he has a mustache.

Sarah: He has a mustache. Good, that's something that nobody's noticed yet.

Edwin: Um I don't know what to say.

Sarah: So when you're looking at, so part of the description, you can look at what kind of hairstyle he has, what kind of feelings look like are on his face... Something like that?

Edwin: Uh as you could see that some Mexicans don't know English. I notice that except he say "you" he said... July...

Sarah: So they're changing the words there to make it sound like he doesn't speak proper English or something?

Edwin: It looks like don't got eyebrows.

Sarah: It's true he has very light eyebrows.

Joanna: Um I have no words so I'll pass.

Sarah: Nothing, you don't see anything?

Monica: Nothing? Nothing?

Sarah: Well aside from what people said, if you were the first one to go, how would you describe this image? It's important that everybody have a turn. It's important that everybody go.

Yanetsky: Can I go?

Joanna: Yeah can she go, I have nothing to say.

Sarah: No it's your turn first. I mean, if you were just describing this to somebody, say that you wanted to show Yanetsky this picture but you couldn't pull it up on your phone, how would you describe it?

Joanna: I would show it to her at school.

[Group breaks into brief conversation].

Yanetsky: Describe the picture to me now, go.
Joanna: Um it's a sad um Mexican saying, “You said there would be tacos. You lied to me,” in a very funny accent.

Sarah: Thank you for contributing your voice. I think it's important that everybody say something so thank you Joanna, because I know you weren’t sure what to say.

Yanetsy: You know how Edwin said most Mexicans don't know English?

Sarah: Are you, are you making a description of the picture? So right now we're not speaking to what other people said, I just want you to look at the picture and describe what you see, and then we'll have a discussion where we comment on what other people said, but for now you just take your turn and describe what you see in the picture.

Yanetsy: A sad constipated Mexican man, apparently he wanted tacos but he didn’t get them so he probably got out of his house shirtless and looked for tacos.

[Joanna laughs uncontrollably in the background, Yanetsy’s final comments inaudible.]

Sarah: Alright.

[At this point, I ask students to go around the circle again, and I ask them if there’s anything else that they notice about the picture. I note that some people were saying things that are not in the picture. I cite as an example Yanetsy's story that the man ran out of the house, as well as the assumption that many people made in describing the man as Mexican, although the words on the photo do not name him explicitly as such.]

Sarah: So one thing that I see is like his eyes and his eyebrows are wrinkled up like in pain, and his eyes look sad and also afraid.

...

Sarah: Is there any other details that you see in the picture?

Isabel: Well he, he looks like he’s in a very small place, and then it looks like he was sweating, cause he has a glow on his face, and then he’s like all like, like all like crinkled...

Sarah: Mm hmm like his face is scrunched up?

Isabel: Yeah he looks very sad like somebody died right in front of him.

...
Diana: He has a double chin, his teeth are sticking out and his lips are like, uh are like, uh, [inaudible]... and then, his eyes look red for crying too much, and his ears. His ears look, are huge... his hair it’s so, it seems like he had already had a haircut.

As Diana was talking, Yanetsy was saying repeatedly in the background that the man looked like an elf. I spoke somewhat sternly to the group, and specifically to Yanetsy, to quiet their laughter. I told them that that was not the direction we wanted to take the conversation; in doing so, I was attempting to create a more serious, and more compassionate, environment. One more student made an observation about the way the words were written incorrectly to mimic the accent of the speech, and this concluded the “descriptive” part of the process.

In the transcript above, the differences in students’ reactions is clear. The three Mexican American students – Monica, Luz, and Jorge- are more descriptive and brief in what they notice. Luz suggests that her mom might sound like that, and in this moment of vulnerability, the atmosphere among the group becomes momentarily more serious. Jorge explains that he knows why “they put tacos, because Mexicans eat tacos”; his use of “they” distances himself from the creators of the meme, suggesting that he does not relate to its contents or find it funny.

In contrast, many of the other student participants, with the exception of Isabel, act silly as they describe what they see. When Jorge comments on the tacos, Edwin says under his breath, “A lot of tacos”. Diana describes in great detail, and somewhat grotesquely, the features that she observes, such as “he’s chubby alright!” “his teeth are sticking out,” “he has a double chin,” and “…his ears. His ears look, are huge”. Joanna calls the text used in the meme “a very funny accent”. Yanetsy invents a story about the man running out of his home, and then at the end of the conversation, repeatedly calls the man an elf while some
of the other students laugh. Effectively, most of the students who did not identify as Mexican American “bought into” the message that the meme was attempting to convey – that is, to dehumanize the man in the photo by ridiculing his appearance, demeanor, speech, and cultural practices.

In the second part of the process, I asked students to go around the circle and explain how this image made them feel when they saw it. I told students we were going to go around the circle the same way we just did, and that everyone would have a chance to say something. I asked Jorge if he wanted to start, hoping that if he started it would set a serious mood rather than a silly one. He did not want to start, but Diana said she would start.

Sarah: ...What does this image make you feel, when you see it? How does this image make you feel? And we're gonna go around the same way, we're gonna go around, and everyone will have a chance to say something...

Diana: So like I see that, this makes, my feelings for this, like it's making me laugh like it's hilarious, but at the same time it's kind of disrespectful because you're accusing a man for how they look, or what you think how they say or pronounce something...

Sarah: And how does it make you feel when you put aside like the funny part of it, and you think more about the part where it, the second part of what you said, how does that make you feel?

Diana: It's disrespectful and also like it's not that, very polite to them, because well they're describing like how would that person react to what, why is he this way, um why is he crying or why is he acting this way, or how would they see, why would he be crying just for...

Sarah: Jorge do you want to go next or do you want Luz to go next?

Jorge: Uh I'll go. Um, it's... it makes me feel like it's offensive at the same time because most Mexicans don't talk that much English and I think he wants tacos so badly so he didn't get them so then he starts, he looks sad, and it makes me feel a
little bit um, it makes me feel like it’s rude, it’s rude kind of, cause I talk English and I’m a Mexican.

Sarah: So it makes you feel like it’s misrepresenting Mexicans in a way? Anything else you want to add? Alright, Edwin?

Edwin: Um I think that it’s kind of probably I think it’s kind of disrespectful because Mexicans is not the only that can not know English, like Dominicans can know only Spanish, and he’s trying to learn English so he makes mistakes.

Joanna: Ok so I agree with Diana. I think it’s funny but what was the other thing she said, like and um rude cause like Edwin said a lot of, more than, Dominicans too don’t know how to talk much English, so yeah.

Yanetsy: Pass.

Sarah: It doesn't make you feel any kind of way? [Pause]. I'm just confused because before you were cracking up... [Pause]. Nothing? Doesn’t make you feel anything? Ok that’s just really interesting because you were having such a fun time laughing earlier. Ok, so alright Yanetsy, you don’t want to go, so we can come back to you if you want.

Monica: So what I think about the picture is that, oh wait so I find it really funny although sometimes offensive, because me as Mexican I really don’t like tacos... I’m serious, I don’t like pastor, or also like lengua...

Edwin: Or quesadillas.

Monica: I like quesadillas but not really tacos, so yeah so I find it offensive, I find it offensive cause as Mexican, and also it’s, so yeah.

Isabel: Ok so I found it like really disrespectful towards um Mexicans because like not all Mexicans have that accent and it’s very, it’s really rude because like, I thought it was funny at first when I saw his face, but like I didn't read it, but now it’s like really disrespectful, because like not everybody just comes to this, like what if you just came from Mexico, you came here, and now he speaks like that. Like that's actually pretty good, because he's already [inaudible]... But like not everybody is just gonna come from a better place and speak our language, our main language perfectly, so I don’t think it’s like necessary to like put a, it’s called like a meme or something, like put a meme of a Mexican with the captions of that he wants tacos enough to cry.

Luz: Ok um so what I feel about that picture is that it’s really offensive to Mexican people I think. Because they um like Mexicans eat a lot of tacos and some people just like think that's funny, well it’s kind of funny, but sometimes it’s really rude, and a
lot of people make fun of other people, but they, they, some people also make fun of those people, so...

[Several other students voice confusion over Luz's idea.]

Luz: Like someone, so you see whoever made that picture is probably like American, and let's say a Mexican makes another picture saying American people think they're they're Mexican because they like...

Sarah: You're saying that another group might make a meme of, so a Mexican might make a meme of some other group, just like some other group is making a meme of a Mexican? Kind of like that? Alright, yeah, do you have a couple more comments? Well Monica reaching forward a little further, so Monica why don't you go first, and then Isabel.

Monica: So something that I found also right now, that it says, oh about the tacos, I was like oh you said there was going to be tacos, but there wasn't, so it shows that he cries about tacos, but we don't cry.

Sarah: Mmm. So, so the way, so the meme in a way is like exaggerating an emotion?

Monica: Because we don't even get mad or cry. We just say ok.

Luz: I do.

Sarah: We all, everyone gets mad or cries sometimes, right, but this picture is showing somebody getting like extremely upset over tacos. So it kind of makes it like absurd almost, right? Like how ridiculous, like why would anybody get that upset over a taco? So then it makes him look in a way like more extreme, like more ridiculous or something like that. Yeah, Isabel? That's a good point Monica.

Isabel: Oh ok, so it puts like a bad image in other people's heads about Mexicans, like let's say you work, yourself works in a taco shop, and then you see a Mexican coming to you, like oh my god, here comes the Mexican now he's gonna cry if I don't have tacos.

Sarah: So people that see this might then have an image...

Isabel: Cause like all of that is about, like media, like if you watch a movie like you're gonna see a lot of Mexicans you know working at a taco shop or eating some tacos, or doing something bad, or poor or something like that. And so then they put, they make memes like this and then they put those images in other people's heads about what to think about Mexicans.

Monica: That's why society treats them like that... because of media....
Many students in this stage of the process observe several ways in which the meme is “rude” or “disrespectful” towards Mexicans. Edwin and Joanna both observe that some people in other Spanish-speaking communities such as Dominicans also do not speak much English, and see the image as therefore “rude” and “disrespectful” towards Mexicans. Diana notes that the image is disrespectful because it portrays the man crying for a trivial reason. Jorge and Monica both note the inaccuracy of the stereotypes in the meme – Jorge notes that he speaks English and is Mexican, and Monica says that she does not even like tacos. Monica and Isabel both suggest that media images are partly to blame for the perpetuation of such stereotypes, and Monica further connects these images with material consequences, noting, “that’s why society treats them like that”. Thus, while the Mexican American students do approach the image from a different standpoint than the others, the process of having each student articulate what the image made them feel elicits more compassionate and empathetic responses from the entire group.

After concluding our discussion of students’ feelings about the meme and the stereotypes it portrayed, I introduced the next meme to the group. To create this meme, I took the original meme and superimposed a photo of a white woman crying, but used the same caption on the top and bottom of the picture – “Chu said there would be tacos” on top of the photo, and “July to me” below. The idea behind this shift was to take the familiar image that made sense to the students, and help them to recognize some of the implicit assumptions and connections they made between the words and the image of the man in order to construct the coherent idea of a Mexican man. Gee (2011) names this the “Making Strange” tool in the context of discourse analysis, which he explains is a way of looking at familiar material and trying to distance oneself from it in a way that provides insights not
otherwise available because of cultural bias and the seeming “naturalness” of that which we know and that with which we are familiar. In this case, I attempted to create a physical image that would aid students in this process of “making strange” the seemingly natural image of the “Mexican” man. In doing so, my hope was to reveal the process of identity formation and racial categorization for students, and in doing so, reveal the social construction of such categories and “ways of looking” at people.

I told students that when we saw the original meme, we were talking about how the words connected to the person shown in the photo. Then I explained to them that I made a different meme and that I wanted them to look at the meme I had created and comment on it. At this point, I showed them the second meme, which is pictured again below in Figure 4.9:

![CHU SAID THERE WOULD BE TACOS JULY TO ME](http://tarheelteaparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/woman-crying.jpg)

Figure 4.9: July to me, altered (Same as Figure 4.8)
(Caption reads, “CHU SAID THERE WOULD BE TACOS JULY TO ME”

When I first showed students the picture, they were nearly silent, and had very little outward reaction. Listening back to the audio recording of the session, and taking into consideration the trajectory of the session up to this point, the students’ silence can
potentially be understood as a rupture in their expectations and perspective of the world – in other words, their silence could be an indication that the image fulfilled its purpose, and “made strange” their subconscious processes of identity construction.

