

Hola Means Hello: The Intersection of Language Ideologies and Language Policies in a School of the New Latino Diaspora

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This paper draws on two years of ethnographic research to examine the intersections of language policies and language ideologies in kindergarten and first grade classrooms in an English-medium school of a New Latino Diaspora community. It explores how language ideologies and language practices of young children, both Spanish-English bilinguals and their English-speaking peers, as well as those of their teachers, interact in ways that shape how language policy plays out in the early years of elementary school. It foregrounds young children's dynamic and innovative language practices as they work and play together throughout the school day, and argues that children themselves be seen as language policymakers. Finally it proposes that schools draw upon the rich and varied resources of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families to facilitate successful educational outcomes.

Introduction

Excerpt 1: *Spanish class*

Five children await their teacher on the classroom rug, bodies in motion and voices co-mingling. Jerome positions himself in the center of the group, raises his voice and calls out, "Spanish class!" After a few seconds of jostling and positioning among the group, Cristal sits down in the teacher's chair, the others sitting on the rug in front of her. As she calls the group to order, I approach to investigate, followed by the teacher who places a box of math manipulatives on the floor. The play quickly dissolves as the children crowd around the box. Later when I ask Cristal, she tells me they were playing "Spanish class," and that "Jerome said it." Jerome, sitting nearby, says he saw it on TV. When I ask if they've played it before, Cristal replies, "No, it's only English here."
(field notes, March 5, 2009)

The above scenario illustrates a brief moment I witnessed in a first grade classroom during several minutes of transition into math work. In this moment Jerome, an English-speaking student, initiated group play with four Mexican, Spanish-speaking peers around a dramatization of what he called, "Spanish class."¹ The

excerpt here provides a small glimpse of some of the innovative and creative kinds of language use, discussions about language, and in this instance, language play or play about language, that took place on a regular basis within kindergarten and first grade classrooms at Jerome's school. He and his classmates attended an English-medium school, Grant Elementary, in a peri-urban town I refer to as Marshall, which is considered a community of the New Latino Diaspora (NLD) where "increasing numbers of Latinos (many immigrant, and some from elsewhere in the United States) are settling both temporarily and permanently in areas of the United States that have not traditionally been home to Latinos" (Hamann, Wortham & Murtillo, 2002, p. 1).² Marshall's minimal previous exposure to Latino immigrants has resulted in creating a range of novel community needs and resources, particularly in local schools. At Grant Elementary, attended by growing numbers of Spanish-speaking students who are primarily Mexican immigrants or children of Mexican immigrants, the sole language of instruction is Standard English, and children are taught to read and write in this variety. On the surface, the English language policy at Grant reflects the fact that the majority of teachers, many of whom have taught and worked in the Marshall School District for a number of years, speak only English. At this level classroom language policy might seem at least partly an outcome of district human resources, and one in which resulting classroom language policy might be imagined as straightforward. However, as Ricento and Hornberger (1996) suggest, peeling back the layers of the metaphorical onion of Language Policy and Planning (LPP), and in this particular case examining the actual language practices across early childhood classrooms, reveal a more complex scenario, one in which official policy does not dictate use across all domains, and in which the subtle interplay between classroom language policies and ideologies, or children and teacher attitudes toward and beliefs about Spanish, begs examination.

In what follows I attempt to answer Hornberger and Johnson's (2007) call for "more multilayered and ethnographic approaches to LPP" (p. 509) by drawing on several years of ethnographic research conducted in Marshall at Grant Elementary. I do this by exploring the intersection of language policies and language ideologies in kindergarten and first grade classrooms as observed through peer-to-peer interaction and children's language practices. At the same time, I locate these interactions and practices within the context of the classroom curricula and daily routines, and therefore highlight how teachers' attitudes towards Spanish frame them. I begin this paper by situating the study within two years of research conducted in Marshall and considering my stance as researcher. After outlining the theoretical frameworks I use to structure my work and highlighting the role of the students themselves as language policymakers, I illustrate and discuss language attitudes and practices of teachers, and then those of students, as evidenced in field notes based on classroom observation, classroom video logs, and interviews, finally contextualizing the classroom data within surrounding language policy at the local, state, and federal levels. I conclude by arguing that what lies at the intersection of language ideologies and policies within the classroom is a particular kind of *ideological and implementational space* (Hornberger, 2002), informally sanctioned by teachers, developed and maintained by students and one that shows great potential for envisioning students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as resources for their classmates and teachers.

Setting

Ethnographic Research Context

During the 2008-09 and 2009-10 academic years, I was involved in two phases of ethnographic research conducted in Marshall, at Grant Elementary and within the homes of kindergarten and first grade students. The first phase of research, directed by Kathryn Howard,³ focused on how eight kindergartners from Mexican households in Marshall transitioned into U.S. public schools with attention to their language use and socialization across home and school contexts. In the second phase, my research partner and I followed five of the original focal students (with an additional new focal child) into two first grade classrooms, studying children's home and school literacies, and visiting two classrooms on a weekly basis and family homes several times a month. In both phases data were collected through participant observation, home and classroom videotaping, and interviews with families, students, and teachers.

