

“Sit up straight, say what you’re supposed to say” – Raciolinguistic Perspectives on the
Linguistic Experiences of Racially Minoritized Students
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Abstract

This study seeks to describe the ways in which students with linguistically and racially minoritized identities narrate their experiences using language in public high school classrooms. Using a Raciolinguistics and Critical Race theoretical frame to explore constructions of linguistic proficiency, bilingualism, racial and linguistic identity, and disciplined language, this study attempts to deepen the current body of research in raciolinguistics by examining the ways in which students with minoritized racial and linguistic identities narrate themselves in relation to their teachers, peers, and broader narratives of language in schools. This research also seeks to attend to the ways these linguistic navigations both participate in and work to counteract the ideological and material violence of schooling. In this ethnographic and interview-based study, Roy D'Andrade's (2005) work in cultural cognitive structures was used to examine the ways in which racially and linguistically minoritized high school students understand concepts of 'academic' or 'classroom appropriate language' as well as the ways they conceptualize multilingual practices and their own multilingualism. A series of in-person, semi-structured interviews with students were conducted alongside over 30 hours of ethnographic observations. Interview transcript analysis surfaced the ways in which participants both utilized and rejected four key narratives to describe their experiences with language in school. Specifically: (a) narratives of language learning and fluency which construct language as linear and hierarchical with fluency as the ultimate goal, (b) narratives which understand bi/multilingualism to be socially enabling and isolating, (c) narratives which construct school as an English-speaking space with strict linguistic rules and conventions, and (d) constructions of racial and linguistic identity as mutually definitive and linked. Results align with the existing body of literature which is invested in the narrated experiences of marginalized students and stands to cultivate asset

based and liberatory heuristics for discussing and practicing multilingualism in schools. Future research involving additional interviews and a larger and more diverse research team could be conducted to add depth, breadth, and additional perspectives to these findings.

Keywords: Raciolinguistics, Critical Race Theory, student experiences, multilingualism, linguistic disciplining

Introduction

Students with racially and linguistically minoritized identities are increasingly becoming the focus of research conducted in fields critical of inequitable and violent schooling practices. Currently, there are several researchers who explicitly center the experiences and figurings of marginalized students (e.g., Milu, 2021; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Zarate, 2018; Daniels, 2018) but there is a need for more specific and situated work. Centering the voices of students most directly impacted by cultural cognitive structures which problematize racialized linguistic practices is essential in the pursuit of anti-racist, anti-colonial, and liberatory educational futures.

Raciolinguistics provides a powerful framework for understanding the material and ideological practices of marginalization, specifically those associated with racialization and linguistics as interconnected and reifying (Daniels, 2018; Rosa & Flores, 2017; Bucholtz et al., 2018). This field is critical of the ways race and language have been intentionally co-naturalized in the name of colonial projects which favor whiteness and render race and language real, “natural”, and essential (Chaka, 2021). The field is interested not only in the complex and nuanced relationships between racial and linguistic identity and experience, but also in the ways Western colonial logics center whiteness and posit monolingual ‘standard English’ practices as the ‘norm’ whilst problematizing all racial and linguistic identities and practices which are read as ‘other’ (Rosa & Flores, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017; Alim et al., 2020; Silverstein, 1996).

This study seeks to describe the ways in which students with linguistically and racially minoritized identities narrate their linguistic experiences in and perceptions of public high school classrooms. Using a Raciolinguistics and Critical Race theoretical frame to explore constructions of linguistic proficiency, bilingualism, racial and linguistic identity, and disciplined language, this study attempts to deepen the current body of research on raciolinguistics by examining the

ways in which students with minoritized racial and linguistic identities narrate themselves in relation to their teachers, peers, and broader narratives of language in schools. This study also seeks to highlight the ways students navigate classrooms linguistically. The research surfaces the role of cultural cognitive narratives of schooling which center whiteness and ‘standard’ English (Chaka, 2021) within student experiences and navigations. The findings of this study indicate that narrative violence in shared cultural cognitive constructions of language center conventions of whiteness and work to marginalize and enact violence against racially and linguistically minoritized students. Further, this study describes the ways that student narrations of their linguistic navigations work to counteract the ideological and material violence of schooling.

This study was born both from a deep interest and investment in the work being done within radical fields of education research and from a personal desire to better understand and critique cultures of schooling that serve and recreate colonial systems of thought and ways of being. I am interested in schools not only as a site of learning but also as sites of social and cultural reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017; Collins, 2009) which seek to uphold hierarchies of power that marginalize and oppress students. I am also interested in the power of schools to be sites of disruption which challenge these same hierarchies. By centering the experiences of students with racially and linguistically minoritized identities, I hope to draw attention to the way those most directly impacted by school, as a space of both maintenance and disruption of systems of oppression, are making sense of these experiences.