In short, for many of the students, the woman in the photo did not match the words surrounding her image. This contrast may have brought into focus for some students how deeply connected the words were to the image in the last meme we looked at. The last meme was very easy for them to make sense of, and some of them clearly took pleasure in both seeing and unpacking the image. Regardless of whether the original meme made them feel good, silly, hurt, or offended, they were able to name their perceptions and feelings readily. The silence of the group upon seeing this image spoke to me of potential confusion, and a moment in which students struggled to understand what they were looking at, because it was outside of any racial-linguistic paradigm they knew of. Essentially, in the new image, there was a disconnect between the language and other signs such as skin color and facial features that, in the previous image, came together to do the work of racialization. This disconnect in the second image caused some kind of disorientation, or provoked resistance in the form of silence. Following is a transcript of students’ reactions to the second image that illustrates the disorientation described above (June 1, 2015):

[I let the group know we are going to shift gears, and show them the second meme I made. When I reveal the meme to them, the group is overwhelmingly silent.]

Sarah: Ok so some people thought the other picture was funny, so my question to you is, what do you think of this picture?

Jorge: I think they’re trying to make it funny, but it’s not funny.

Sarah: And why is it not funny?
Jorge: Cause... she looks like if she knows English, and English people don't like talk, "chu said there would be tacos chu lie to me," not like that, they talk like more more...

Edwin: To be like American accent... "oh I thought it was tacos"

Jorge: And so it doesn’t really make sense.

Jorge’s reaction demonstrates the way he connects language practices to race, noting that the image is not realistic because the woman appears to know English. Edwin corroborates this idea by offering a more realistic alternative to the speech shown in the meme, what he refers to as more of an “American” accent. Monica has a similar reaction:

Monica: ...So if American society sees this picture they wouldn't believe it like... American people don’t eat tacos they like only American food, like, they don’t have an accent, but we don’t know cause probably she’s Irish, she’s just learning English...

Sarah: So she could be Irish just learning English? She could...

Monica: Or from the Netherlands...

Here Monica agrees with Jorge’s sentiment, connecting visual racial cues with cultural and linguistic practices, but attributes this view to “American society” instead of herself. She is cognizant of the stereotypes at work that read the woman as an English speaker, and astutely observes that she may be a European immigrant who is just learning English, that in reality her whiteness does not mean she knows English or even that she is American.

While Jorge and Monica focused on the implausibility of the speech as connected to the image, Joanna focuses on the disappointment she feels at seeing the image of the white woman rather than the “Mexican” man:

Sarah: Doesn't make sense, uh huh. Uh yeah, who else? Oh Joanna’s got her hand raised, hold on we have to go to Joanna because Joanna has her hand raised, hold on let me mark the date!
Joanna: Um I, the picture's not really funny but even without the picture it's really funny to me, I don't know why, but it is really funny. And to see that picture it's very disappointing. I don't know why, but it is very disappointing.

Yanetsy: Wait you made this?

Sarah: Mm hmm. I made it, I made it because I wanted to ask you guys, yeah I wanted to see how you reacted, I wanted to get your opinion on it. So you were, so you think the words are funny, but not cause you're connecting them to the woman? The woman is just...

Joanna: [Inaudible]. No matter what the words are funny.

Joanna’s disappointment points to an attitude towards the white woman that differs from her attitude towards the "Mexican" man. Something about the second image takes away from the joke, and perhaps from the pleasure, she derives from seeing the original image. One idea that several students brought up when viewing the image of the “Mexican” man was that he appeared ridiculous to be crying over something so trivial as tacos. By dehumanizing the brown-skinned man, his emotions become a point of mockery and a source of pleasure. By contrast, the emotions of the white woman are taken more seriously. Edwin observes,

Edwin: I agree with Monica because the way she cried it looks like, like somebody died, if not it's cause probably somebody lied to her, so she's disappointed.

Sarah: But not because of there not being any tacos?

Edwin: Yeah, tacos.

Sarah: That's not really believable?

Edwin's reaction shows empathy and understanding for the white woman, and he theorizes on why she might actually be crying, because it is not believable that it would be for tacos. In contrast, students were incredulous that the "Mexican" man would cry for tacos, but they
were not skeptical. In other words, they believed that a Mexican man would cry for tacos, and they located fault within the man for doing so, while they expressed disbelief in an image that would suggest a white woman cry for such a reason. In the image of the “Mexican” man, his excessive crying is interpreted by many students as a reflection of the man’s absurdity or stupidity, whereas in the case of the white woman, it is simply unbelievable.

Of the students in the group, the Mexican American students were by far among the most compassionate toward the “Mexican” man, and were the only ones who initially questioned the validity of the image. Monica, who identifies as Mexican American, points out:

Monica: So something that I found also right now, that it says, oh about the tacos, I was like oh you said there was going to be tacos, but there wasn’t, so it shows that he cries about tacos, but we don’t cry.

Sarah: Mmm. So, so the way, so the meme in a way is like exaggerating an emotion?

Monica: Because we don’t even get mad or cry. We just say ok.

In a follow-up conversation about the memes, I asked students to reflect on others’ reactions to the images they saw. For the purposes of the activity, I grouped students so that the students who identified as Mexican American were sitting together, and I explained to them why I did so. I wanted the Mexican American students to have a chance to debrief with each other, both in regards to the meme and to their classmates’ reactions to it, and to potentially feel more at ease in expressing their feelings about the session. The following is the conversation of three students who identified as Mexican American, when asked, “How did the meme of the man in the last session make you feel?” (June 3, 2015):
Monica: It made me feel like it was funny but really um racist. Not racist um rude, it was rude...

[Jorge interjects: To you!]

Monica: ...to other people, to mostly like Mexican American, because they eat like tacos, and...

Luz: They don’t cry over it that’s just dumb! Whoever made that picture I’m gonna punch them!

Sarah: Jorge can you finish what you were saying, how did it make you feel?

Jorge: Um it made me feel first I thought it was not a Mexican but then I realized that they were, I knew it was a Mexican but they were making fun of his accent, so it’s rude, it made me feel like the person who made it is like rude.

Luz: They don’t have a life.

Jorge: Yeah, no wait no uh not all Mexicans cry for tacos.

Monica: Mostly Mexicans don’t like tacos.

Jorge: Yeah most of them, cause we, we don’t really...

[Monica interjects: We don't eat tacos]

Jorge: ...not that much.

Monica: Only like in fiesta, or...

Luz: Party...

Jorge: We eat American food, like hotdogs, like that.

Monica: Or Caesar salad.

The reaction of the students who identify as Mexican American is clearly tied to how they view themselves and how they view Mexican Americans in general. In both cases, students
felt the meme misrepresented Mexican Americans, and asserted a different identity for themselves personally as well, noting that they eat “American” food as well, including hot dogs and Caesar salad. The next question focused on the reactions of others in the class. The same three students as above responded (June 3, 2015):

Monica: So you see how many others were like laughing at it, I was like, at first I was like laughing...

Jorge: Ok so how did the reaction of others make you feel?

Monica: So many, so all the other ones they were laughing at it, at first I was laughing too cause it was kin-, it was funny.

Luz: I have a question.... Did you laugh because, you were just laughing because you just wanted to be a part of the class? Or you just thought it was funny?

Jorge: Ok, no.

Monica: I thought it was funny. And then...

[Monica goes on to explain that she was laughing because of the picture and because of Yanetsy’s reaction.]

Jorge: I wasn’t laughing at nothing, I didn’t get the joke.

The conversation above reflects the complexity of the reactions of the Mexican American students to their classmates. On one hand, they felt offended by the picture, but Monica also expresses that it was funny to her. Luz hints at pressure she may have felt to go along with the laughter of the group when she asks Monica if she was laughing to be part of the class or because she thought the image was funny. Jorge repeatedly rejects the notion that the image was funny, and seems to press both Luz and Monica with his repetition of the initial question, “Ok so how did the reaction of others make you feel?” He never answers this
question himself during their conversation, but he does make it clear that the image is not humorous to him.

When asked the same question, “Were some of [your classmates’] reactions upsetting?” the following conversation ensued among students who did not identify as Mexican American (June 3, 2015):

Isabel: ...No I didn’t really care, because like we all kind of like just...

[Diana interjects: Started laughing]

Isabel: ...acted the same, like at first we started laughing and then we like got over it like that’s very rude, you know, but like we just acted the same so I didn’t really feel anything for that.

Joanna: Most of us.

Isabel: Yeah most of us, like a hun- no like 99.99%

Diana: I was still laughing a little bit when you guys got serious, but then like I see I see now and then I was like oh I see what they’re saying.

Isabel, who identified as Dominican American, felt that everyone’s reaction to the meme was the same, and therefore did not feel offended by others’ reactions. Joanna and Diana generally agreed, though Joanna did perceive some difference in students’ reactions, as evidenced by her qualifying statement, “Most of us”. While the conversation in this group centered around a process of initial laughter at the image to a growing understanding of the offensiveness of the image, the conversation between the Mexican American students focused more on how they handled their feelings of indignation at the image throughout the process. Later in the conversation, when asked “How do you think it might make a
Mexican American student feel to see someone laughing at this meme, and why?” Diana responds,

...Well the after-school that we have right now, like so part of the Mexicans also laughed at this image, so at first it didn’t make them feel as bad but then they realized what was the consequence, and then they were like oh they’re making fun of us, like as Joanna said, and they got really mad and they were like but this is not how we talk.

Here Diana’s response shows an understanding that the Mexican American students approached the meme from a different perspective than she and the other students did. While there are many directions this conversation could take from here, Diana’s reaction shows the potential for such conversations to act as a jumping off point in recognizing the unique perspectives and experiences of diverse groups of Latino students, as well as in deepening students’ understanding and compassion for each others’ lived realities.

**Conclusion**

This chapter set out to demonstrate the diversity of the racial-linguistic experiences of this particular group of Latino adolescents. Students’ reactions to the initial prompt asking them to reflect on an experience related to race, ethnicity, language, immigration, or class that made them feel bad or uncomfortable revealed disparate experiences of racialization based on factors ranging from facial features, to skin color, to language practices. This conversation laid the foundation to engage deeply in the analysis of a codification provided by students that embodied the complexity of the raciolinguistic ideologies that underpinned many of their personal experiences. The process of using a
codification in the context of Collaborative Descriptive Inquiry is offered here as a possible approach for raising students’ critical awareness of the ways that racializing ideologies inform their perceptions, and others’ perceptions, of language practices, and vice versa. Gaining a deeper understanding of this discursive process is a critical precursor to students’ ability to position themselves how they see fit, and to resist others’ attempts to position them in negative or otherwise incongruous ways.
Chapter 5

Translanguaging: “It’s not a standard language, but it’s still a language”

Introduction

Students’ articulated understandings of their own and others’ language practices in this study are complex, multi-layered, and sometimes contradictory. These findings reflect the complexity of students’ bilingual language practices as well as their varied social understandings of language. In this chapter, I focus on three main findings related to students’ understandings of language practices.

The first section of the chapter focuses on bilingualism. In this section, I first call attention to a discussion of students’ views on translanguaging. Students see translanguaging as a “mixing” of English and Spanish, or Spanglish as they call it, and reflect on their own use of this type of bilingual speech. I then turn to the ways students describe using language, and note that students use qualifiers such as “mostly” and “usually” that suggest the use of translanguaging in many contexts, including at home, with friends, and at school. In the second section of the chapter, I focus on many students’ difficulty in speaking monolingual Spanish and note that most refer to instances of speaking only Spanish as “having” to do so, in contrast to monolingual English, where the qualifier “have to” is absent and they simple “speak”.

The third section of the chapter examines students’ understandings of the language dynamics that took place in the after-school program, and theorizes on their significance, as
well as on what might have shifted the language dynamics, and what consequences, positive or negative, such a shift might have had. These findings carry important implications for school language policies for emergent bilinguals. Finally, given students’ differing attitudes towards speaking Spanish and being bilingual, I consider Grosjean’s assertion that bilinguals are not “two monolinguals in one” (1989) in the context of identity formation, and differentiate between having an identity as a Spanish speaker or as an English speaker, versus developing an identity as a bilingual. Taking this into consideration, I then theorize on how certain monolingual contexts may contradict students’ self-conceptions and the implications of this, particularly in school settings. I first start with a discussion of the existing literature on the topic, then situate my findings within this body of knowledge.

**Latino languaging and bilingualism**

Understanding the language practices of Latino bilingual youth in the US requires a flexible and dynamic understanding of how language is used by transnational, multilingual communities. Translanguaging emerges from the notion that languages are not disembodied forms located within the rules of a grammar textbook, but rather language practices emerge from speakers, and are very much embodied in the users of those practices. García (2009) writes, “For us, translanguagings are *multiple discursive practices* in which bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*” (p. 45). Thus, for bilingual people, dynamic bilingual interactions, in which speakers use multiple languages to communicate, are natural and often essential to sense-making. Rather than seeing the separation between languages as natural and inevitable, and seeing languages as self-
contained systems that individuals possess, García’s concept of translanguaging recognizes that bilinguals do not have separate languages, but rather use multiple language practices in dynamic ways. Though for purposes that range from practical to political, societies label languages such as “English” or “Spanish” as distinct, static entities, in practice, bilinguals use language fluidly and dynamically (Mignolo, 2000; García, 2009).