Grant Elementary

Marshall's changing demographics are exemplified by U.S. Census figures from 1990 to 2009, during which time the Latino population grew from 2.7% to 20.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009). As Lipinoga (2009) points out, these figures do not take into account the large numbers of undocumented families living in the town. Grant's student demographics reflect these figures and exemplify current growth in the Latino population. Whereas a little over a decade ago, small numbers of Latino students attended the school, in 2008-9, slightly less than 70% of the kindergarten students were from Spanish-speaking households, and in 2009-10, over 70% of kindergartners were identified as such. To illustrate these diverse demographics, across the two focal first grade classrooms in 2009-10 over half of the students were Latino children of Mexican-origin or first-generation Mexican American, roughly one quarter appeared to be black-identified (with African American as the prominent ethnicity), and the remaining students were non-Mexican Latinos (of various racial identifications), white-identified (with European American as the prominent ethnicity), or of mixed ethnicity.⁴ Of these, the majority of the Mexican students were Spanish-dominant and the other students were either English-dominant and encountered Spanish from their peers at school, in their neighborhoods, and likely through television and other media.

Schools of the NLD like Grant face formidable challenges in responding to the rapid change in student demographics in recent years. As no teachers in kindergarten or first grade spoke more than greetings, leave-takings, or simple directives in Spanish at the time of the study, they were faced with the difficult task of serving many young children who had little experience using Standard English for academic purposes. During the two years of research, there were three full time teachers at Grant who spoke Spanish – a fourth grade teacher, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, and the school's lead teacher.

Researcher Stance and Research Questions

García, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Torres-Guzmán (2006), in the book, "Imagining Multilingual Schools," explicitly address their own stance as researchers and editors of the volume as well as those of the volume's contributing authors. I see this framing as crucial, particularly within the context of LPP research that in earlier decades often failed to address the ideologies and positioning of those conducting research or theorizing within the field (Ricento, 2000). In this vein, I, too, propose that researchers take on a "divided vision" of both "the actual and the imagined" (García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán, 2006, p. 11). In doing so I define my role as one in which I attempt not just to describe what is, but envision what *could be* in classrooms of the NLD. I argue that classrooms such as these, which might be seen as spaces with limited available human and material resources for working with growing populations of culturally and linguistically diverse students, can be re-imagined as ones where students and families become the primary resources for learning and school success. Schools of the NLD like Grant pose both dilemmas and opportunities. Although schools in communities with rapidly shifting populations lack institutional structure and experience in meeting the needs of students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, they do not carry longstanding and oftentimes static notions of bilingualism, and have great potential for innovation and positive change. It is from the above perspectives that I think and write about language policies and language ideologies in early childhood classrooms and that I ask the following research questions:

1. What is the intersection of language policies and language ideologies in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms of a school located in a community of the New Latino Diaspora (NLD)?
 - i. What languages policies (official and unofficial) operate in kindergarten and first grade classrooms?
 - ii. What language ideologies, as seen through students' and teachers' actions, talk about language, and language use, might undergird these policies?
2. What might this intersection reveal about the reality and potential for language development and learning in these early childhood classrooms?

Theoretical Frameworks

"Reclaiming the Local" through an Ethnography of Language Policy

Excerpt 2: *¿Usted tiene miedo de culebras?*

Maritza reads aloud her leveled, non-fiction text, carefully enunciating each word in English using teacher-like intonation. She pauses at a page with a photograph of a snake egg, looks up and says, "¡No me gustan! ¿Usted tiene miedo de culebras? Yo, sí. [I don't like them! Are you afraid of snakes? I am.]" (field notes, June 6, 2009)

This moment took place in June of Maritza's kindergarten year when she was beginning to read leveled books in English with simple, repetitive text on each

page. While she is a Spanish-speaking child of Mexican parents who speak only Spanish, her only experience with literacy instruction at school has been in English. However, the use of Spanish while reading in English was not unusual for her and her Spanish-dominant peers in many of their interactions around reading and writing. I choose to highlight another salient vignette from the classroom in order to join other researchers in "reclaiming the local in LPP" (Canagarajah, 2005) as they argue that within research in the field an alternative discourse, or "disciplinary reorientation," is needed in which "a local grounding should become the primary and critical force in the construction of contextually relevant knowledge" (p. xiv). While for communities of the NLD with growing numbers of Latino residents it might be easy to accept dominant discourse in LPP at the national level that assumes the only or most efficient way for "Limited English Proficient (LEP)" or "English Language Learner (ELL)" students to perform at the level of their English-speaking peers is through full English immersion, a closer look within the classrooms of these multilingual students illustrates how "new strategies of interpersonal communication and literacy are being developed in everyday life as people from different languages and dialects of English interact with each other" (p. 19). Thus, I argue that the exclusive focus of federal LPP on student performance in English fails not just to realistically portray but also to effectively draw on the rich and varied cultural and linguistic resources of students and their families for fostering successful educational experiences.