This study’s research questions are as follows:

1. How do racially and linguistically minoritized students narrate their experiences using language in public high school classrooms?

2. What are the underlying cultural cognitive structures that inform student understandings of language and how do these structures figure in the way students are making sense of/narrating their linguistic experiences?
3. To what extent do raciolinguistics linkages between racial and linguistic identity inform student narrations of classroom experiences?
4. How is the linguistic environment of a public high school in the United States narrated?

Review of Literature

Socially Situated and Constructed Identity Development

The term “identity” can be used to describe either (1) a social category defined by a set of rules, characteristics, attributes, and behaviors or (2) a set of socially distinguishing features that are deemed unchangeable and of social consequence which act as a source of pride (Fearon, 1999). Identity is socially situated and contextualized in such a way that may be imposed - either by an individual onto themselves or externally. Pertinent to this study, the way individuals make sense of their racial and linguistic identities is largely influenced by societal constructions and narratives of race and language (Omi & Winant, 1994, Tsai et al., 2020). Internalized societal narratives and external impositions of “identity” categories with societal implications often take the form of racialization and assumptions of linguistic ability which are linked with cultural cognitions of identity (Boutte-Heiniluoma & Crystell, 2013; Tsai et al., 2020; Zarate, 2018). Due to the historical and contemporary co-naturalization of race and language, individuals are assumed to possess or lack certain linguistic traits (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Ethnic and racial identity development occurs through individual meaning making, psychological cognitions and feelings, and cultural socialization (Mena, 2022). Considering

cultural socialization provides valuable insights into the many intersections of ethno-racial identity and social constructs of race and the body (Adames et al., 2021; Mena, 2022).

Specifically, there is a focus on the ways in which racial identities are valued and powered under white supremacy and how this knowledge impacts educational spaces and student identity development (Burrell, 2010). An imposed identity in the form of racializing a particular body and evaluating ability and worth based on linguistic proficiency often yields educational bias and inequity (Dixon-Román, 2018; Burrell, 2010), specifically because school practices tend to reproduce societal inequalities.

Critical Race Theory

One approach to understanding the impact of social and institutional structures and spaces on identities is to apply Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is invested in understanding and transforming relationships between race, racism, and societal and interpersonal power structures by interrogating concepts and structures including but not limited to order, equality, reason, rational or objective thought, and law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical Race Theory (CRT) stems from civil rights activism, feminist critiques of power and social roles, and the collective legal action and theorizing of interdisciplinary scholars and activists who aim to center race in conversations and legislation associated with rights and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The key tenants of CRT are as follows; (1) Ordinary-ness: racism is the norm rather than an exceptionality in the United States and thus is often rendered invisible making it difficult to disrupt (2) Interest Convergence: systems uphold and protect white supremacy which yields material and psychological benefits for white people regardless of class meaning there is very little incentive for white folks to eradicate existing systems, (3) Social Construction: race and races are constructed by social thought and interaction and thus are fluid, plastic, and malleable,

and (4) Different Racialization: because race is plastic and constructed, individuals are racialized differently at different times to serve and protect white supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Jackson, 2021; Omi & Winant, 1994). CRT offers a theoretical frame through which to critically interrogate concepts such as ordinary-ness of racialized violence, interest convergence, the constructed nature of race, and the plasticity of race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Jackson, 2021; Omi & Winant, 1994). The theory has been instrumental in constructing and reconstructing the way race, racism, and power are understood and identified in interactions between individuals and between individuals and institutions.

CRT in Public Education

More recently, CRT has gained attention in spheres of public education where its inclusion in curriculum is widely misunderstood, misrepresented, and debated (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Despite this debate and the attempts of right-wing groups to criminalize CRT, this theory has become a powerful tool for engaging with the material and ideological consequences of racial inequity and white supremacy in public schooling (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Within educational spheres, many CRT scholars advocate for a grounding of the work in CRT's legal roots (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005) with specific attention paid to the ways the legal and educational systems interact to compound racialized oppression and violence. CRT-based education scholarship proposes culturally sustaining and critical multicultural pedagogies (Crenshaw et al., 1995) and provides an analytical and ideological tool which allows for critical analyses of education and schools as racialized and powered spaces which re/produce systems of white supremacy (Ladson-Billings,

2006). CRT informs theories of raciolinguistics and racial matching or representative teaching and thus is at the heart of this study.