To speak of languaging is not just to be descriptive of the reality of bilingual communities, it is also to speak back to hegemonic linguistic and cultural practices. Mignolo writes, “The celebration of bi or pluri languaging is precisely the celebration of the crack in the global process between local histories and global designs... and a critique of the idea that civilization is linked to the ‘purity’ of colonial and national monolanguaging” ([2000] 2012, p. 250). Thus, Mignolo asserts the rightful place of translanguaging, or bi or pluri languaging as he calls it, in the nation state, as well as calls attention to the colonial nature of the “pure” linguistic practices, particularly of standard English and Spanish, that have become dominant in the Americas.

For Mignolo, bi or pluri languaging is also intimately tied with the fruitful border thinking that is generated by and also generates the unique positionality of “the new mestiza” as conceived by Gloria Anzaldúa in her book Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987). Mignolo attributes Anzaldúa with the idea of “bilanguaging as a fundamental condition of border thinking” ([2000] 2012, p. 253). In other words, translanguaging plays a key role in the development of the identity of the new mestiza, and the fruitful generation of ideas that accompany this unique position in the world. Without translanguaging, it might be impossible to explore, name, embrace, or resist aspects of life, and of self, in the borderlands.
As I will discuss below and throughout this chapter, creating opportunities for youth to engage in the world bilingually, and to develop bilingual voices, is critical to their wellbeing, and is distinct from opportunities to develop English or Spanish. If bilinguals in the US context are living in borderlands, then failing to address this reality in school means missing the opportunity to help youth achieve self-actualization. Situating bilingual language practices in the borderlands also shifts thinking away from school as a place to learn the autonomous codes of one language or another, to school as a place (in the borderlands) where students have opportunities to see who they are, where they are, why they are, and to fight injustice in their lives. Starting with the location of the student and their language practices rather than the abstract idea of language, power dynamics float to the surface and school becomes a place ripe for thinking and change.

Translanguaging as resistance

Linking language practices to the agenda of the nation state, and recognizing which language practices are valued, upheld, and officially sponsored, and which are deemed inadequate, is essential to viewing the act of translanguaging as transgressive, especially in the context of schooling. Mignolo writes, “While the nation-state promotes love toward national languages, bilanguaging love arises from and in the peripheries of national languages and in transnational experiences” ([2000] 2012, p. 273). Mignolo goes on to describe bilanguaging love as “love for being between languages, love for the disarticulation of the colonial language and for the subaltern ones, love for the impurity of national languages...” ([2000] 2012, p. 274) and further connects the idea of bilanguaging love to Freire’s idea that rebellion by the oppressed is an act of love and “grounded in the

Mignolo’s idea of bilanguaging love, Freire’s assertion of basic human rights, and Anzaldúa’s description of the borderlands and the subjectivity that living in that space creates, all provide a useful frame for thinking about translanguing as an act of resistance and an assertion of self in the context of schooling. García’s two basic principles of bilingual pedagogy – social practice and social justice – connect this frame specifically to bilingual pedagogy (2009, p. 318). In terms of social practice, translanguing is a strategy that allows students to draw on all of their language practices in the classroom. Rather than insisting on the separation of languages (as nearly all ESL and bilingual program models do), translanguing may be applied across all program models, whether the classrooms are designated “bilingual” or “English-only,” and uses students’ language practices strategically to accomplish lesson objectives. By emphasizing collaboration, cultural relevance, and community language practices, translanguing as a pedagogy becomes an act of social justice as well. Translanguing pedagogies also very much align with the tenets of critical pedagogy, placing students at the center of the classroom and building curriculum based on their lives and experiences, rather than starting with a standard curriculum and attempting to modify it to fit the needs and interests of the students.

In further elaborating bilingual pedagogy as social justice, García names equity, language tolerance, expectations and rigor, and assessment as components of a social justice education for bilingual students. Equity and language tolerance are especially relevant to this study. Equity refers to valuing students, their languages, cultures, and communities through equal classroom participation and equal access to high quality
programs. Language tolerance means building on students’ home language practices, and giving students the opportunity to construct knowledge in their classrooms using language practices that make sense to them.

Used in the classroom, translanguaging becomes a political act of resistance to cultural and linguistic domination. Pratt calls spaces of diverse cultural interaction “contact zones,” and recognizes that they often take place “in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power...” (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). Using students’ home languages and English dynamically in the classroom provides the opportunity to address unequal power relations in society and cultural and linguistic pressures of assimilation. Developing one’s academic voice is a difficult process, and even more so for students who are historically oppressed and denied educational opportunity; further, the only way for multilingual students to develop their voices, including academic voices, is multilingually. For all of these reasons, students’ full range of linguistic practices must be considered in a classroom that aims to be socially just. Translanguaging offers a way for students to negotiate their classroom identities and grapple with power dynamics they face in their classrooms and communities, using language that makes sense and that allows them to access the full range of their knowledge and life experiences.

Language socialization

Language socialization derives from the idea of socialization as the “interpersonal activity of 'becoming’” (Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro, 1986, p. 7). Building on this concept, then, language socialization has to do with the interactive ways in which social activity constitutes and reflects back to us our linguistic selves and the identities we author based
on our linguistic choices in varying contexts. Heath, whose seminal study published in 1983 in the book *Ways with words* examines the ways three southeastern communities use language, asserts that “all language learning is cultural learning” (1986, p. 145-146). Watson-Gegeo affirms this idea in two critical tenets of language socialization, that “language and culture are mutually constitutive and socially constructed” and that further, “all cultural activities across different contexts are socio-historically marked” (2004, as referenced in Baquedano-López, Solís, and Arrendondo, 2010, p. 342).

In this sense, there is more at stake when learning a new language than simply memorizing a new code of communication; as speakers acquire new ways of communicating, they do so in social contexts that further shape their identities and positions in varying contexts. In the classroom, this has implications for thinking about how we socialize children and adolescents into ways of languaging to “generate culturally meaningful ways of thinking, feeling, and being in the world” that will afford our students sociolinguistic interactions that dynamically resist the reproduction of social inequality (Watson-Gegeo (2004), as referenced in Baquedano-López, Solís, and Arrendondo, 2010, p. 342).

Research oriented towards a language socialization framework with Latino communities suggests diverse and dynamic approaches to parenting, approaches that are not universal among all Latinos, and that change over time (Zentella, 2005). Schecter and Bayley (2002) study Mexicans living in California and Texas, and make important points about the social aspects of language maintenance. The researchers found that families who reported successful transmission of bilingualism to their children spoke mostly, if not exclusively, in Spanish at home (ibid, 2002). Schecter and Bayley also found that
participants’ ideas about language maintenance were context-dependent both in terms of place and social connections to family and community (2002). Finally, Schecter and Bayley found that language maintenance was not a decision that was made once, but rather one that was constantly renegotiated and renewed (2002).

**Being bilingual**

In this section, I focus on students’ articulated understandings of bilingual speech or “Spanglish,” as they often call it, and their reflections on their own bilingual language practices. Students situate “Spanglish” as a common everyday practice in which they engage, but which they do not see as appropriate for “official” use. Students do not see translanguaging as the norm in bilingual speech, or as their right as speakers. Instead, students are guided by the norms of schools and of the dual language bilingual program in which they study, which strictly separates each of the languages by day. Thus, they interpret translanguaging as simply “Spanglish,” a corrupted version of what they should be speaking.

In an after-school session focused around examining students’ language practices, I asked students what they thought of such bilingual speech. After asking students to define “standard English” or “standard Spanish,” I asked the group if Spanglish is standard English or standard Spanish, and they answered “no” in chorus (Field notes, June 8, 2015). When I asked if this is a valid way of talking, Isabel said yes, but Monica responded no. I followed up with the question “Is it just as acceptable as speaking standard English or standard Spanish?” and several students respond no.
Isabel elaborates, “Not like at school and stuff, no.... In school they're trying to teach you like how to correctly speak these two languages, like let's say, they're trying to teach you how to speak Spanish correctly, and then English correctly, but when you mix those together, it's not correct but it's still a language; it's not standard, it's not a standard language, but it's still a language” (Field notes, June 8, 2015). Here Isabel explains the practice of translanguaging as a valid way to communicate, but explains its limits when it comes to school. Her description of the school “trying to teach you like how to correctly speak these two languages” demonstrates her internalization of the school’s focus on the languages as structures, and not language as a local practice, a concept asserted by Pennycook whereby, “languages are a product of the deeply social and cultural activities in which people engage” (2010, p. 1). In Pennycook’s reframing of language use, it becomes apparent that the school policy in which a community of people attempts to dramatically shift language practices according to an external schedule runs counter to the ways that communities use language in reality.

Monica responds to the same question, “Ok, so my mom says that Spanglish is nothing, that it's the wrong way to say it.... so whenever my mom says, whenever I speak like Spanglish... My mom says no, you cannot tell me like that, either you're speaking Spanish or English” (Field notes, June 8, 2015). Monica’s home experiences mimic Isabel’s school experiences; while both students use translanguaging, they both receive the message from home or school that the practice is not as acceptable as using a standard language form.

In the same session, after reading a blog defending the use of Spanglish, called "Spanglish: 'Right' or 'wrong'?" by Chantilly Patiño, on her blog "Bicultural familia," I bring
up an assumption that is called into question in the blog, that the only reason people speak this way is because they do not know “proper English” or “proper Spanish”. Edwin recalls an incident in which a “worker” was speaking to his mother about an apartment and moving between Spanish and English throughout the conversation. Edwin theorizes that the reason he does this is, “well probably he said it in Spanish cause my mom don’t know English” (Field notes, June 8, 2015). Edwin, then, recognizes an instance in which the language practices of the speaker are selected for the audience, and are not a result of simply not knowing one language or the other.

When I follow up by asking why they think others have a negative view of bilingual language practices, Isabel theorizes,

Well I’m pretty sure they have that negative view because ... to some people it’s not a language, so then to that person, that says it, they’re just like oh yeah you know what, they’re just speaking like that cause they don’t know the language. Like let’s say you go to like Brazil or something, and you know a little bit, you know a little bit of Portuguese, and then you’re from here, so then you’ll, you know you’ll stick in some English words, and then they’ll be like oh yeah they just don’t know how to speak it, but then you still know it, you just you’re so comfortable with English, that when you’re speaking Portuguese it just comes naturally. (June 8, 2015)

Isabel emphasizes how natural it is for bilingual people to use all their language practices when they communicate.

The data from the session above shows, on one hand, the insecure place of translanguaging in institutional or official capacities, and on the other, the very secure and real place that translanguaging has in students’ lives. This is an important consideration for dual language bilingual programs; while these programs strive to build on the community practices of their students, the findings here suggest that the strict language policy that separates the two languages is not the way students typically use language. This is further
corroborated in the data that follows, in which students describe their language practices in either language using qualifiers such as “mostly” or “usually,” showing a measure of flexibility in their interactions.

When asked how students used language, many reported using both English and Spanish with other bilinguals, including family, friends, and classmates, usually with an emphasis on one language or the other. Monica reports that with her sister, “we usually speak English and Spanish” with an emphasis on English, while with her parents, she speaks “...mostly in Spanish but like my dad is usually we speak both,” and with her friends “we’ll usually speak both languages” with an emphasis on English, except when they make a concerted effort to practice Spanish (Entry interview, May 27, 2015). At Sunday school, Monica reports usually speaking Spanish, while in school there is a greater emphasis on English, though “we will usually speak both languages. And either Spanish or English, but when it’s like English, English week, we speak English but when it’s Spanish week, we usually speak a little bit English, cause like sometimes we don’t know the words in Spanish so we say it in English.” (Entry interview, May 27, 2015)

Joanna also reports speaking a mix of English and Spanish at home, with an emphasis on Spanish. “I speak a lot of Spanish. Um I sometimes speak English with my mom, when it’s like about what we’re gonna eat” (Entry interview, May 13, 2015). Conversely, she mostly speaks English with her friends, though she reports using Spanish in certain scenarios, “With Angie when I argue with her and she gets like really annoying I would scream at her in Spanish.... With Yanetsy I would like not really scream at her because then she would pretend to cry. So I’ll just like say really annoying stuff to her in Spanish” (Entry interview, May 13, 2015).
Diana similarly describes using “mostly” English with her brother, “...with my brother we mostly talk English because he understands more English than Spanish” (Entry interview, May 27, 2015). When asked how she uses language with friends, Diana says, “With my friends I just use English because since our domain language is English and we understand more than Spanish we talk mostly that” while with her father, “I speak more Spanish with him because since he’s still learning [English]...” (Entry interview, May 27, 2015).