Through the lens of ethnography of language policy I see language policy not as a product but as "a process that begins with a potentially heterogeneous text that is interpreted and appropriated in unpredictable ways by agents who appropriate, resist, and/or change dominant and alternative policy discourses" (Johnson & Freeman, 2010, p. 15; see also, Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Johnson, 2009). And through this lens multiple and conflicting LPP texts, both literal and metaphorical, become available; they are not just evidenced through policy documents and edicts but can be seen in the actions, interactions, and practices of students and teachers. In this way, students and teachers are agents of policy whose selves can partly be read as policy texts,⁵ texts that in their different configurations and formulations both respond to and help shape current and future policies. My primary focus in this paper, in foregrounding students as language policymakers, is to point out that by examining actual classroom practice, a kind of *trickle-up* effect becomes apparent in which children's talk about and use of language contradict official school, state, and federal language policy. I argue that by recognizing and examining this trickle-up effect, policymakers at all levels might better build upon the realities of classroom life in the policies they design or mandate.

By engaging in an ethnographic examination of on-the-ground LPP in several early elementary classrooms, I also hope to identify and represent what Hornberger (2002) refers to as "ideological and implementational spaces" in which multilingualism is fostered and language diversity is viewed as a resource in educational settings. And while Hornberger focuses on how teachers find ways to open these spaces, in this case the students are those who are the agents of change in forging multilingual spaces. Within these interactional spaces the students respond to and influence the language practices and attitudes of their peers while transforming and developing their own. These practices not only signal their beliefs or perceptions about language, but also convey much about their understandings of each

other, and of the multiple and varied contexts in which they live and interact. This point is key for examining the intersection of language ideologies and policies for children and teachers with different and often disparate ways of speaking, or *communicative repertoires* (Hymes, 1972), as well as wide ranges of experiences upon which they rely during classroom interactions.

The Ideological within LPP

Ricento (2000), in a historical account of the development of LPP, discusses how the current, or third, phase of LPP's history is situated in the context of the new world order, postmodernism and linguistic human rights, and he focuses attention on the role of ideology in language policy. He writes,

Language policies can never be properly understood or analyzed as free-standing documents or practices; to ignore the role of ideology, or to relegate it to a bin of 'extraneous' variables, too fraught with ambiguity to be useful in empirical research, is to engage in an ideological subterfuge of the worst sort. (p. 7)

Ideologies are infused throughout the layers and levels of LPP summarized in the preceding sections and pervade current discourse about the importance of learning English for immigrant families and their children. And while I believe students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds should develop proficiency and literacy in Standard English, I question assumptions about the value of Standard English over students' language varieties and languages and that English immersion models are the most effective method for learning the language.

In this paper I define language ideologies as commonly held assumptions or beliefs about language and its speakers (Kroskrity, 2000; Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity, 1998; Woolard, 1998; Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). These assumptions and beliefs are often shared across groups, culturally-situated, and tend to lie under the surface of social interaction (Woolard, 1998). As Silverstein (1979) points out, uncovering these tacit beliefs and assumptions can be accomplished by examining language use as well as attitudes toward and metadiscursive talk about language. While in this study teachers' language ideologies become more apparent through interview responses, children's emergent and dynamic ideologies can be seen in their conversations with each other, in metadiscursive commentary about their own and others' language use, and in their ideas and choices about when and how to use different languages for different activities in different contexts.

Pennycook (1995), employing Said's (1983) notion of the "Worldliness of English," discusses ideologies underlying uncritical assumptions about the value of English at a global level, drawing a parallel between global inequalities and the English language (p. 35). Although he looks at the spread of English as an international language, his points regarding the uncritical assumptions about the value of English can be directly linked to the policies of English-medium schools located in settings such as those of the NLD. Pennycook seems to address this when he writes, "Language plays a central role in how we understand ourselves and the world, and thus all questions of language control and standardization have major implications for social relations and the distribution of power" (p. 50). And while

within early elementary classrooms at Grant social relations are nascent and power seems to lie in the hands of adults, I focus on connections between language and power in the classrooms as observed in peer-to-peer interaction.

LPP and Performative Action in the Classroom

Although teachers were the dominant and most recognizable agents of LPP in the classrooms at Grant, a careful look at what LoBianco (2010) terms *performative action* in the classroom suggests that children, too, became agents of language policymaking. He includes performance, or performative action, in his discussion of language planning activity and describes this as "instances of language used to both convey messages in regular communication and at the same time to represent models for emulation of language forms," and "the modeling of language behaviors" (p. 161). While LoBianco conceptualizes performative action as that of teachers, I extend this notion by investigating how the students themselves engaged in such performances. And although these performances were not results of explicit language planning, they were ones in which children actively conveyed messages about languages and provided models for emulation of both language forms and behaviors. I also address how my research partner(s)⁶ and I engaged in performative action by discussing how we, as English and Spanish speakers, offered models of and messages about language in our interactions with the children, thereby influencing the data we collected over the course of the two years. The data presented and discussed in what follows places performative action at the intersection of language ideologies and language policy and practice. While in the ensuing discussion I focus primarily on the classroom data, I end this section by framing it within the larger and nested levels of school, district, state, and federal language policy.

