ELL High School Students of Mexican Ancestry: A Phenomenological Study of Language Ideologies

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Abstract:
The formation of languages and dialects is frequently considered a social process (Gal & Irvine, 1995). As such, humans form their own ideologies about particular language varieties, placing values on certain ones in a given context more than others (Greenfield, 2010). The development of a person's language ideology can be influenced by the profit of distinction, which Pierre Bourdieu (1984) describes as the "noted margin of difference for usefulness and prestige of a particular language" (p. 55). It is through the process of misrecognition (Bourdieu, 1984) that a particular language is "recognized as legitimate and appropriate for discourse in official settings" (as cited in Lin, 1999, p. 395); consequently, the language with perceived legitimacy is intrinsically linked to the profit of distinction.

Purpose Statement:
The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the essence of language ideology formation among ELL students of Mexican ancestry in an urban high school in the Great Plains.

Research Questions
What is the essence of language ideology formation among this particular group of students?

Sub-Questions
• What are the perceived influences on language ideology formation that come from within Liberty High?
• What are the perceived influences on language ideology formation that come from students’ families?

Methodology
Phenomenology
Using a critical social theoretical framework, the researcher performed semi-structured interviews and participants observations (Cresswell, 2013), which was part of a larger study in 2012 examining the perceptions of faculty/staff and students on the graduation of ELL students of Mexican ancestry.

Student Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ELL Level</th>
<th>Student’s Birthplace</th>
<th>Time Lived in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Lincoln, NE (USA)</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Exited</td>
<td>Norfolk, NE (USA)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chikis</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>Cuernavaca, Mexico</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancho</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Exited</td>
<td>Chihuahua, Mexico</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Exited</td>
<td>Chihuahua, Mexico</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphael</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>San Luis Potosí, Mexico</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Level V</td>
<td>Guerrero, Mexico</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Language Preference

- Spanish
- Both
- English

Student Household Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Parent(s) Living in Home</th>
<th>Absent Parent</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>People Living in House</th>
<th>English Speakers in House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Mother and Father</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>Mother and Step-father</td>
<td>Father unknown</td>
<td>4, 2 half</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chikis</td>
<td>Mother and Step-father</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancho</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Father working</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>Mother and Father</td>
<td>Father in PA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphael</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Father in MK</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Father and Step-mother</td>
<td>Mother dead</td>
<td>1, 3 half</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings:
1) Participants demonstrated a language preference pattern based upon to whom they were speaking.
2) Students reported ambiguous feelings toward orientations for English language instruction.
3) Language learning opportunities for Spanish and English were available in the school to varying degrees.
   - Levels I-IV ELL courses (reducing in number as student progresses)
   - Content courses
     • Language based: English, literature, reading and oral communications
     • Other: math, science, physical education, art, social sciences, etc.
   - Levels I-II Spanish for Native Speakers courses
   - World languages
     • French, German, Spanish, Chinese

Conclusion

English = Profit of Distinction
• "Learning English is, of course, important and necessary for all students; this is a given. But rather than supporting the suppression or elimination of native language use at home and at school, the research... supports promoting native-language literacy as a way to enhance learning English more effectively" (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 227).

References