Isabel describes usually speaking English with her mom and brother, “So I usually speak English with my mom and my brother, but my mom wants me to speak more Spanish with her, but I speak a lot of Spanish when I’m with my father because a lot of them don’t know English so I have to speak Spanish” (Entry interview, May 20, 2015). She further reports mixing the languages more in contexts that require more Spanish than English, including speaking to a Spanish-dominant friend and when completing a lesson in Spanish (Entry interview, May 20, 2015).

Edwin likewise described bilingual language practices with friends and family, explaining that he uses “Spanish... and English too” at home, while with friends, he uses “English... with Spanish” (Entry interview, June 3, 2015). Talking about school, Jorge reports, “I get to speak both languages, not only English or Spanish, but both. Like in my house I speak both languages too” (Entry interview, May 18, 2015).

The selected examples above demonstrate the way most students in the study described their language use in their bilingual communities. Qualifiers such as “usually,” “mostly,” “sometimes,” “both,” and “too” indicate that students use translanguaging to communicate, usually with an emphasis on one language or the other depending on the
context. This finding is in keeping with recent research on translanguaging that indicates the fluid, flexible use of language practices in bilingual communities where they are not forced, as in school, to suppress the features of their linguistic repertoire that are not recognized as belonging to one language or another (García, 2009).

Further, the findings here support the notion that bilinguals are not typically balanced, but rather use their language practices according to the situations they find themselves in, based on what makes sense for the context, and based on their own and others’ linguistic practices and comfort levels with different language practices. Thus, this finding suggests that translanguaging is not a balanced act composed of 50% linguistic features of one language and 50% from another. Far from it. Instead, translanguaging happens with shifting emphases, and for shifting purposes. Some students reported using both languages with people who also knew both languages, such as siblings. Other students reported using translanguaging to aid communication in Spanish-dominant contexts where they felt less comfortable. In other instances, students made deliberate shifts in their language emphasis because parents requested that they practice Spanish, or because friend groups wanted to practice Spanish.

In these contexts, Spanish or English was not spoken exclusively, but rather was the language of emphasis. The way that we shift our weight from one foot to the other while standing on a moving subway train to maintain our balance, we might think about students shifting their linguistic “weight” from one set of language practices to the other based on contextual factors, but rarely abandoning either completely, rarely opting to stand on one foot. Likewise, maintaining equal weight on both feet would not allow for movement, but shifting weight as needed creates flexibility, and in this imbalance is where students find
their linguistic equilibrium. Later in this chapter, I talk about language policy and the potential of language policy to create desired shifts in language practices, particularly in regards to maintaining marginalized language practices. This metaphor will be useful, also, to think about the potential for school as a place where students have opportunities to learn and develop linguistic flexibility, as well as a possible space for Spanish-dominant language practices in their lives as they become potentially more immersed in mainstream American, English dominant cultural and linguistic practices outside of school and as they move on to high school.

**On “having to” speak Spanish**

In this section, I examine students’ articulated attitudes towards Spanish-dominant versus English-dominant contexts. Students report the difficulty of speaking monolingual Spanish and most refer to instances of speaking only Spanish as “having” to do so, in contrast to monolingual English, where the qualifier “have to” is absent and they simply “speak”.

While students talked about using exclusively English and using translanguaging or bilingual speech, it was instances in which students used exclusively Spanish that revealed the greatest contradictions. On one hand, six out of eleven students, in the entry interview, described having to speak Spanish in certain contexts, in contrast to simply speaking English. Of the five students that did not use this construction, three of them described challenges they have in completing their work during “Spanish time”. This finding suggests a disconnect between students’ abilities and the linguistic demands of Spanish-dominant spaces. On the other hand, many students expressed enthusiasm for these challenging
pedagogical spaces, and saw the structured policy as creating more opportunities for them to develop Spanish skills. At the same time, nearly all students described using both languages in these Spanish-dominant spaces in school, challenging the notion that they are Spanish-monolingual spaces as the school’s language policy would suggest.

In the conclusion of this section, I will argue that the findings of this study affirm what teachers in dual language bilingual programs already know – first, that most students are English-dominant and struggle in Spanish-dominant spaces, especially by middle school, when many of the students have been in the US their whole lives. And secondly, that Spanish-dominant spaces in dual language bilingual programs are not Spanish-monolingual spaces, but rather are spaces where mostly English-dominant students naturally use their entire linguistic repertoires to access the content and demands of the lessons. This finding suggests that a rethinking of language policy in dual language bilingual programs is necessary, 1. to meet the needs of the students, 2. to accurately reflect the language use in these spaces, and 3. to more effectively counter English hegemony in bilingual schools.

The table below outlines the instances in which students describe “having to” speak Spanish (bold emphasis mine).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Response in entry interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>With family: “...I speak a lot of Spanish when I’m with my father because um a lot of them don’t know English so I have to speak Spanish.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|         | With friends: “Um with Julia, I have to speak Spanish sometimes, but with most of my other friends, I have to speak -l speak English...”  
(May 20, 2015) |
| Diana   | Talking about her mom: “...since she doesn’t know that much English, I have to translate to, for |
her, when it’s some business, or when she doesn’t, when she needs me to translate it for her.”

Talking about her family in general:
“Well they um mostly use Spanish so when they talk Spanish, I also have to talk Spanish because they don’t know that much English.”
(May 27, 2015)

Monica
With friends, “try to” but also “have to” speak Spanish:
“...we always try to speak Spanish, like because Susana wants to get better in her Spanish, and Niya, so we always have this like week that we always have to speak Spanish, so yeah, so we help each other.”

With her mom:
“...with our mom, we have to speak Spanish so yeah.”
(May 27, 2015)

Luz
At home, at the dinner table:
“...the people that are there talk Spanish, so we have to talk in Spanish or sometimes me and my sister like to talk by ourselves and talk English.”
(May 20, 2015)

Yanetsy
In school during “Spanish time”:
“...you would have to speak ...well not, like when the teacher is leaving everyone speaks English, but like in class like when you answer questions you have to ... say it in Spanish.”
(May 27, 2015)

Chris
In school:
“Sarah: How do you use language at school? Like in the classroom. Chris: Uhh, it depends, like. When we have to talk Spanish, we talk, or if it’s English week then we talk.”
(May 18, 2015)

Jorge
Not of his own speech, but when speaking of teachers:
“Sarah: ...when it’s Spanish time, do people sometimes speak in English at the tables? Jorge: Yeah, to each other. But when the teacher’s asking them, they speak Spanish, cause the teachers all have to, the teachers also have to speak Spanish.”
(May 18, 2015)
Seven out of eleven students reference “having to” speak Spanish, six of them in reference to themselves, and one (Jorge) in reference to teachers. The other four students in the program do not use the construction “have to,” but three of them do report differences in completing schoolwork during “Spanish time”. The fourth student, Edwin, reports using a mix of Spanish and English in his class. Edwin is the only student participating in the after-school program from the self-contained special education classroom, but in that class, the teacher does not follow the same strict language policy that the general education classes in the school follow. It is interesting to note that he is the only student that does not reference “having to” speak Spanish nor does he report difficulties in completing schoolwork in either language, but rather talks about using both languages in all his interactions – at school, with family, and with friends.

The three students who do not use the phrase “have to” but do report differences in completing classwork during “Spanish time” are Tyler, Joanna, and Angie. Tyler reports that he must respond in Spanish at times during the school day:

Sarah: And how do you like use language in school, will you always follow the rules of the language?
Tyler: No. [A bit emphatically]. [Sarah laughs]. Like in Spanish like if I’m speaking to my friend I’ll speak English, but if the teacher asks me a question in Spanish I must respond in Spanish. (Entry interview, May 11, 2015).

Tyler also explains that his vocabulary is smaller in Spanish than in English, “Yeah cause English it’s like I can use so many words, then in Spanish, I have like not a small vocabulary, but not as big as English” (Entry interview, May 11, 2015).

When asked if she finds language harder in certain situations, Joanna responds, “When I’m explaining a Math problem, it’s like really hard in Spanish ’cause I don’t know
what to say and I barely speak Spanish, I rarely say Math stuff in Spanish, like um saying equations and stuff” (Entry interview, May 13, 2015). Angie also reports a tendency to speak more English than Spanish amongst peers, including during “Spanish time”:

Sarah: And how about in school, do you use the language according to the day or the class?

Angie: Um no. Well what what we used to do for like years like for example let’s say it’s writing and uh and it’s English time ... and everybody speaks English, but when it’s Spanish time, people speak English to themselves, but when but when the teacher’s like oh this kid come up and show this, the kid’s speaking in Spanish, and explaining everything, translating the thing that they said in English to the teachers, but in Spanish. (Entry interview, May 20, 2015)

When asked if the same happens during “English time,” Angie reports that students stick to English. When asked why she thought that was, she responded,

Because um a lot of these people were born in the English people environment, New York, and a lot of people wanna learn English, sometimes, some people, so they just speak English so they can train about it. And people who already know English just wanna speak English just because. They just feel like it. It’s more comfortable for them. (Angie Entry interview, May 20, 2015)

Spanish-dominant contexts that students described above included speaking to relatives who were predominantly Spanish-speaking, when speaking with Spanish-dominant friends, and “Spanish days” at their dual language bilingual school, where Spanish was expected to be spoken without any English features present. This finding suggests that most students who participated in this study were generally more comfortable using translanguaging or using only English for communication, and view Spanish-dominant settings as linguistically challenging. Despite this challenge, most students also highlighted the positive aspects of being bilingual, and when asked, had
positive reactions to using Spanish in school, even though it sometimes felt forced or stretched them beyond their comfort zone. In the next section, I will report on students’ reflections on the way we used language in the after-school program, particularly in regard to some students’ desire to have had designated Spanish-dominant spaces within the program.

**Reflecting on language use in the after-school program**

The findings in the section above reinforce what we already know –that oftentimes, US-born or US-raised Latino children are more comfortable speaking English or speaking bilingually. They, like virtually all bilinguals, are not balanced bilinguals, yet there are occasions in school, at home, and with friends that push them beyond their linguistic comfort zone. Yet, while these situations were challenging for some students, many saw value in the practice of creating Spanish-dominant spaces. Students reported learning more Spanish and being stretched to practice their Spanish in a way they may not otherwise.

I told students at the beginning of the study that there was no official language policy during the after-school program, or rather, that the policy was that they could use whatever language practices they wanted. This was a point that I brought up throughout the program as well. In students’ exit interviews, I asked them, “How did you feel being able to use whatever language you wanted during the program?” As a follow up question, I asked them how they would have liked a language policy that mirrored the language policy in school, rather than simply being allowed to speak how they wanted. While many students used bilingual speech throughout the program while talking in small groups and occasionally in the interview process, the space was decidedly English-dominant. In asking
this question, I was curious to know how students felt about having greater linguistic freedom. Their responses instead typically reflected their comfort levels in Spanish-dominant spaces.

When asked about language use during the after-school program, Jorge responded that the open language policy of the program was “good,” but when asked if alternating languages would have been better, he responds, “Yeah, that would be kind of better….so like one week of English could be good, so then and one week of Spanish would be, too. So people can practice their, their like, they can pronounce the words correct in English or in Spanish (Exit interview, June 26, 2015). At the beginning of the program, when asked how he feels going to a bilingual school, Jorge responded, “I get to speak both languages, not only English or Spanish, but both. Like in my house I speak both languages too” (Entry interview, May 18, 2015). Jorge was the only student who described “getting to” speak both languages –in other words, he saw his attending a bilingual school as a privilege. For a student like Jorge, then, having a free-form policy meant not getting to participate in Spanish-dominant spaces in the program.

Diana, when asked how she felt about the language policy in the after-school program, said, “Well... I talked mostly in English because well, English is my main language and um, and I was born here.... And also because most of us in the class also knew more English” (Exit interview, June 25, 2015). When asked if she would have preferred an alternating language policy in the after-school program, said, “Maybe because well, since I know a lot of Spanish and also English it might be preferable to me but for others it might not be” (Exit interview, June 25, 2015). In both of her statements, Diana demonstrates an understanding that the language used in a given context depends not only on her
preferences, but also the preferences of others. In the case of the after-school program, Diana explains why the group spoke English in part by noting that most students were more comfortable in English. In discussing an alternative, she recognizes that using Spanish more in the after-school program may have been preferable to her but not to others. The linguistic choices she makes, real or imagined, demonstrate her perception of the after-school program, and group of students who attended, as being English-dominant.