Reading the Classroom Data

Excerpt 3: *I do, too!*

Gaby points at me and asks, "Do you talk in Spanish?" Bernarda answers for me, "Yes!" Gaby comments dramatically, "Oh my God!" Julina confirms with me, one-on-one, that I speak Spanish (although I know she knows I do) and begins to tell me (in Spanish) that she reads to her baby sister in Spanish. Clarence, sitting between Julina and me, begins to tell us how he also speaks Spanish, announcing, "I do, too, I only do it at home, and sometimes I do it at school, right Gaby?" (field notes, December, 9, 2009)

As I mention above, critical to the data collected and presented in this paper is the fact that my research partner and I were present as adult (and authoritative) Spanish speakers in the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Conversations such as these highlight the influence that we, as researchers, had on the children's language use and talk about language and thus, on the study itself.⁷ The conversation in Excerpt 3 took place late in the Fall semester of first grade, when I sat at a table with four children, three of them (Gaby, Bernarda and Julina) Mexican-origin,

Spanish-speaking students, and one, Clarence, an English-speaking student; it is representative of numerous conversations my partner and I had with the children, and that the children had about us both in our presence and amongst themselves.

Classifying and Analyzing the Data

Over the two years of research, we amassed an enormous body of data, which includes kindergarten and first grade field notes, video logs, and interviews from September of 2008 to July of 2010. The data analysis for this particular study has involved triangulation of field notes, video footage and audio-recordings from interviews, and coding throughout the data of instances of teachers' talk about and use of Spanish, and both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking children's talk about, use, and performance of Spanish. Data illustrating teachers' talk about and use of Spanish, while not the primary focus of the analysis, serves a dual-purpose. First and foremost, teachers' own classroom language policies greatly affected the extent to which their students could openly and freely use Spanish. And secondly, these policies, while not necessarily discussed with children or laid out as rules or class norms, communicated much to children not just about which language practices and behaviors were sanctioned but also about how they as teachers valued different languages. In coding the data I explored how Spanish was used in different configurations and interactional spaces, as well as how children, regardless of language background, often drew simultaneously on Spanish and English in their talk and language play.

Rather than labeling talk in which both languages were used as instances of "code-switching or -mixing," I use the term *translanguaging*, defined by García (2009, p. 45) as "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds. It goes beyond code-switching, although it includes it, as well as other kinds of bilingual language use and contact." As many students spoke varieties of both languages to different degrees, and often experimented with language in creative and playful ways, I find this term useful in that it portrays children as multilinguals-in-the-making who draw on the language practices of others – peers, teachers, family members, and even researchers – in and outside of the classroom and across their communities. As García points out, "translanguaging, or engaging in bilingual or multilingual discourse practices, is an approach to bilingualism that is centered not on languages as has often been the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable" (p. 44). Furthermore, the notion of translanguaging portrays languages as dynamic rather than static and helps avoid strict categorization or classification of students' language proficiencies that pervade educational policy, policy that potentially limits how students are perceived and evaluated. And although the term translanguaging has previously been used to describe the language practices of bilingual children, I use it to describe not just language practices of the Spanish-speaking students, but some of those of the English-speaking children.⁸ Finally, use of this term helps draw attention to the idea that translanguaging is "the communicative norm of bilingual communities" (p. 51), to the creative, playful ways in which children use language, and to how they draw from the multiple linguistic resources at hand to engage in social and academic tasks.

Teacher Talk about and Use of Spanish

Excerpt 4: *They still need to keep their language*

They eventually talk to each other in English, and if they feel better talking to each other in Spanish, then that's fine... Cause I do feel like they still need to keep their language, like a lot of time the parents will say they don't want to speak Spanish anymore, but I think it's important to keep their language. (interview, Kelly, kindergarten teacher, June 16, 2009)

In this interview, Kelly went on to say that she knew being bilingual was an advantage for students. Her commentary mirrored that of other participating teachers (two other kindergarten teachers and two first grade teachers) who also expressed their belief that children should maintain their home language and had *laissez-faire* attitudes towards its use in class. However, kindergarten teachers tended to view use of Spanish in the classroom as acceptable primarily while children transitioned into English, while first grade teachers showed an accepting attitude towards its use regardless of student proficiency in English. As English is the official language of the school, along with the fact that, at the time of the research no teachers in these grades spoke Spanish outside of simple phrases for greetings, leave-takings, and directives, their instruction for all subjects and during interpersonal interactions took place in English. Overall, the small amount of interaction in Spanish between students and teachers took place on occasion during English as Second Language (ESL) time when groups of four to five children left their classrooms to work with ESL teachers.

Kindergarten teachers expressed, in their daily classroom conversation as well as in interviews, that it was fine for students to use Spanish with each other for translating or clarifying directions or content during individual and small-group work time; implicit here is that using Spanish was a means to accessing content in English or a bridge to the English-language curriculum. In this way Spanish-speaking children's own communicative repertoires were marginalized and delimited in the classroom, much like those of many other students whose home language varieties were other than Standard English. Outside of one teacher's preference for us as researchers to use English with students, the other teachers permitted and at times encouraged our use of Spanish with children mainly for interpretation and translation. In one kindergarten classroom, the teacher incorporated the use of Spanish into the daily calendar routines, which consisted of counting and naming the days of the week. Across all three kindergarten classrooms, teachers frequently used a handful of directives such as "*Escucha* [Listen]" and "*Síéntate* [Sit down]," and less frequently for praising student work or behavior with "*Muy bien* [Very good]." Moreover, in kindergarten teachers asked my research partners to conduct writer's workshop several times with children who seemed to be struggling with understanding the writing process being taught in English; here again, the use of Spanish was to access curricula, rather than to develop biliteracy. In first grade while the teachers tended toward a more relaxed attitude about the use of Spanish, they rarely attempted to use or discuss it outside of side conversation with children during transitional moments or in light of information to be sent home (e.g. translated documents, including math homework). English was the language of instruction, literacy, and academic work in the classroom. While some children

had begun to write in Spanish in kindergarten, by first grade this happened much less frequently. Table 1 provides a summary and a fuller picture of teacher use and commentary about Spanish.

