

Language Ideology and Educational Research

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The articles in this special issue use the concept “language ideology” in research on educational phenomena. This concept has been developed in linguistic anthropology over the past two decades, where it has facilitated many interesting analyses of language use in cultural context (Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity, 1998). This special issue shows how a focus on language ideology can enrich educational research as well.

This introduction makes four main points. First, it describes the larger theoretical context for our work on language ideology and education. Second, it defines the concept of language ideology as it has been used in linguistic anthropology. Third, it sketches how language ideology might be a useful concept in educational research. Finally, it offers a brief overview of the four articles in this issue.

Our work on language ideology and education is part of a larger strategy in research on linguistics and education, a strategy that might contribute to a “linguistic anthropology of education.” Linguistic anthropologists study the role language plays in culturally patterned behavior. Contemporary linguistic anthropology has become a particularly fertile field both in its theoretical insights and in its empirical contributions. The best contemporary linguistic anthropology has maintained a linguistic emphasis on theoretical systematicity and analytic rigor, while applying this to understand culturally-embedded verbal behavior (e.g., Hill & Irvine, 1992; Silverstein & Urban, 1996)—

showing empirically how the cultural contexts of language use intertwine with language's structural properties.

At the same time, other contemporary social scientists have become more interested in language. Cultural anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and others have increasingly been using language and discourse as explanatory constructs in their theories of culture, identity, learning and other central human processes. Educational researchers also study the role language plays in identity development, learning and enculturation. But only some have taken advantage of contemporary work in linguistic anthropology. The sub-field "linguistic anthropology of education" would use insights and approaches from linguistic anthropology to explore educational processes—asking questions like the following: How are teachers' and students' identities established and transformed in particular interactional contexts? How might ideologies about language influence classroom behavior and educational policy? How could social reproduction occur in part through language use in school? Are some educational practices "ritualized," as ritual is understood by contemporary semiotic theories? Research on these questions has of course been going on for some time. But we suggest that systematic use of concepts developed in contemporary linguistic anthropology can further contribute to educational research on these questions.

We can provisionally define the linguistic anthropology of education with reference to six characteristics. Sophisticated classic work that could be called linguistic anthropology of education shares many of these characteristics with contemporary work (e.g., Cazden, John & Hymes, 1972; Heath, 1983; Mehan, 1979; Philips, 1983). Nonetheless, contemporary linguistic anthropology has refined the traditional approach

with respect to characteristics three and five. Contemporary work also goes significantly beyond most classic work with respect to characteristic four.

First, the linguistic anthropology of education studies *language in use*, not linguistic structure for its own sake. According to Duranti (1997), Hanks (1996) and others, linguistic anthropology does take advantage of linguists' discoveries about phonology and grammar, but it studies how structural categories are used in communicative practices. Linguistic anthropology of education studies speakers as social actors, not as repositories of linguistic competence.

Second, like cultural anthropology in general, the linguistic anthropology of education tries to understand *participants' own point of view* on their activities. In some cases, of course, participants do not consciously represent the categories that they use to organize their thought and action (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Silverstein, 1985). Instead of imposing outsider categories, linguistic anthropology induces analytic categories that participants either articulate or presuppose in their action.

Third, linguistic anthropology of education does not simply study "Discourses"—with a capital "D," following Gee (1990)—as many in social theory and cultural studies do (after Foucault, 1972). As described by Duranti (1997), Silverstein (1992) and others, linguistic anthropology tries to address macrosociological questions raised in social theory by *doing detailed analyses of language use in particular contexts*, thus studying what Gee calls discourses with a little "d."

Fourth, contemporary linguistic anthropology of education studies emergent patterns of identity formation that are created (partly through language use) in particular contexts, instead of presupposing stable social groups and individual identities that are

merely presupposed by speech. As described by Duranti (1997), Silverstein (1976, 1998) and others, linguistic anthropology studies *how language use can constitute aspects of culture and identity*.