Explaining that part of her rationale for speaking English in the after-school program was that she was born in the US points to English not only being a linguistic preference but an identity marker as a US American. However, Diana also states a preference for an alternating language policy that would have allowed her to use more of her Spanish language practices. This complexity is indicative of the borderlands that Diana navigates as she makes linguistic choices, and highlights that linguistic choices are not simply synonymous with linguistic ability.

Monica’s response to the questions about the after-school program’s language policy demonstrate her use of both languages, as well as a recognition on her part that others may not be as dexterous in both languages. An excerpt of her exit interview transcript (June 25, 2015) is below:

Sarah: How did you feel being able to use whatever language you wanted during the program?

Monica: It felt good. Like, mostly, like, Diana, she mostly speaks Spanish. So we will be like talking English and then talking Spanish, so it could be just like back and forth.

Sarah: Would you have felt different about the program, you think, if we were doing, like one day English, one day Spanish? Like that?
Monica: Yeah, I'd feel different. Like, cause mostly, like everyone speaks English. So yeah, they mostly don't speak Spanish.

Sarah: Mm-hmm. How about for you personally, would you have found it different or would it have felt-

Monica: Well, no. Because like, my mom makes me speak Spanish at home.

Sarah: Mm-hmm.

Monica: Yeah. She says I don't want you speaking English to me. [Both laugh.] So, yeah.

Sarah: So you think you, how does that make it different for you if we were to do like, one day English, one day Spanish?

Monica: Um.

Sarah: Like, compared to some of the other people in the class.

Monica: Like, like other people from the class will say oh my god I want to do only English. I don't want to do Spanish.

Sarah: Mm-hmm.

Monica: But, I just, I just, I already didn't, care...

Sarah: Did you find yourself speaking mostly in English during the program?

Monica: Yeah. Kind of.

Sarah: And why do you think that is? Like, looking back on it.

Monica: Like, we spoke with different, well, we mostly speak, spoke, um, English and Spanish, so yeah, but I will mainly speak with a group of like, Diana and, and my sister and Jorge we'll speak Spanish.

Sarah: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Monica: So yeah.

Sarah: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So in the program, you were finding like if you and Diana and Jorge and your sister were speaking, you would speak mostly in Spanish?

Monica: Yeah.
Monica’s description of the way she and some of the other students used Spanish during the program suggests that Spanish-dominant speech was marginalized by the “choose-your-own-language” policy. Thus, no language policy more readily translated into a de facto English-dominant policy. Though not much has been written on this subject in the context of dual language bilingual middle school programs, anecdotally many teachers would corroborate this finding. Nevertheless, English dominance in dual language bilingual programs is an area of study critically in need of attention. Especially as programs are increasing in popularity among monolingual English-dominant families, the issue of English-dominant language practices overpowering Spanish-dominant ones needs recognition and further understanding.

At the same time, while the policy was de facto English-dominant, the flexibility built into the language policy of the program allowed Monica and others to use all of their language practices throughout, and as Monica says above, they did this during small group conversations. This finding might guide larger conversations about language policy in bilingual schools; encouraging translanguage in English-dominant spaces could be a powerful way to resist English hegemony and to ensure that Spanish-dominant and more balanced bilinguals have as many opportunities as possible to access all of their linguistic resources.

In contrast to Monica, Diana, and Jorge, who felt as comfortable in Spanish-dominant contexts as they did in English-dominant ones, Yanetsy reported feeling less comfortable in Spanish-dominant situations, but nonetheless supported the idea of an alternating language policy rather than the open language policy that was enacted. First, Yanetsy
explains that the open language policy, “was pretty good because I don’t really speak Spanish that much. Because I, like I don’t really understand it that much anymore...” (Exit interview, June 26, 2015). However, when asked how she would have felt if we had an alternating language policy like in school, she responds (Exit interview, June 26, 2015):

Yanetsy: I think it would’ve felt different because it’s almost like, we’re doing everything bilingual, so then it’s like we have one whole week just English and then one week of Spanish, and then there’s like there’s more, probably more interesting things going on in different languages.

Sarah: Mmm, so in a way you think it would have been better to do one week English, one week Spanish?

Yanetsy: Yeah.

Yanetsy noted that the language practices of the program would have changed, from her standpoint, as well as the content, and she notes that there are “probably more interesting things going on in different languages” (June 26, 2015). In this sense, according to Yanetsy, opening up the language policy led to the program being an English-dominant space, which in turn limited the content of the conversation, and relegated the program to content that fit within a certain set of cultural practices associated with English-dominant language practices. As Becker notes, learning a new language is tantamount to learning “a new way of being in the world” (1995, p. 227). Likewise, Yanetsy’s observation points to consciously creating Spanish-dominant spaces in school as a powerful way to connect to students’ cultural practices, family histories, and ways of being in the world.

Some students, like Yanetsy, felt that Spanish-dominant spaces in school were challenging but useful for reasons ranging from accessing content not available in English to developing their linguistic repertoires and providing them an important skill. Other
students reported feeling just as comfortable in Spanish-dominant spaces, and therefore reported that they would have preferred to have a language policy in the after-school program that mirrored the alternating model of the school. Yet these students spoke mostly English during the program. They silently understood that that was the preference of the majority, and acquiesced.

Thus, “Spanish time” at the dual language bilingual school also becomes a protected space for students who are as strong, or stronger, in their Spanish language practices as they are in English. The policy creates an official space where, regardless of preferred language practices, all students are asked to use Spanish-dominant language practices, even as the practice may go against the social grain for some English-dominant students. This suggests an additional reason to protect Spanish-dominant spaces in bilingual schools – not only for the benefit of students who feel they need the practice or for the continued sustainability of their bilingualism, but also for students who feel confident in Spanish-dominant spaces.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examine students’ articulated understandings of translanguaging and bilingual language practices, their qualification of “having to” use Spanish in Spanish-dominant contexts, and finally their interest in protected Spanish-dominant pedagogical settings. Findings demonstrate that student use language bilingually, with one language usually being more dominant than the other, though the language of dominance varies according to many factors, including the student, the setting, and the language preferences of others. For these students, just as they are not balanced bilinguals, nor is
translanguaging a balanced act. Rather, students speak of situations where they use mostly Spanish or usually use English.

When schools, particularly dual language bilingual programs, are faced with the question of allowing translanguaging into their official language policy, many educators and administrators I have spoken with are fearful of the carefully cultivated pedagogical spaces devolving into chaos. However, students’ reported languaging practices would suggest otherwise.

Students’ language practices as described here would more closely align to a language policy of “English-dominant” or “Spanish-dominant” spaces, rather than “English-only” or “Spanish-only,” as they are currently designated in traditional dual language bilingual programs, as well as in other classroom settings. Language-dominant spaces instead of language-only would provide the structure needed for students and teachers alike to engage meaningfully, plan accordingly, and protect minoritized language practices, in this case, Spanish, from being overwhelmed by English. Further, such spaces would recognize and institutionally value the actual language practices of students and communities, and protect them, rather than protecting the structure of English or the structure of Spanish for their own sake. At the same time, language-dominant spaces would still allow students to learn the standard forms of the language; the critical difference would be that they would be able to do so using their entire linguistic repertoire.

The findings here also have important implications for how educators and researchers think of bilingual youth. Though current research recognizes that bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one, the language practices of many bilingual programs still approach bilingual education from the position of teaching two languages. This has further
implications in the subjectivities that are then created in those monolingual classrooms, as we imagine students as English speakers or Spanish speakers. In reality, they are precisely neither, but rather are bilingual speakers. Thus, students’ repeated description of “having to” speak Spanish is not just a linguistic hurdle, but also may be incongruent with their self-perceptions. In other words, students may have stronger identities as bilingual speakers, and as English speakers if they are English-dominant, but not necessarily identify as Spanish speakers.

Finally, the policy suggestions here cannot be implemented from the top down. Carol Boyce Davies says, “'Taking space means moving out into areas not allowed... *in which the dancer negotiates the road*, creating space, as in the Trinidad verbalized, 'give me room'. In this particular context, the dancer is able to negotiate among a variety of other dancers; his/her own particular dance space”' (Davies, 1998, as quoted in Henry, 2011, p. 274).

Davies’ idea of taking or creating space is itself a constitutive act; in this context, school language policy is decided for students rather than students making active choices about how they will participate linguistically in school. Spanish-only spaces may be dissonant with their identities, but at the same time, they do articulate a desire for Spanish-dominant spaces. Thus, how could greater input from middle school students regarding the language policy of the school shape their experience of it? Student input could include:

1. Having conversations about a language policy that has already been decided
2. Having a beginning-of-the-year conversation with students about larger structures that have already been decided, but leaving room for students to put forth some ideas for micro structures
3. Deciding as a community to commit to bilingualism at the beginning and periodically throughout the school year, by collectively creating and signing a pledge
4. Creating space in the curriculum for the local history of bilingual education
5. Creating a research project around the bilingualism of the community, in which students learn their own histories and articulate for themselves their desired present and future language practices

In conclusion, Spanish-dominant spaces serve a clear purpose in terms of creating space for students’ minoritized language practices. English-dominant spaces have a less clearly defined role in terms of social justice aims, though since most youth who grow up in the US are English-dominant, these spaces could potentially create linguistically comfortable places for these students. However, what is not clear is the need for Spanish-\textit{only} or English-\textit{only} spaces. Such spaces do not allow for flexible language practices, on paper, yet based on the findings of this study, flexible languaging happens anyway. Recognizing this reality and building on it as a strength, bringing it into the conversation instead of leaving it in the shadows as an unspoken truth, allows us to think of organized ways to implement policy that would allow for, and maximize on, such practices. If we rethought dual language bilingual programs as schools that created English-dominant and Spanish-dominant spaces, as well as space for students to choose their language practices freely, we could open up the possibility of teaching youth how to recognize and negotiate their own languaging and how to make conscientious choices, instead of imposing a policy that removes school-sanctioned student agency from the development of language practices in the community.
Chapter 6

“Why didn’t she ask for help?”: Translating for monolingual English speakers

Introduction

This chapter focuses on youth as translators, and students’ experiences and articulated desire to use their bilingualism specifically to translate for monolingual English speakers. This is a reversal of much of the literature on this topic, which positions students as helpful to family members in navigating various English-speaking institutions. By reconceiving of this practice as helpful towards English speakers, and by expanding the contexts in which students typically translate, students put forth an alternate paradigm about bilingualism in the US, in which the bilingual student is in a position of power and possesses a valuable resource that benefits society as a whole. In imagining themselves outside the context of family interactions and deficit notions of their Spanish-speaking relatives, and at the same time re-imagining the English monolingual as deficient, students invert the power dynamics that locate deficiency in the Spanish speaker.

After a brief review of the literature on students as language brokers, I will re-theorize the notion that bilingual youth are translators for Spanish-speakers, by recognizing the power dynamics inherent in such a framing as it perpetuates a deficit view of Spanish speakers while failing to recognize the monolingualism of the English speakers in the interaction. This chapter considers, then, both the ways in which traditional framings of this phenomenon privilege English speakers, as well as how students’ reframing of translation as being helpful to English-speakers can be understood as a form of resistance and a re-shaping of the linguistic power dynamics present in their daily lives.
Language brokering

Just as students navigate physical borders between multiple countries, they also navigate linguistic borders in US communities where multiple languages are spoken and individuals use a variety of language practices to varying degrees. For bilingual Latino adolescents with family members attempting to navigate monolingual spaces, this may mean becoming language brokers. Martinez, McClure, and Eddy (2009) refer to language brokers as, “intermediaries between the cultural and linguistic divides that separate their families from the host culture” (p. 72). They cite earlier work of Tse (1995); Cohen, Moran-Ellis, & Smaje (1999); Orellana, Dorner, & Pulido (2003); and McQuillan & Tse (1995) that reveals children as language brokers in situations ranging from health care visits, parent-teacher conferences, and visits to the bank (ibid).

Martinez, McClure, and Eddy (2009) further the discussion on language brokering by examining the process not from an individual, cognitive standpoint, but one that “emphasizes the family constellation and regards brokering as a dialectical and dynamic interactional process” (p. 89). Orellana (2009) also emphasizes the importance of context in considering the ways that children navigate numerous interactions as translators for their parents and families in Translating childhoods: Immigrant youth, language, and culture, noting that one teen’s work as a translator “both shaped and was shaped by the routine practices of her household,” and also “both forged and was forged by her family’s circumstances as immigrants to the United States” (p. 2). In this way, the work of translation is both highly situated and itself constitutive in shaping context.