Table 1
Teacher Talk about and Use of Spanish

Teacher Talk about Spanish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stating that children should maintain their home language • Permitting children to use Spanish with each other • Discussing how bilingualism provides advantages in life • Mentioning that parents should read to their children in Spanish at home • Expressing that they would like to learn Spanish • Noticing that "only recently" have English-speaking children begun to speak Spanish in the classroom • Asking researchers to use Spanish to interpret or translate for children • Requesting that researchers primarily use English with students (in one case)

Teacher Use of Spanish

- Giving commands or directives
- Praising student work
- Asking children to translate words or phrases for them
- Reciting numbers and days of the week for calendar routines (in two cases)

What is not clear from the above descriptions was the significance of teachers' *laissez-faire* policy toward student use of Spanish in peer-to-peer and small group interaction. As the curricula across the primary grades allowed for the majority of literacy and math time to take place in small groups and individual work at tables, much of the children's day was spent in interaction with their classmates without direct supervision of the teachers, who were often sitting at their own instructional tables with small groups or individuals. During these times teachers did not discourage nor did they pay great attention to children using Spanish among each other. Thus, there was space and freedom for the use of Spanish in spite of its unofficial status; this space became the central space in which we observed children's talk about and use of Spanish.

English-Speaking Students' Talk about, Use, and Performance of Spanish

Excerpt 5: *Gracias for listening to my song*

A new student, Jackie, arrived this week to Milton's class, and when I go to meet her, Milton who is sitting at her table begins to speak to me in Spanish. Jackie asks, "Do you talk Spanish?" and I ask her if she does. She says, "yes," and demonstrates with "hola" and "gracias." Milton jumps in, adding that I know both Spanish and English. A bit later, when I'm across the room, Jackie approaches me and sings a made-up song, and I compliment her. She moves away but finds me a minute later, saying, "Gracias for listening to my song." (field notes, December 22, 2009)

This is but one of many examples of English-speaking students' interest in and performance of Spanish, and took place during an interaction my research

partner had with first graders. What is striking about this scenario is that Jackie, an English-speaking first grader, had only been in the school for several days, yet her awareness of, interest in and performance of Spanish were already evident. Our field notes throughout the two years continued to indicate that English-speaking children paid great attention to their Spanish-dominant peers' language use as well as to how we as researchers interacted with them in both languages. Table 2 summarizes their comments about and use of Spanish.

Table 2
English-speaking Students' Talk about, Use, and Performance of Spanish

English-speaking Students' Talk about Spanish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing others' use of Spanish • Describing their ability to speak the language (to peers and researchers) • Reporting use of Spanish at home • Claiming Mexican nationality

English-speaking Students' Use & Performance of Spanish

- Pretending to speak Spanish
- Performing Spanish words and phrases (e.g., "Hola means hello.")
- Choosing and attempting to read Spanish books in the school library
- Engaging in language play and dramatization
- Interacting with Spanish-dominant peers
- Using simple phrases for greetings and directives
- Using Spanish vocabulary for school-based activities and classroom materials
- Translanguaging (incorporating Spanish words and phrases into English sentences)

Of specific interest is English-speaking children's use of Spanish phrases and vocabulary for school-based activities (e.g., counting) and classroom materials. Although they did not often form complete sentences, they readily greeted, took leave of, exclaimed, and gave directives in Spanish. In this case their Spanish-speaking peers became their teachers, and they enthusiastically performed and played with the models provided them. The beginning scenario (Excerpt 1) in which Jerome instigated play about Spanish class demonstrates this interest and enthusiasm, and his classmates and he sought out an implementational space for "trying-on" Spanish, much to the enjoyment of their Spanish-speaking peers. Their interest was not only in speaking the language as frequently, while at the school library, they joined in Spanish read-alouds conducted by Spanish-speaking peers or the researchers, who did so at students' request. Of additional note, and discussed in the following section on Spanish-speaking children's language use, English-speaking children showed similar patterns of translanguaging, formulating sentences such as the one Jackie uttered (Excerpt 4) in which she incorporates a word of Spanish into her English sentence.

While across the large body of data collected we have no note of adults commanding children to speak only in English or to stop using Spanish, my research partner did witness one instance (in a first grade classroom) when an African American student did so. In this instance, he told two African American girls who were speaking "made-up Spanish" to use English, saying, "This is the USA, this is America!" This comment hints at the ideology of many adults who use the guise of language to index their concerns and fears about Latino and other immigrants'

presence in the US (as illustrated in recent legislation in the state of Arizona). Interestingly, however, on several occasions English-speaking children in conversation with children from Mexico claimed the country as their home as well.

