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

By: Kristine Sudbeck, MA

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

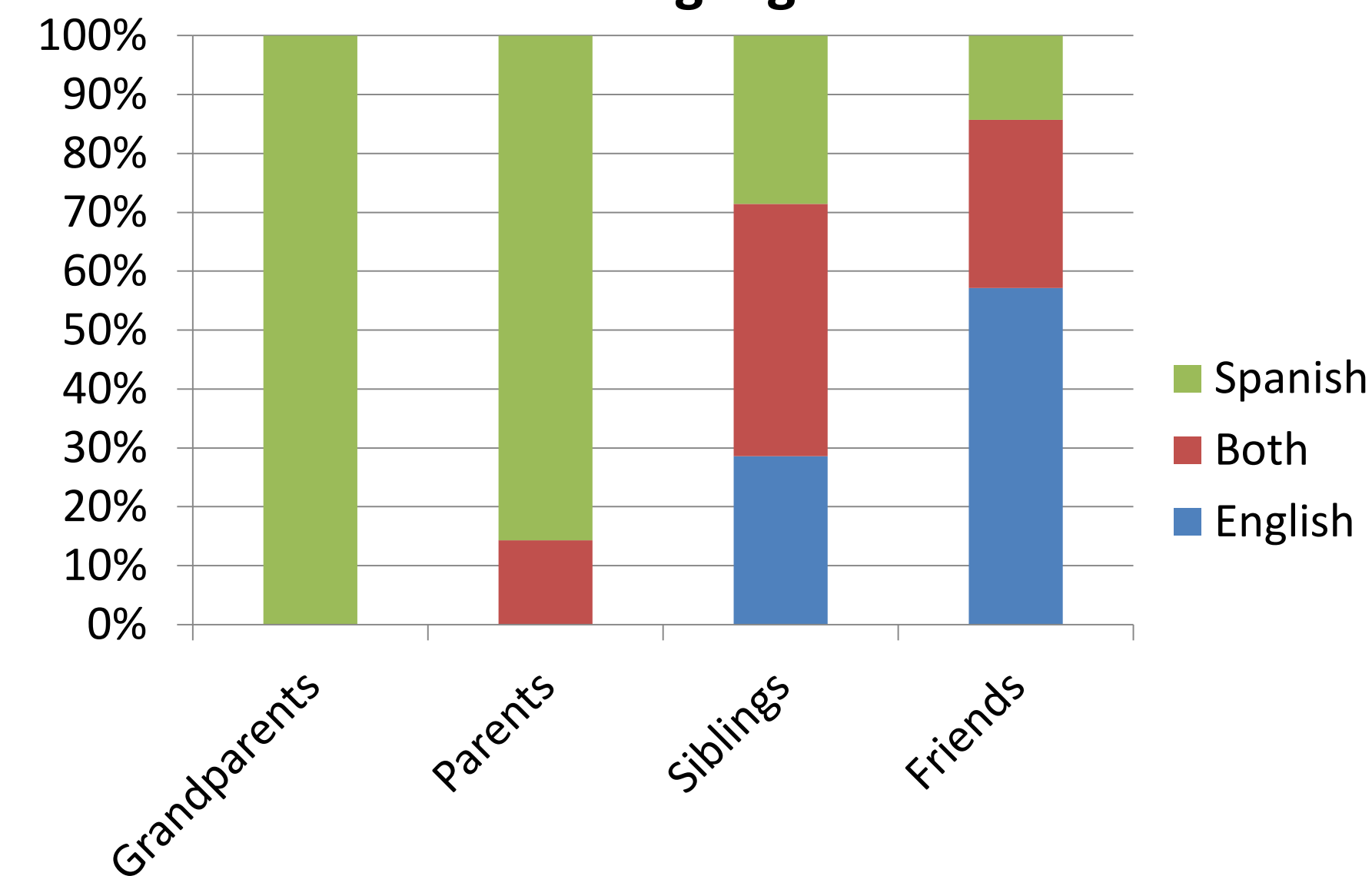
Phenomenology

Utilizing a critical social theoretical framework, the researcher performed semi-structured interviews and participants observations (Creswell, 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

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

Student Language Preference



Student Household Information

Student	Parent(s) Living in Home	Absent Parent	Siblings	People Living in House	English Speakers in House
Sonia	Mother and Father	n/a	3	5	2
Angel	Mother and Step-father	Father unknown	4, 2 half	8	8
Chikis	Mother and Father	n/a	3	9	3
Pancho	Mother	Father working in PA	3	5	4
José	Mother and Father	n/a	2	5	3
Raphael	Mother	Father in MX	4	3	0
Alicia	Father and Step-mother	Mother died	1, 3 half	7	3

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

Essence of Steps towards Additive Bilingualism

- The normative orientation of the language-in-education policy at Liberty High= ADDITIVE BILINGUALISM
 - “assumes that learners learn other languages (including the dominant language) most effectively when there is the continued educational use of the learners' first languages and, therefore, respect for the cultural assumptions and values implicit in them, that is, an additive approach” (McKay & Chick, 2001).

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).

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