Both positive and negative effects of language brokering have been documented. Malakoff and Hakuta (1991) and Valdés (2003) document the positive effects of this role
for children, including strengthened metalinguistic and interpersonal skills. Likewise, DeMent and Buriel (1999) and Valdés, Chavez, and Angelelli (2003) cite students’ pride at being able to assist their families. Documented negative effects include the stress on children as they navigate the challenges of translation, increased responsibility, and a reversal of parent-child roles (Umuña-Taylor, 2003; DeMent & Buriel, 1999; McQuillan & Tse, 1995).

Orellana’s (2009) work on language brokering focuses on the invisibility of the language brokering of children, and by extension, the invisibility that children often experience in an adult world. By focusing on these practices, Orellana (2009) draws out stories in which “children emerge as actors and agents in a full range of institutional contexts, not just as schooled and domesticated objects of adults’ socialization efforts,” exposing the socially constructed nature of the typical generational hierarchy that positions children and youth at the bottom, the most voiceless, the least respected, the least knowing (p. 3). However, while Orellana alternates between framing translation as youth translating for their families to youth mediating between adults, ultimately her main focus is on the role of the bilingual child in the immigrant household, and as a secondary focus, what this role means for the development of the child, with little discussion of the work bilingual youth do for English speakers and English-speaking institutions when they translate (Orellana, 2009, p. 5). I hope that the research presented here will extend this work, and demonstrate the myriad ways in which students exercise agency not just in their actions but also in the framing of what they do.
Reframing translation – who needs help and why

A theme that emerged first in the entry interviews, then developed throughout the after-school program, was the students’ desire to use their bilingualism to be helpful in US society, not only to monolingual Spanish speakers but also to monolingual English speakers. As elaborated above, most literature has focused on how children in immigrant families are helpful to relatives who do not speak English, translating for parents at doctor’s appointments, translating communications from the school, or answering telephone or house calls from monolingual English speakers (Orellana, 2009). While this prior work is foundational in its focus on children as language brokers, it lacks a critical discussion of the deficit paradigm that assumes such work to be for the benefit of the monolingual Spanish speaker but not the monolingual English speaker, or English-speaking institution. However, framing the translation work of bilingual youth as being for the benefit of the Spanish speaker but omitting the benefits of this service for the English speaker reinforces the hegemonic power of English and positions Spanish speakers from a deficit perspective. Further, little is written about monolingual English speakers’ needs in interactions with bilingual communities, and how Latino adolescents understand that need in relation to themselves and the linguistic skills they possess. The findings in this chapter suggest that students wish to position themselves not only in relation to their families, but also in relation to the larger US society. Reframing translation, then, is not only a way of giving students the recognition they deserve, but also of positioning them differently, socially and economically.

As I mention above, the issue is partially one of framing – rather than seeing the youth translator as indispensable to the monolingual English-speaking teacher, doctor, or
telemarketer, the child is framed as useful to the parent, and the parent is framed as the participant in the interaction in need of help, the one who lacks the linguistic skills necessary for the interaction. There is little recognition in academic literature that the English-speaking individuals and institutions attempting to reach Spanish-dominant households in these interactions lack the skills to do so. Locating the deficit in the Spanish-dominant family serves to maintain the status quo—it positions English as the natural language to know, while Spanish is positioned simply as an inconvenience and the Spanish-dominant subject is viewed not for the linguistic skills they possess, but rather the ones they lack. The burden of understanding is placed on the family, which relieves both public and private institutions such as schools, health care companies, hospitals, and other businesses from the responsibility (and the potential added expense) of hiring a bilingual professional for the office.

However, many students in the study framed bilingual translation differently, viewing monolingual English-speaking Americans as being in need of help, and viewing themselves as well positioned to help them. Further, the interactions students imagined were different than previously documented scenarios in which youth help family. The scenarios they imagined took place between themselves and friends, at school among peers, and at Spanish-speaking restaurants for monolingual English-speaking customers. The power dynamics were shifted as well, as bilingual students imagined and positioned themselves as knowledgeable experts to monolingual English speakers. In other words, students were interested in being positioned as bilingual experts in relation to monolingual English-speaking Americans, and also lamented instances that they viewed as missed opportunities to be in such a position.
There were several instances in which youth expressed their frustration at not being viewed as English-speakers, particularly by monolingual English speakers. For instance, Diana wrote of a time when she encountered tourists in Ecuador who were insulting Ecuadorians in English, explaining, “...but then I knew English so I directed them and insulted them for calling Ecuadorians horrible things. This experience made me feel angry and very useful for the fact that I know two languages and I understood what they were telling us and frustrated because they thought no one can speak English” (Student notebook, May 27, 2015).

Students also expressed pride at being able to translate for English speakers. Monica relates that she and a small group of her friends designate weeks to try to speak mainly in Spanish to one another. In this instance, she takes on the role of expert as two of the participants in this group are learning Spanish as an additional language, while Monica explains that the other Mexican American in the group is not as proficient in Spanish as she is. In relating this example, Monica expresses pride in her knowledge of Spanish, but also that she can help her friends (Entry interview, May 27, 2015).

The incidents briefly described above are meant to illustrate the varying contexts in which students help English speakers through their bilingual abilities or assert their bilingual identities to monolingual English-speakers. Next, I have focused on one event as a detailed case study that illustrates the disjuncture between some students’ lived experiences and their imagined possibilities as bilingual translators. In what follows, I recount Luz’s story of a white, monolingual English-speaking American woman who came into a Mexican restaurant and was unable to communicate her order to the staff. Luz wanted to intercede and help translate for the woman, but before she could do so, the
woman yelled at the staff that they should learn English and stormed out. What follows is an excerpt from the entry interview in which Luz first explains the incident, followed by a description of a class session a week later in which Luz writes about the incident and acts it out with classmates, culminating in a group discussion. After describing these events, I theorize on the ways Luz and the other students understand the dynamics of the event, and how their understandings are linked to language, race, ethnicity, and class, as well as how they re-position themselves in the skit and in the group discussion. Below is an excerpt from Luz’s entry interview, May 20, 2015:

Sarah: Have you ever seen someone get treated badly because of how they speak or because of the language that they speak?

Luz: Yeah, one time I was in a restaurant there was this … woman that she didn’t know Spanish and everyone that worked there was, knew Spanish so she was like screaming at them because they couldn't understand nothing, so they, like she just left and no one could help her.

Sarah: Wow what did you think about that?

Luz: That that was really rude because she should at least ask for someone to translate it for her.

Sarah: Mm hmm. So who did you think was being rude?

Luz: The woman that was ordering ‘cause like she knew that the woman there didn't understand so why didn't she ask for help?

Sarah: Mm. And what kind, do you remember what kind of things she was saying?

Luz: Yeah she was ordering a burrito and she didn’t want specific things and the woman didn’t really understand what she really, what she want.

Sarah: And then the woman started yelling?

Luz: Yeah.
Sarah: Do you remember what kind of things she was yelling?

Luz: Yeah like why don’t you like listen, like you should learn English, and she just left.

It was one week later when I asked students to respond to the prompt that I described in Chapter 4: “Reflect on an experience you had that was related to one of these things that made you feel bad or uncomfortable.” Then I listed, "language, race, ethnicity (and I explained that this could mean their country of origin or their family's country of origin), immigration, or wealth/ money”. I told students they did not have to write about every factor listed, but could choose one or several to write about. I mentioned Luz’s story as an example of what one could write about, and Luz chose to write about that instance. She wrote:

One day I was in a Mexican store and I saw a white woman go inside. She tried to order a burrito but the people that were working there did not understand. The woman was mad and started screaming at the workers and left really mad. Everyone there were really mad of what the woman did. I think that was an insult to the workers. * (Student notebook, May 27, 2015)
*Minor spelling errors corrected for readability.

After writing, I offered students the option to either draw a picture to accompany their story, or to act out their story for the class. A group of three students chose to act out Luz’s story. As they prepared their skits, I went around to each group and asked them how they would re-imagine the ending. Students then had the option to perform the actual ending to the story, or the imagined version. Luz’s group performed the story with a reimagined ending, in which Luz approaches the woman’s table after the woman begins to yell at the waitress. Luz successfully translates for her in the reimagined scene, though the woman still stalks out of the restaurant.
When Luz relived this event in the after-school space, part of that reliving became reimagining the possibilities, and merging the reality of what happened with the desire and vision of the student. Her vision was not that everyone speak the same language, but that she be afforded opportunities to be a facilitator between monolinguals. In this sense, her fantasy, her reimagining, is that the larger society perceive her the way she sees herself, and recognize her reality –as a bilingual facilitator who can make a bilingual world function even when not everyone is bilingual. At the same time, the unequal power dynamics between English and Spanish in the US context mean that Luz is not simply a liaison between two worlds. She

1. Lives in the borderlands and brings that space literally into the dialogue between two worlds of the Spanish and English monolinguals
2. Refuses the power dynamics embedded within the monolingual white woman’s speech, and instead shifts power dynamics as she becomes a critical player in the success of the interaction
3. Reasserts the privileged place of Spanish in that space –the Mexican restaurant is a space where Spanish should have greater status than English

At the same time, in the reimagined play, Luz translates for the woman as she had wanted to do, but she does not change anything else –she does not make the white woman polite, nor does she imagine that she stays to eat. This may be because for Luz, the important part was that she be seen in a different light, not that the woman change her behavior; alternatively, it could be that Luz did not think she could change the woman’s behavior, or that it did not occur to her to want that to change. Regardless of her reasoning, the shift that Luz made in her play shows a shift in her role but not a shift in the landscape.
As educators, our job then is not only to offer students opportunities to reimagine their roles in the world, but also to teach them how to reimagine the world itself as a way to create space for the kinds of people students want to become.

The world that the white woman communicated when she entered the Mexican restaurant was a world rooted in English hegemony. Her monolingual English words in a clearly Spanish-dominant space, coupled with her choice to leave rather than seek help from those around her, communicated a dominant discourse of entitlement to speak English anywhere in the US, and could be understood as a form of resisting the reality of language diversity in the US. Many aspects of the place would have communicated that she had entered a Spanish-dominant space – the language of the signs posted, the speech of the customers and the employees, perhaps the music or the décor, and so on.

At the same time, her failure to seek someone out around her who might be able to translate suggested to Luz that she expected that it was a Spanish-only place, and bilingualism did not fit into her paradigm of what was possible in that place. Either that or the message she wished to send was her entitlement to order in English. It is impossible to know why the woman became irate when the employee she was speaking with did not understand her request; however, for Luz, this is an important moment in her understanding of her bilingual identity. This woman made her feel invisible as a bilingual – her English abilities were invisible to the woman, rendering her, as a whole, complete person, invisible. This woman’s failure to see Luz for what she had to offer became an act of oppression as Luz was denied the ability to express her full humanity.

As mentioned above, Luz expresses more regret that the woman did not allow her to help than she does over the woman’s outburst or lack of Spanish skills. This is important in
considering the impact of hegemonic language practices on bilingual US Latinos, and in particular, on the adolescent development of Latino middle schoolers. Luz experiences the woman’s actions personally, and maybe feels her identity being pushed in a direction that is not congruent with the way she sees herself by the woman’s refusal of her help, or by the woman’s assumption that no one who looked like Luz could help (because she may assume that everyone that looks Mexican only speaks Spanish).

This incident demonstrates a deficit view of Spanish at work in contrast to the hegemonic power of English, and shows how those dynamics worked to deny Luz a position of privilege by helping the woman. At the same time, the woman’s behavior towards the staff but also her blindness to see or her refusal to accept help from Luz reinforced her position of power. The woman’s actions suggest a belief that the staff should have known English, but at the same time, the bilingual knowledge of Luz was ignored. By refusing the help from Luz, the woman denied her the opportunity to use her bilingualism in a way that would have disrupted the power dynamics between the languages, and by extension, the communities. This denial served to reinforce the status quo on multiple levels. First, that English monolingual speakers have the right to enter any space and be spoken to in English, and to be understood in English. Second, that monolingual Spanish speakers are the ones that need help, not monolingual English speakers.

Pennycook suggests that the idea of language as a local practice be used not to simply document and describe local language practices, but “to understand the material and political consequences of language use” (2010, p. 32). In this case, the larger issues of power and dominance were resident within the linguistic interaction. Therefore, naming
interactions such as these with youth holds the potential for youth to locate, in their everyday lives, moments of oppression and moments of resistance and action.

My question then, is how can an educational program take incidents such as these and offer a space for students to regain, reshape, and assert their identity and their reality in situations where they are positioned in ways that are not only incongruous with their identities but also cast them in an inferior light? This incident speaks to Luz, and tells her personally, in the framing of Therborn, what is good, what is possible, and what exists (1980).

1. What does it say to her? How might power-imbued interactions like this one that center around language have a real, material impact on students’ feelings of self-worth, their identity as Americans, their attitudes towards being bilingual?