Spanish-Speaking Students' Talk about, Use, and Performance of Spanish

Excerpt 6: *Vas a venir a mi casa*

During lunch, Bernarda sang a little song to Cristal about her upcoming visit, "*vas a venir a mi casa, vas a venir a mi casa* [you're going to come to my house]." Meanwhile, Cristina and Josefa chatted in Spanish about different languages they knew of and how they wanted to learn *chino* [Chinese]. (field notes, June 17, 2010)

Clear in this example, is the level of ease and comfort with which Spanish-speaking children seemed to use Spanish with one another. Cristina and Josefa's talk about learning Chinese shows their metalinguistic awareness while demonstrating their interest in learning the language. Also in this example, Bernarda's singing in Spanish echoes many instances we witnessed during classroom transition times, during lunch and at recess when Spanish-speaking children engaged in bilingual hand games and rhythmic chants. They often taught these games and chants to their English-speaking peers. Furthermore, as Bernarda's first grade classroom and ESL teachers, Lisa and Noelle, noticed, Spanish-speakers often had the opportunity to act as models and teachers not only for the English-speaking students, but also for newcomers to the school who had less experience with English. During a home visit to Bernarda's house, Lisa commented to her mother about how much Bernarda had helped a new (Spanish-speaking) student, Noelle, adding that Bernarda had "loved to help out and translate in kindergarten" (field notes, April 9, 2010). Acting as interpreters and translators had become part of their daily lives, and they frequently took on this role for other Spanish-speaking students, as well as their families, at school and elsewhere (for further discussion on children as translators, see Orellana, 2009). Table 3 lays out a number of ways the Spanish-speaking children talked about and used Spanish.

Table 3
Spanish-speaking Students' Talk about, Use, and Performance of Spanish

Spanish-speaking Students' Talk about Spanish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing others' use of Spanish • Describing their ability to speak the language (to peers and researchers) • Claiming authenticity as a Spanish-speaker • Claiming and defending Mexican nationality • Evaluating peers' and researchers' use of Spanish
Spanish-speaking Students' Use and Performance of Spanish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interacting with Spanish-dominant peers • Interpreting and translating for newcomers and peers deemed less proficient • Talking to and with researchers • Translanguaging throughout school day during both social and academic activities • Discussing literacy activities (e.g., discussing an English book in Spanish or in both languages, discussing the spelling of an English word in Spanish, etc.) • Engaging in language play (e.g., making up or telling rhymes and jokes in Spanish; singing or chanting while playing hand games)

Important to note is how they mixed and blended the languages across interactions in what seem to be instances of translanguaging. For example, children would often speak in both languages, or in mostly Spanish, in order to accomplish academic tasks in English such as looking up English words in a dictionary or completing math assignments. While on the one hand these practices are surely related to the learning of English, on the other they are phenomena that help illustrate that "there are no clear-cut boundaries between the languages of bilinguals" (García, 2009, p. 47). In spite of the fact that many of the Spanish-speaking students in first grade knew and interacted with the researchers at school (and at home in some cases) in Spanish, they engaged in a running commentary about whether and how we (the researchers) could speak it. This seemingly perplexing commentary, as all children in the class seemed to know who did and did not speak languages other than English, begs more attention, but for the moment can be seen as a way in which children actively acknowledged and engaged in meta-commentary about language as part of their self-making and understanding of others. As I have pointed out, while in kindergarten some Spanish-speaking children showed signs of emergent writing in Spanish, in first grade this happened much less frequently. The fact that children still eagerly read and checked out books in Spanish in first grade is promising, but for the most part the activity of reading in Spanish seemed, by first grade, to have been relegated to the home.

Reading the Classroom Data as Nested within Federal, State and Local LPP

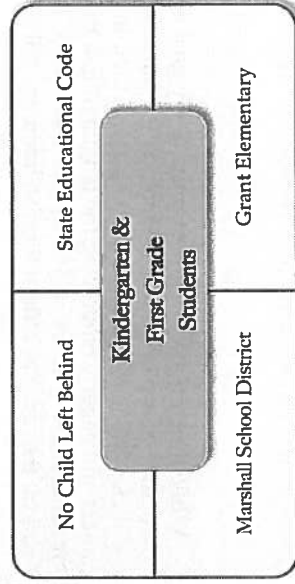


Figure 1. The Local in LPP: Creative yet Constrained

Critical in this case is how the language attitudes and practices of kindergartners and first graders, as well as those of their teachers, are framed within larger and surrounding language policy that plays out at federal, state and local levels. While Figure 1 highlights the fact that the on-the-ground language practices of students are the epicenter of LPP in this study, it also helps illustrate how discourse is "both creative at a micro-level and constrained (determined) at higher levels" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 125). The Marshall School District, in compliance with state educational code and federal mandates, assessed students whose parents indicated on enrollment surveys that a language other than English was spoken at home. And once students were identified as English Language Learners (ELLs) they were provided with regular English as a Second Language (ESL) services based

on English proficiency levels according to the assessment results. At the time of the study, Grant had relative autonomy in structuring these services and used a pull-out model in which ELLs received both ESL instruction and English language arts support.

In order to receive federal funding through Title III to provide services for ELL students, school districts in Marshall's state adhere to state education policy, which in turn complies with federal policy under No Child Left Behind (NCLB).⁹ Current state educational policy mirrors federal policy with regards to services for ELLs and provides definitions and guidelines for ESL instruction with recommendations for time allotment and structure of ESL classes. Although Title III focuses explicit attention on the acquisition of English for ELLs, developing native language skills have not been outlawed, and states are allowed "flexibility and control" (for further discussion, see Lipinoga, 2009). At the same time, the fourth guiding principle of NCLB,¹⁰ "Focusing on What Works," mandates that programming, including programming for ELLs, must be based on "rigorous scientific research" (NCLB, 2001).