Fifth, exemplary work in the linguistic anthropology of education systematically analyzes *patterns of semiotic cues* across particular segments of language use, instead of relying on isolated instances selected from the data. As described by Hymes (1996), Silverstein (1985), Wortham and Locher (1996, 1999) and others, linguistic anthropological analyses rely on “poetic” structures of semiotic cues that collectively presuppose a particular interpretation of a text. This contrasts with much classic and contemporary work in discourse analysis—which unsystematically extracts segments of discourse that support an analytic point.

Sixth, simply studying language in educational settings does not make one a linguistic anthropologist of education. Most studies of bilingualism, language learning and language minority students do not draw on the core theoretical insights and methodological techniques developed in linguistic anthropology, as these have been summarized in the first five points above. One can of course study the dynamics of multiple languages in educational settings from a linguistic anthropological perspective, and some linguistic anthropologists of education certainly do, but linguistic anthropology is only a small subset of empirical research on language. Thus the linguistic anthropology of education is a *subset* of what Hornberger (2000) and Spolsky (1999) call “educational linguistics.”

This special issue illustrates what a contemporary linguistic anthropology of education might look like, by focusing on one important concept. Woolard (1998)

defines language ideology as “representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (p.3). Gal (1998) describes how this concept subsumes several lines of inquiry that were formerly considered distinct.

Linguists and philosophers of language have pondered the...fact that ordinary language is always and unavoidably its own metalanguage. Many [others]...have noted that, to understand interaction, one has to have cultural categories for “what is going on,” and what can possibly be going on, in any strip of talk. Scholars of multilingualism and language contact...have understood that choice of a language has political implications exactly because of speakers’ commonsense convictions about what...the use of a language is assumed to imply about political loyalty and identity. And historians of ideas have noted the important influence that linguistic theories and social movements have often had on each other. (p.317)

The concept of language ideology, construed this broadly, has clearly been around for a long time. But contemporary linguistic anthropology has sharpened and applied the concept in productive ways.

Woolard (1998) describes two different lines of research on language ideology. First, language ideologies are belief systems shared by members of a group—ones that apply to language. People might believe, for instance, that a particular dialect “lacks grammar” and thus cannot be used to express complex ideas. Work on language ideology in this sense has studied standardization, language revitalization, language and nationalism, diglossia and bilingualism, and other topics. Second, language ideologies are the often-implicit construals that speakers make of particular instances of discourse.

Any utterance makes sense only as it gets (metapragmatically) construed as an instance of some recognizable type of social action. The circulating types of frames, events and identities that can be presupposed to organize a particular discursive interaction—types that Urban (1996) calls “metadiscourses”—are (most often) implicit construals of what different linguistic forms mean for the social positioning of speakers. Language ideologies help us explain how particular utterances come to make sense as recognizable types of events.

Although these two senses of language ideology might initially seem opposed—with the first describing more “macro-level” beliefs about languages and dialects and the second describing more “micro-level” construals of utterances within particular events—they actually describe a more general process of positioning and the enactment of social identity. Language ideologies mediate social identity, because people rely on their construals of what particular linguistic patterns mean in order to identify speakers as occupying recognizable social positions. Drawing on ideologies that circulate widely in a society, particular speakers position themselves and others in characteristic ways. Consistent positioning over time can establish more enduring identities for individuals and groups.

Silverstein (1985) provides an example of this process in his account of how English lost its 2nd person plural participant deictic. Before 1700, English had *thee/thou* as the 2nd singular and *ye/you* as the 2nd plural. Around the 13th century, under the influence of French, this distinction had also taken on the social indexical value of intimate and formal 2nd person singular pronouns, with *thee/thou* the intimate or “T” form and *ye/you* the formal or “V” form (cf. Brown & Gilman, 1960). In 17th century England,

speakers characteristically used asymmetrical *ye/you* (i.e., speaking V to someone who calls you T) to indicate deference and symmetrical *ye/you* to indicate sophistication. The Quakers found both these uses abhorrent and began to use *thee/thou* in all contexts—regardless of the status of the addressee (see Bauman, 1983, for more detail on Quaker language use in this historical period). The Quakers consciously used *thee/thou* in socially inappropriate ways, in order to index their moral objections to social hierarchy and pretension.