2. How can a critical curriculum take this incident, and change the answers to those questions that this incident asserted? How does talking about an event and reimagining it shift participants’ realities, as well as what they see as “what is good, what is possible, and what exists” for themselves?

Creating space to reimagine what is possible

One of my central questions of this research study is what a space such as the one built in this after-school program can offer by way of opportunities for youth to become self-actualized. In this instance, the experience of talking about this event and acting it out gives Luz the opportunity to not only process but to revise what happened, and to be in a supportive environment where others agreed with her assessment of the situation. The conversation below that followed Luz's play shows some of the potential of such a space to
build solidarity among peers while they make sense of one student’s negative experience and connect it to other experiences in their lives. In the excerpt below, Luz begins by recapping the event (May 27, 2015):

Luz: What I did was uh, what really happened was that I was [acting as] the waitress that was trying to help to take her order but she didn't really understand Spanish, and I didn't understand English, so she started screaming at me, so yeah. And then her [Diana], that was supposed to be me, she tried to help but she didn't really care, so she left.

Sarah: What do you think about the way that the woman was acting?

Yanetsy: Rude.

Angie: Yeah.

Fer: She should be patient.

Jorge: No she shouldn't. Well she's... Maybe she might be really hungry and then she might die.

Luz: Jorge she's rich!

Following the conversation above, I asked students if they thought an English-speaking person who goes to a Spanish-speaking restaurant should be able to order in English. One student responded that the restaurant could have a translator, and another said that the customer should use Google translate to make their order. At this point, students imitated how a white person would sound attempting to read Spanish from Google translate and laughed.

Building on the conversation around the appropriateness of different languages in different spaces, I asked students why they thought most of the signs in their neighborhood were in English when most people there speak Spanish (this was a phenomenon they
observed on a neighborhood walk we had taken previously). Angie said she thought it was because this is the United States. Luz offered that the person who is the owner of the space might tell people renting the space that it has to be in English because it’s the United States. Isabel likewise thought stores are mostly in English because the people who bought the stores speak English. Yanetsy shared a friend’s experience of someone telling her she had to learn English because she is in America and said she did not know why the US held that attitude, “speak English if you come!” Yanetsy went on to cite America’s freedom of speech as a reason to embrace many languages, not just English (From after-school session on May 27, 2015). This conversation clearly connects students’ understanding of English as the language of power, but at the same time, Yanetsy’s comment at the end of the conversation recognizes the potential incongruence of English hegemony with American constitutional rights.

Beginning with Luz’s story of the white woman in the Mexican restaurant, and in the re-imagined play and group discussion that ensued, there were several moments in which Luz and her peers both examined and reimagined the intersecting dynamics of race, ethnicity, class, and language. On the one hand, the white woman’s refusal to ask for help or try to speak Spanish constitutes her refusal to accept spaces of inverted power relations, her refusal to engage in spaces of local practice different from the dominant norms of white, middle class, English-speaking Americans, and her enacted desire to subordinate local language practices to the dominant norm. However, in the after-school program, students were able to subvert this dynamic on several occasions.

The first inversion of this power dynamic is through their reenactment of the event, in which Luz gives herself the opportunity to translate. A second inversion takes place in
the conversation that follows the play, in which students imagine alternate scenarios, one being that white monolingual English speakers can use Google translate to order in Spanish. When the students imitate how white people might sound attempting to use Google translate, they subvert white supremacy and English supremacy, and put forth a scenario in which the lack of Spanish ability is exposed and highlighted, rather than the lack of English ability as was the case in the actual unfolding of events. Their laughter at these imagined Google translate attempts, then, is not at all cruel, but rather is subversive and empowering as they reclaim their bilingual abilities and reimagine themselves in a position of strength, and white monolinguals in a position of weakness.

Finally, in bringing this conversation into a classroom space, we took an unofficial youth discourse and invited it into an official, semi-public space. What is the effect of this on the power dynamics resident in such interactions? What is the effect of the experience of making this hidden transcript part of an official school discourse for these specific students? This can be a way of thinking about everyday actions as activism, as well as the importance of the embodied experience of resisting structural inequality.

Students were well aware of larger issues of inequality that were underlying the event described in Luz’s play, and were able to name these issues and also connect them to other experiences. One such moment is when Jorge suggests that since the woman did not accept help, maybe she would starve. Jorge’s comment attempts to re-position the white woman as being in need, and having denied the help, suggests that she might face grave consequences. Luz replies in an incredulous voice, “Jorge, she’s rich!” Luz reads social class and privilege in the woman’s white skin and English language practices.
Further, Luz’s response to Jorge makes clear her understanding that there will be no grave consequences for this woman by leaving the restaurant without food. By contrast, Spanish-speaking families are in danger of losing access to critical resources such as education, health care, tax refunds, job opportunities, and housing if they do not have a bilingual translator. The stakes are high for them, and stand in sharp contrast to the low stakes of not knowing Spanish for the monolingual English speaker who storms out of the restaurant but will not starve as a result of doing so. And, while students felt that being bilingual would provide an edge in the job market, they also communicated an understanding of the need for monolingual Spanish-speaking Latinos to learn English if they want to access wealth in the US and participate fully in the economy.

At the same time, while Jorge’s conjecture would likely not play out in reality, his statement can also be seen as a way of asserting a desire –not that the woman will starve, but that Spanish language practices be consequential for monolingual English-speaking Americans, and that specifically the bilingual skills that he and his peers have to offer be consequential. His statement, then, highlights the unequal power dynamics between the languages, and also recognizes the material consequences of such power dynamics for non-English speakers.

The students’ exchange suggests that they view the woman who stormed out of the restaurant as being in a position of power, and indeed she is. The position of white monolingual English speakers is reinforced by the many places they frequent physically, online, on the television, etc. The places they go speak to them, and every time English is spoken, and they communicate in English, a larger discourse is spoken behind those words, what Gee calls “Big ‘D’ Discourse” (2011). English utterances do not just communicate their
message at face value –“I’d like to order a burger,” or “Have those papers to me by noon.” They also communicate, construct, and reinforce the value of English in the US. For this woman who walked into the restaurant, then, the worker’s inability to communicate with her in English may have been a disruption of her habitus, but more importantly, it was a disruption of the underlying message she receives in most other spaces she occupies –that her language is good, is universal, is accepted everywhere, and will give her access to what she wants. Her refusal of Luz’s help, then, is also a refusal to bend the dominant discourse that says that English is the law of the land, and no other language will be acceptable.

English-dominant discourse is also evident in the signage in the neighborhood, with most business names being in English, although the employees and customers are often Spanish-speaking or bilingual. The privilege associated with English emerged in students’ explanations of why the signs might be in English, with several students speculating that the owners were English-speaking and thus mandated that the signs be in English. The privilege of the language was then associated in students’ minds with the privilege of business ownership and wealth.

What do the power dynamics between English, Spanish, and bilingual language practices mean for Latino adolescents as they navigate their place in US society? The dominance of English in the US has material consequences for bilingual students. Economically speaking, bilingualism may benefit some in the job market, but for many jobs, English proficiency, along with the ability to navigate largely white, middle class norms, are more important. As long as languages other than English continue to be marginalized, jobs that require those linguistic skills will also risk marginalization in the economy, as many jobs requiring bilingual skills are low-level, rather than managerial or leadership positions.
Implications

The findings outlined here have several important implications. First, these events demonstrate students’ desire to use their bilingual language practices for the benefit of monolingual English speakers. This does not involve recognition or praise, but rather a re-positioning that raises the status of their linguistic skillset in relation to monolingual English speakers.

Secondly, these findings offer a possible blueprint for going about changing unequal power dynamics in students’ lives – by creating opportunities for Latino bilingual youth to exercise their bilingual abilities for the benefit of non-Spanish speakers. This would partly be a reframing of the translation work students already do, and recognizing that when bilingual youth translate, they are benefiting English monolinguals as well. It would also be an expansion of the way students use their bilingual skills to include opportunities to assist peers and opportunities to translate for English monolinguals in Spanish-dominant spaces.

Third, as mentioned above, there is a need for a shift in the framing of bilingual youth translators – failing to recognize the service they provide to monolingual English speakers relegates their skills to the free help that children offer their parents or family members, when actually it should be viewed as just as critical to the institution or business for whom they are translating. This shift in framing opens up real job opportunities that have the potential to change the material conditions of US Latino communities.

Fourth, these findings highlight an important way that the devaluing of Spanish limits the opportunities of bilingual youth and reinforces their marginalization and oppression in the US. By denying that youth offer an important skill that would benefit monolingual English speakers as well as Spanish speakers, youth are also denied the
opportunity to exercise their full ability to contribute to the economy, to society, and to the overall betterment of the country. Mainstream discourses position immigrants, and particularly Mexican and undocumented immigrants, as being a drain or a burden on the US, but youth’s experiences as outlined here suggested just the opposite. Namely, youth are eager to contribute meaningfully and to be seen by others how they see themselves – as helpful, skillful, and essential to the future of the US. Failure to see youth in this light constitutes active oppression and marginalization as students suffer material consequences as a result of these deficit ideologies.

Finally, the act of recognizing an oppressive event and then reimagining it is a powerful tool that can be used to help students construct, re-imagine, and co-create new possibilities of “what is good, what is possible, and what exists” for themselves individually and collectively (Therborn, 1980), to see themselves in a new light, but also to bring to light ways that dominant discourses act on them, and how they would shift those discourses to re-position themselves in society.
Conclusion

What is possible?

What has been done?

In setting out to do this research, I wanted to talk to bilingual Latino middle schoolers about their experiences of language, and I wanted to create a pedagogical space in which students could connect their bilingual language practices to larger systems of oppression and power, to processes of racialization that shape their everyday lives, and in doing so, create new possibilities for them, for me, for educators, and for communities. Here, after reviewing the findings of this project, I would like to take the opportunity to look beyond those findings and explore possibilities for the future.

Chapter Four highlights the diverse standpoints and experiences of students in the after-school program of race, ethnicity, and language based on their appearance, speech, and country of origin, amongst other factors. The first section of this chapter focuses on the experiences of three students to illustrate the varied ways that students are racialized in the US and to document the lived effects of such processes. The second section of the chapter focuses on the use of a meme as a codification and the process of Collaborative Descriptive Inquiry to more deeply understand the connections between race, ethnicity, and language, and to subsequently unpack issues of racialization and linguistic discrimination with students. This method shows potential for building not only understanding of complex processes of oppression, but also for building understanding and empathy among diverse groups of students.
Chapter Five first examines students’ articulated understandings of their bilingual language practices, especially in thinking about “language-dominant” spaces but rarely “language-only” spaces. The findings of this section demonstrate that, like bilingualism, for these students, translanguaging is not a balanced act. In the second section, I unpack some students’ use of the qualifier “have to” when referring to speaking in Spanish-dominant contexts, and finally in the last section I explore students’ interest in protected Spanish-dominant pedagogical settings. The findings of this chapter emphasize a need to more deeply understand the specific ways that translanguaging occurs in communities, and to use this information to develop pedagogical spaces in schools that are more attuned to the needs and language practices of students.

Chapter Six reconsiders youth translators through the lens of Luz, a student in the after-school program who became upset when a white monolingual English-speaker in a restaurant failed to ask for help translating when the employee did not understand her order. Luz’s reaction suggests that she is primarily upset by the woman’s behavior because it excluded her from the opportunity to act as a bilingual translator, thus asserting her bilingual identity and situating herself within the larger US-context as an essential participant in a bilingual world. These findings offer many possibilities for future considerations. In the next section, I examine such possibilities and make a few suggestions for moving forward.

What is possible?