NCLB's first guiding principle, "Accountability," requires students labeled as "Limited English Proficient" (LEP) to participate in annual standardized testing in English with the exemption of LEP students who have been in the US for less than twelve months on the language arts portion of the tests. Test scores of these recently arrived LEP students are discounted for the first year they are in the US, but then must be included in the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) reports, which identify schools as succeeding or failing to make projected annual levels of progress in academic achievement (NCLB, 2008, p. 4-6). While children in kindergarten and first grade are not required to participate in annual testing, the pressure to meet grade level literacy standards (in English) so that children are ready by third grade for testing is clear in interviews with their teachers as seen below.

There's tons of pressure, like they come in not reading and they have to be on a D [level] by the end of the year... They have to get to a certain part in third grade for the PSSAs [annual state standardized tests].
(interview, Sally, kindergarten teacher, June 19, 2009)

You know they're really pushing us to get all of the kids, which I totally agree with, on a D level. But for some of our ELL learners it's really hard because they don't have the language, they don't have the vocab. So it, it's just not realistic for all of them, so that I always feel pressure to get them, you know, up as high as I can... The pressure makes me feel like I'm running in circles sometimes.
(interview, Jess, kindergarten teacher, June 19, 2009)

Here teachers' comments illustrate not only their concerns about the overemphasis on reading skills and levels, but also speak to the heavy burden placed on young children to show proficiency in Standard Academic English.

Striking within NCLB's policy is a paradoxical message: schools are not prohibited from implementing bilingual education and have autonomy in choosing program models. Yet programs must be based on "findings" from a particular genre of research, and all students must acquire and perform at proficient levels in English as indicated by a single, annual, standardized test. Thus, an illusion of

choice and local autonomy blankets restrictive and limiting policies, particularly when the risks of non-compliance and/or "low performance" include the possibility of punitive action. As federal policies establish the formal role of English within U.S. public schools and therefore attempt to delineate its functional role within society, in Grant's case they do so by promoting language shift from other languages and varieties to Standard English, and assigning it as the sole language of literacy. And although the goal of policy is for students to acquire Standard English, the actual methods identified for meeting this goal are at best ambiguous, and at worst, based on unfounded and ideological assumptions about language learning and about the growing numbers of students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Echoes of these ideologies can be found in Cristal's reply (Excerpt 1) to my question about her prior experience playing Spanish class with her peers, "No it's only English here."

Conclusion

While much remains to be examined, my goal is to have painted a portrait of a particular group of young students at the juncture of their language practices-as-policies and ideologies, busy going about their lives as kindergartners and first graders and eagerly embracing the languaging of their peers. The ideological and implementational space in which this takes place is one that in many ways remains off the radar of official English language policy as it is primarily a space that belongs to and is shaped by the children themselves. What is remarkable about this phenomenon is that the children, while both directing and being influenced by the innovative uses of and discourses about Spanish, had the freedom to spend great amounts of time each day in these spaces of partner and small group work and play. While overlying policy constrains and inhibits the use of Spanish for academic purposes in these early childhood classrooms, the agency and creativity seen in Cristal and her peers' brief and interrupted dramatization of Spanish class (Excerpt 1) in some ways belie her own response to my question.

These interactional spaces spilled out onto the recess yard, into the school cafeteria, and flowed across the school day into bus rides and walks home. The children who were making use of these spaces were formulating language policy that served their own interests and ideas. Their current language practices, actions and interactions can be seen as policy texts that contest assumptions about direct and full assimilation into Standard English. Moreover it is a space in which children of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds collaborated, created and co-narrated the possibilities for their lives in a process of self- and other-making that held much promise for promoting multilingual learning and living. The language practices taking place within these spaces served to foster a certain amount of prestige and power to those who used or attempted to use Spanish and help illustrate how, through performative action, children became agents of language policy. Here, though, along with highlighting these creative and agentive instances of language use, it is important to keep in mind the constraints pointed out by Blommaert (2005), which are always influenced and often dictated by language ideologies existing at higher levels in LPP (see Figure 1). The very real constraints of both high-stakes testing in English and the exclusive use of English for academic

instruction and literacy limit the possibility for children's development of bi- or multilingual literacy. While this space remained unexamined, or at least unquestioned, by teachers who tacitly assigned Spanish an unofficial status and allowed it to flourish, it became locked into the medium of the spoken vernacular.

The implications for the long-term use of Spanish are unclear, but what seems to be a growing certainty is that for children in these classrooms Standard English is the sole language of academics. Several focal children in the study had older siblings who, according to our observations at both home and school tended to use more English than their younger siblings. While the classrooms of these older students had far fewer Spanish-speakers, their tendency to use more English follows documented trajectories of shifting to English dominance over time of first- and second-generation children of immigrants (for discussion on language shift and loss, see Potowski, 2010). Moreover, informal observations and accounts about classroom language policy in the upper elementary grades suggest that use of Spanish may be less accepted or tolerated.¹¹ I argue that by combating this shift to English as we move forward in an increasingly diverse world of linguistic flexibility and re-orienting educational policy to build upon students' and their families' rich and varied language practices, schools can facilitate successful school experiences and greater academic achievement for all students (see, for example, González, Moll & Amanti, 2005; García, 2009; Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008). And through foregrounding the local classroom practices of multilingual students, attention can be directed to and lessons learned from how policy is constructed on the ground, oftentimes through a trickle-up effect as described in this paper.