As others heard Quakers using only *thee/thou* for the second person singular, a language ideology developed: to use *thee/thou* in any context made one sound like a Quaker, or at least like one who might favor their extreme political ideas. Most speakers did not want to identify themselves this way, and so they stopped using *thee/thou* altogether. Non-Quaker speakers of English were willing to violate grammatical rules, using *ye/you* for both singular and plural addressees, in order to avoid sounding Quaker. By 1700, then, the formal distinction between the English 2nd singular and the 2nd plural had disappeared through the mediation of a language ideology.

This example shows how language ideology has particular power as an analytic tool, because such ideologies *both* contribute to larger social belief systems *and* allow individuals to construe particular instances of discourse. Widely shared ideologies about language do in fact predispose speakers to interpret particular instances of discourse in certain ways. At the same time, contingent social interactions are the empirical location in which broader theories and social patterns exist and get transformed.

The concept of language ideology can be productively applied to educational research in various ways, several of which are illustrated by the articles in this issue.

Speaking broadly, one can see how the identity of “educated person” might get mediated by language ideologies. People seem to get identified as “educated” or not based in significant part on how they speak. That is, accents, dialects, and the use of particular lexical, grammatical and pragmatic forms often get taken as indexes of how educated a speaker is. Cazden (1988), for example, describes how formal educational settings often discourage storytelling in favor of more “rational” discourse. Lemke (1990) shows how students must normally master various features of scientific talk in order to get recognized as potential scientists.

The concept of language ideology, and linguistic anthropologists’ account of how such ideologies mediate social identity, provides a useful framework for understanding such phenomena. The articles in this special issue all apply the concept of language ideology to educational phenomena in this way. Ayala Fader examines how Yiddish and English texts socialize Hasidic cultural identity in Boro Park, Brooklyn. Her analysis of Hasidic children's literature and literacy activities reveals culturally specific ideologies of gendered bilingualism, as well as notions of the moral individual and community. She shows how literacy practices contribute to the cultural reproduction of difference and the legitimation of a moral hierarchy, in which Hasidic beliefs and practices are given divine validation.

Kevin O’Connor analyzes how participants in a student engineering project use linguistic forms to index social identities during a video conference. The video conference, involving students from two universities which differed widely in status, took place during the course of a multi-institution student project sponsored by a federally funded engineering education coalition. The coalition intended the technology to allow

for "face-to-face" interaction among geographically separated students. But O'Connor shows how videoconferencing transforms face-to-face interaction in a variety of ways which have implications for the indexing of social identity, and he cautions against the common view among distance educators that such technologies provide a transparent and neutral means for communication.

Mira Lisa Katz examines the curriculum of one workplace literacy initiative serving immigrant women employees in a hotel housekeeping department. She explores the competing discourses and ideologies of the workplace—family, skills, and, more recently, being part of the team. Inevitably, problems arise when employers assume they can “teach” workers how to behave, talk and interact—and it can become increasingly challenging for workers to maintain their own sense of identity. The article illustrates the conflicts some immigrant workers experience between their own cultures’ ways of construing workplace discourse and those presupposed by American employers, and it highlights the importance of linguistic and cultural versatility in the United States workplace.

Anthony Berkley reconsiders the link between ideology, participation, and learning, by examining a context that reverses some of the social factors typically found in urban minority education. His article analyzes the introduction of an ideology of standard language and individual expression into a Maya-speaking community in rural Mexico. This ideology was neither the dominant one of Mexican society, nor did it represent the views of the members of its target community. It was espoused only by the bilingual, female teacher who stood for recent national reforms in basic education and who faced a mixed classroom dominated by adult men. What resulted were value

conflicts, which gave rise to negotiated solutions culminating in a set of hybrid educational compromises—like the enregisterment of standard Maya as a written rather than oral discourse, the production of multiply authored texts, and the development of a new sense for the linguistic difference between Maya and Spanish. Berkley evaluates these as "unintended consequences" because they emerged in contingent ways from the learning process itself.

Taken together, these four articles illustrate the utility that linguistic anthropological concepts like language ideology can have for the study of educational contexts and processes.

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