The students represented in these chapters are shown in complex, layered processes of negotiating racially-imbued, oppressive social dynamics as they navigate the
world and find their place in it. Their positions are unique, and as such, the specific findings of this study could not be expected to manifest among all groups of students, or across diverse communities. However, I do believe the findings of this program suggest “what is possible” generally for any group of students or any community (Therborn, 1980). That is, the findings of this study suggest that creating space for middle school students to engage in processes of critical inquiry around oppressive conditions they face in their daily lives, or see others face, opens up possibilities for fruitful dialogue and new understandings among individuals and groups. My intention in creating this after-school program was to carve out space for students to sit down together and talk about language, race, ethnicity, and unequal power dynamics in the US. I started by asking students to start noticing language in their communities –how people used language, when they themselves used different types of language, and how they made sense of what they did and heard. Students brought with them, in their language journals but also in the embodied sense, rich material that sparked conversations about linguicism, segregation, the hegemony of English, racialization, and what it means to be American. In what follows, I ask the question, **What is possible in a school-based program whose explicit goal is to raise students’ critical awareness of the world around them?**

**Naming the value of Spanish beyond resource language**

Since the era of Civil Rights, mainstream arguments for bilingual education have shifted from a rights framework to a resource framework; Ruiz documents these orientations in his significant work “Orientations in language planning” (1984). However, while viewing bilingualism as a resource has been beneficial in some regards, it is
problematic in others. Documentaries, articles, and news reports tout the benefits of being bilingual as an argument for increasing the number of dual language bilingual schools in their communities. Univision’s video (2013) “The benefits of being bilingual,” the New York Times articles “The bilingual advantage” (2011) and “The benefits of bilingualism” (2012), the many articles suggesting that bilingualism delays dementia and Alzheimer's, and in the New York Times most recently, “The superior social skills of bilinguals” (2016), tout the benefits of bilingualism in mainstream media as dual language programs rise in popularity, especially among monolingual English-speaking white families. The trend among white monolingual communities has gone so far that dual language schools have started opening up in places where no bilingual community exists to even attend. This problem has been framed as an issue for the school because the students have no language model to help them learn the additional language, be it Mandarin Chinese, French, or Spanish. In reality, it is a problem for bilingual communities, as precious, hard-won resources are diverted away from the communities that not only want them but need them, and limited funds for bilingual education programs are funneled into schools that are inaccessible to bilingual students.

Bilingual schools were intended to fulfill the basic civil rights of bilingual citizens – Lau v. Nichols (1974) determined that equal did not mean equitable, and that bilingual children needed bilingual materials and teachers to learn. This fundamental right is obscured in resource language, but others argue that rights language is overly confrontational and divisive. While resource language has succeeded in cooling racial and ethnic divides that the term “bilingual education” tends to incite, it also has the effect of making dual language bilingual education increasingly inaccessible for bilingual children,
as more and more emergent bilingual students attend English-only programs in NYC, even with dual language programs on the rise.

Resource language has some benefits for bilingual students. It explicitly names the value of knowing more than one language, and celebrates knowledge that was once seen only as a deficit and a hindrance, and ideologically, as a symbol of foreign-ness, of not belonging. However, resource language is also detrimental in the ways that it obscures the roots of bilingual education as a civil rights project, shifting the aim of bilingual education from social justice to social resource. This project attempted to reconnect bilingualism with issues of power, race, and ethnicity that have been obscured by resource language, and to point out some of the unattended issues that trouble bilingual youth. This is also an attempt at reconnecting bilingual education, and the importance of bilingualism in bilingual communities, to fundamental issues of human rights.

One of the takeaways that nearly every student participant in the after-school program articulated in their exit interviews was that they felt a renewed sense of pride in being bilingual, and that they wanted to make concerted efforts to speak more Spanish and to sustain their bilingualism (Exit interviews, June 2015). I was initially surprised to hear this, as we did not focus any sessions explicitly on “the value of being bilingual”. We did not read the many articles that elaborate on the benefits of knowing two languages, and we did not analyze statistics about the likelihood of getting a job when you are bilingual or monolingual. We did not discuss resource language or rights language, and since the focus of the program was not on bilingual schooling, we did not talk much about why students attended a bilingual school, or why their parents chose to send them there.
What we did do was to name oppressive social practices in the US that contribute to xenophobic actions against Latinos and immigrants, as well as processes of racialization that affect all people of color. As we examined linguicism and racism explicitly, students started working towards understanding and dismantling ideas that they had grown up around, but may not have explicitly discussed before or named. Therefore, while resource language may be a way of rallying the mainstream English-monolingual population around bilingual education and bilingualism, language and discussions that address the reality of students’ lives may better serve students in their quest for self-actualization and historical consciousness. This orientation towards language, which I term “language as lived reality,” considers language as valuable because it is part of students’ and communities’ identities, and therefore combines certain ideas pertaining to both “language as right” and “language as resource” orientations.

This orientation towards language does not make an argument per se, in the same way that “language as right” made a legal argument, or “language as resource” makes an economic one. Instead, the argument is the reality of the language practices themselves, and the recognition that it is only in recognizing students’ lived realities in school that school can become a force for social change and transformation. “Language as lived reality” can be further understood as an orientation towards language practices that focuses on the language practices and linguistic experiences of communities (including linguistic discrimination, racialization of language practices, and so on), and that values language practices in so far as the community uses and values them. Thus, the value of the language is located within the community, as in the Māori perspective of language as a community treasure (Berryman, et al., 2009), rather than the value of the language being located in the
resource it provides the larger society, which follows a mining perspective, in which the resource is extracted from its original source for the economic gain of the majority.

The finding that talking about students' language practices and the issues related to those practices would cause students to value their bilingualism more makes sense when understood through the lens of language as a lived reality. This finding points to creating spaces for bilingual youth to talk about and understand their language practices, and to explore the ways that racism, discrimination, and unequal social relations affect their understandings of language as well as their actual language practices. Such spaces have the potential to raise the status of Spanish as well as bilingualism in ways that do not require the language to be understood within a capitalist, resource-oriented framework.

Further, framing the value of bilingualism within the realities of students' lives rejects the capitalist, competition-based framework and instead critiques the ways in which such a framework serves to benefit some and oppress others. In doing so, it removes oppressive ideologies and replaces them with justice-oriented ideologies. Other language orientations focus on how to convey the importance of bilingualism to policymakers and the mainstream monolingual US population; but we also need to think about how we convey the importance of bilingualism to bilingual youth, and the impact of the reasons we give on their self-perception, their awareness of being bilingual, the value they place on bilingualism, and how they position themselves in US society. Creating a space for students to talk about their language practices raises the status of bilingualism for them without using resource language.

Finally, resource language attempts to shift the status of bilingualism in relation to English by claiming superiority – it can be viewed as a direct counter-narrative to countless
instances in which English has been deemed superior. Reality language, on the other hand, recognizes the oppressive forces that create this inequality, and works to remove them, so that all language practices might be valued equally. Being bilingual may accrue benefits, but what will be the unintended harm in framing communities’ linguistic and cultural practices in this way? What ideologies will we be ascribing to if we play the “resource” game, even if we come out on top?

The resource framework has the potential to further devalue endangered languages around the world, not to mention devaluing the translanguaging practices of bilingual US communities, since the “pure” language is what is the most highly valued commodity. Further, as we have seen with trends in dual language schools, the resource model diffuses resources for bilingual education so that students who need bilingual education are less likely to get the resources, while students who want bilingual education have ever increasing opportunities for access. An orientation that views language as lived reality, then, might work as a counterpoint to resource language that fails to recognize and celebrate language practices for the value they hold within the communities that use them, and as demonstrated in the findings of this study, have the potential to increase students’ estimation of their own bilingualism.

**Engaging students in activism, recognizing students as activists**

If activism is defined only as protesting in the streets, we fail to recognize the myriad, everyday actions that ordinary people take to resist racism, linguistic discrimination, and other forms of oppression and marginalization. To this end, Mercado and Reyes (2010) call for a multi-pronged approach to activism that calls for collaboration
and coalition across diverse groups and spheres. Looking back at both Chicano and Puerto Rican activism, they draw out lessons as we move forward.

First, large-scale social movements are a necessary component of activism especially in regards to resisting and transforming political, cultural, and economic institutions (Mercado and Reyes, 2010). Second, to advocate for change, we must first understand the problem. Anyon points out that education will not solve the political economic issues that cause poverty and inequality; thus, part of understanding the problem is situating educational issues in this larger context and incorporating resistance to these root problems into a larger vision for educational equity (Anyon, 2005). Third, Mercado and Reyes call for the union of groups from diverse backgrounds, coming together for a common cause. Fourth, community activism is everyone’s responsibility, and therefore must play out in many different social arenas. To this end, it is critical to recognize activism as such – activism does not only take shape in large-scale social movements, but can also be found in the everyday choices people make. Finally, Mercado and Reyes (2010) call into question what counts as public policy in education. By thinking about education policy as being built from the ground up as well as being imposed from the top down, we can utilize schools as sites of policy change, thereby shifting students’ role from a recipient to an enactor of policy.

The findings of this dissertation are in keeping with the multi-pronged approach to social change described above, including an expanded view of what counts as activism. In this study, I had the opportunity to observe the ways students already engaged in forms of resistance to the injustices they witnessed and experienced. The after-school space became a place to investigate and develop such counter-actions to social injustice. While I was a
teacher, one of my middle school students taught me the saying, “Camarón que se duerme, se lo lleva la corriente,” and in this work, I find truth in the idea that in order to create a path towards educational equity, we must act, and actively resist, to make change. I hope this dissertation serves as a call to action for researchers and educators, and offers new possibilities for engaging with and learning alongside middle school youth in transformative ways.
References


Appendix A: Interview protocols

Individual Student Interview Protocol

This protocol was used with all student participants.

Entry Interview –At start of research project

1. Ask students about themselves
   a. Where were you born?
   b. If not NYC, how long did you live there? Where else did you live before coming to NYC?
   c. Have you been in the same apartment/ neighborhood or moved around within NYC?

2. Family
   a. Who do you live with? Have you always lived with these people?
   b. Does your family live close by?
   c. What do you do with family in NYC?
   d. What do you do when you visit relatives?

3. Language use
   a. Tell me about how you use language at home. Why? What’s an example?
   b. Tell me about how you use language with different friends. What’s an example? Is it different with different people/ in different places?
   c. Tell me about how you use language at school.
      i. Do you always follow the language “rules”? What are examples of students not following the rules? How do teachers, students, principal, assistant principal react?
   d. How do you spend your weekends? Tell me a story about [one of those places].
   e. Do you ever have to choose whether to use English or Spanish? How do you choose?
   f. Do you feel differently depending on how you’re using language?
   g. Do you find language (reading, writing, speaking, listening) harder in certain situations? Explain.
   h. How do you see yourself using language in the future? How do you see your family using language?
   i. Do you think language use will change in your community in the future? Are there ways you would like to see it change? Are there ways you would like it to stay the same?
   j. Have you ever seen someone get treated badly (or have you had a personal experience) because of how they speak or the language they speak? Explain.
i. Have you ever noticed someone being treated differently because they didn't know English? Explain.

k. Do you think there’s anything unfair about the way people use English, Spanish, and other languages in the US?

4. Tell me about your experiences in school.
   a. What are some things that you like about school this year? Is there anything you would like to change?
   b. What do you think of going to a bilingual school? How does it make you feel?
   c. Tell me how school is for you now. Tell me about being a middle schooler, in a dual language program.

5. Social action
   a. Can you think of a time when you thought something was unfair? How did you react? How did it make you feel to react that way?
   b. Have you ever done a school project where you've tried to change something that was unfair or tried to make the world a better place? Explain.
   c. What are some ways that your family and the community is involved with school? For example, times when your family comes to the school, or that you have a school event somewhere in the community. Describe.

Exit Interview – At end of research project

1. Participation in the project
   a. Tell me about the project we worked on. Can you tell me about some of the things we talked about that were important to you?
   b. What parts of this after-school project were the most interesting to you? Why?
   c. Did you learn anything during the after-school program? If so, describe.
   d. How did you feel in class, during the class discussions and group activities, as a result of being able to use both of your languages?

2. Language use
   a. Do you think you’re more aware of the way you, and people around you, use language after participating this project? If yes, how so?
      i. Home
ii. Church

iii. In the neighborhood

iv. Friends

v. School

b. Did this project make you think more about how you use language? How so?
c. Did this project make you think more about how other people use language? How so?
d. How did participating in this project make you feel about speaking Spanish or being bilingual?

3. Language, race, and ethnicity

a. Do you see a connection between language and race or ethnicity? Is this a connection you had thought of before this project? (If needed, give examples of when we looked at the meme of the Mexican man, and then I switched the picture to a white woman, and also when we talked about linguistic profiling.)
   i. What do you make of this connection?

b. Can you think of an example of language discrimination? How did you react when you heard about it or experienced it? How did it make you feel?
c. Can you think of an example of someone being treated badly (or have you had a personal experience) because of how they speak or the language they speak? Explain.
   i. Have you ever noticed someone being treated differently because they didn't know English? Explain.
   ii. Have you seen someone being treated badly or made fun of because of their ethnicity (for example, Mexican, Dominican)?

d. Do you think there’s anything unfair about the way people use English, Spanish, and other languages in the US?

4. Social action (revisited)

a. Describe the video(s) that you participated in at the end of our after-school
program. Do you think it helped make positive change? How so? Or why not?

i. Do you think videos like that have the potential to make positive change? Why or why not?

b. Do you see a link between language and power? How so?

c. What do you think needs to change in terms of language, discrimination, and power in your community or the US in general? What steps can you see yourself or a group of people making to help change these things?