What remains unclear is how relations of power and language use will continue to operate across the lives of these children. While language status and power in the lower elementary grades are tentative and connected to ever-shifting interactions, this paper does not directly address how power and prestige are assigned to those who speak Spanish outside of the ideological and implementational spaces of peer interaction and small group work. At the same time, as Standard English is the only official language of academics, it is thus legitimized and gains another form of status; those who master it gain different kinds of power, opportunity and access. Also unexplored in this paper is that large numbers of students attending Grant speak African American Vernacular English; the status of this variety of English remains unacknowledged, and its marginalization continues. What does this suggest about language, status, and power for African American students? How might Spanish-speaking children be learning African American Vernacular English alongside Standard English?

Future Research

This case has shown how students' own language practices can be tacitly integrated into classroom LPP and greatly influential within peer interactions. Of potential for further study is how children continue to play policymaking roles as they move into upper grades and into middle and high school. If teachers' *laissez-faire* policies change in the upper grades, what might happen to the spaces students have carved out for themselves in earlier years? Furthermore, following Cooper's (1989) discussion of opportunity and incentive to learn a language, what

does it mean that there are no official or formal opportunities or incentives to learn or become literate in Spanish at the elementary level, and some of the unofficial opportunities developed in this study were due to presence of the researchers? Another vein of future research might look more explicitly at Spanish as a language of status and prestige. Current work in a high school of a nearby community, another community with large numbers of immigrant students, shows that a similar phenomenon is occurring in which Spanish is seen as a status symbol, not by Latino students, in this case, but by students from Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia who express great regard for and interest in learning Spanish (Smalls, 2010).

As I began this paper by outlining my stance as researcher on language learning in educational settings, I conclude by returning to the notion of a "divided vision" in research (García, Skutnabb-Kangas & Torres-Guzmán, 2006, p. 11). While I have described with some detail "the actual" at Grant for kindergartners and first graders, "the imagined" remains to be outlined (p. 11). My vision for children at Grant, and more broadly for children across public schools, is one in which they are provided the opportunity to use not just Spanish, but other languages and varieties of English in more official spaces, and in which critical language awareness and development of multiliteracies accompany literacy instruction in Standard English. More important, however, would be to investigate children and families' own visions of what counts as successful educational outcomes and what they might imagine as an ideal school setting. This might be possible through further work that engages students, families, and teachers in more direct participation and/or collaboration in the research process (e.g., Funds of Knowledge projects as developed by González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and fosters the development of critical language awareness and pedagogies (see, for example, Alim, 2005, 2007). The imagining has yet to take place but I hope to have highlighted the potential for doing so that lies in the rich and varied language practices of young children.

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Notes

¹In this paper I do not attempt to evaluate or draw formal conclusions about children's language proficiencies. At the same time I do wish to differentiate between the children who speak different varieties of English at home and those who primarily speak different varieties of Spanish at home, keeping in mind that children of Mexican-origin, immigrant families often rapidly learn English, and use varieties of English for many purposes at home and in the community. Throughout the paper I use the terms "Spanish-speaking" and "English-speaking" not to assign fixed labels, but to distinguish between these two groups.

²Names of the community, school, teachers and students are pseudonyms intended to protect the privacy and anonymity of all mentioned in this paper.

³Howard's work, along with that of Wortham, form part of a growing body of research conducted in Marshall aimed at addressing community and school district needs in serving Latino families.

⁴I base my description of student demographics on a composite of phenotype, language use, informal teacher identifications, and student comments. This data represents a snapshot at mid-way through the school year; however, the demographics shifted across the school year as children left or arrived at Grant due to moves and other circumstances.

⁵My use of the "self as text" draws on Talburt's (2000) discussion of teacher as text in a university setting.

⁶During the first year of research I had two in-the-field research partners, while the second year worked with only one partner in the field.

⁷The fact that English-speaking students often talked to us about Spanish, asking us about our own knowledge and use of the language, and demonstrating or performing in Spanish, suggests that they may have been soliciting the kind of attention paid to the focal children, all Spanish-speaking, who, for example, got to wear a microphone and took center stage in front of the camera.

⁸As the majority of English-speaking children in these classrooms spoke African American Vernacular English, one could also make the case that they translanguaged every day while using Standard Academic English at school.

⁹English and Varghese discuss how "the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002, removed the term bilingual education from federal legislation and programs" (2010, p. 108). They also describe how Title III of NCLB replaced Title VII, the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), effectively exchanging the concept of bilingual education for "English acquisition" (see, among others, Hornberger, 2010; Menken, 2008; Wiley & Wright, 2004).

¹⁰The four guiding principles of NCLB are: Accountability, Flexibility, Local Control and Focusing on What Works (NCLB, 2001).

¹¹I want to thank Elaine Allard for sharing this observation with me.

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