Raciolinguistics

“What does it mean to speak as a racialized subject in contemporary America?” (Alim et al., 2016)

Colonial Histories of Race and Language

“Standard English”, Whiteness, and Power

As a component of the colonial project and in the name of furthering white supremacy, race and language have been regarded as real, “natural”, and essential through intentional construction and treated as one and the same. Specifically, Western colonial powers have constructed whiteness and monolingual English language usage as the “norm”, rendering both invisible, mutualistic, and as the expectation and the standard (Rosa & Flores, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017; Alim et al., 2020; Silverstein, 1996). White, western knowledges posit that non-accented English is “the universal language” (Torres, 2015) and argue that English is both “neutral” and “benevolent” due to its universality. However, such argumentation ignores the ways in which English “remains a language to which colonial discourses still adhere, a language still laden with colonial meanings.” (Pennycook, 1998). Further, under the colonial project, English monolingualism and whiteness have been employed in the ‘justification’ of each other and their collective supremacy as described in the following quotation, “whiteness is exceptional in part because of its use and spreading of ‘standard English’ and English is exceptional as it signals and invokes the power associated with whiteness”. The mutualistic powering of English

and whiteness serves larger colonial motivations and is both rooted in and roots the racing of language and the theorizing of language through the lens of race (Alim, 2016).

Within the mutually definitive relationship between race and language, specifically between English and whiteness, are deep investments and attachments to a constructed ‘standard English’ (Chaka, 2021). ‘Standard English’ is a concept rooted in the belief that there is a predictable, universally accepted set of normative guidelines which govern how English is spoken and written (Bacon, 2017). These normative standards are the marker against which varieties of English are evaluated – variance and diversion are “judged to be deviant and inappropriate” (Chaka, 2021). Whiteness, monolingual English speaking, and standard English are constructions which have been rendered within larger normalized binaries. Each now represents “essentialized and racialized polar terms” (Chaka, 2021). This essentializing process yields a construction of reality in which: to only speak “standard English” is to be folded into whiteness while to speak multiple languages and/or non-standard English is to be a part of non-Whiteness (Chaka, 2021; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Von Esch et al., 2020).

These assertions, often rendered invisible, are based in historical and contemporary traditions of white supremacy and colonialism (Pennycook, 1998). Whiteness has long valued English, spoken and written in the way first popularized in Europe, as a symbol of wealth, education, and status or power. During periods of active colonization, colonial bodies have used English as a method of control and as a tangible assimilatory demand (Pennycook, 1998). This use and privilege of English is mirrored today in the ways English is expected and taught to individuals who have immigrated to the U.S. and the West more broadly defined (Erker & Otheguy, 2021; Chaka, 2021; Schultz, 2016). ‘Proficiency’ or use of a standardized English is evaluated by the “white listening subject” who is unlikely to perceive racially minoritized

English speakers as “proficient” regardless of actual ability (Rosa & Flores, 2017, Chun, 2016).

This mutually definitive and supremacy-asserting relationship is a central component of the colonial co-naturalization of race and language and demonstrates the historical and contemporary construction of race and language by colonizers to assert supremacy.

Raciolinguistic Perspectives

Raciolinguistics or raciolinguistics perspectives consider the ways in which racial and linguistic categories have been historically “co-naturalized” (Rosa & Flores, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017) or have been understood culturally as mutually constructive and definitive of one another.

Theoretically, raciolinguistics combine critical-language research with critical-race scholarship resulting in a holistic and robust perspective on the historical and contemporary deficit paradigm often employed when assessing the competence and ability of racially and linguistically minoritized individuals. Because whiteness and English monolingualism are considered the “norm”, racial and linguistic identities and practices which exist outside of such constructions are considered ‘other’ and are deficit framed. This deficit framework results in the continued centering of whiteness in English education and linguistic practices and often leads to individuals who are racialized as “non-white” being viewed as linguistically deficient and non-English languages being widely devalued (Rosa & Flores, 2017; Gerald, 2020). Due to the interlocked and co-naturalized constructions of race and language, this deficit perspective is broadly applied regardless of education or accomplishment (Flores & Rosa, 2017).

Destabilizing Race and Language - Transracialization

Not only are race and language co-naturalized they are often hyper-categorized and assigned such that those who speak certain languages are racialized into categories associated

with that language – an individual speaking Mandarin on a train is not racialized as Latinx (Pennycook, 2007; Alim, 2016). Raciolinguistic perspectives or theorizing race and language as they have been co-naturalized provides an opportunity to destabilize and interrogate racial and linguistic projects (Alim, 2016). Specifically, in his 2016 essay titled “Who’s Afraid of the Transracial Subject”, Alim (2016) introduces the concept of transracialization which means “to theorize racialization as a dynamic process of translation and transgression” (Alim, 2016, pg. 34) and emphasizes the utility of transracialization in “problematizing the very process of racial categorization” (pg.35). Transracialization destabilizes normative patterns of racial and linguistic categorization by highlighting the situated and fluid nature of interpersonal interpretation. Additionally, it asserts itself as transgressive (Alim, 2016) and disruptive of binaristic thinking - a product and producer of contemporary American racism.

Racialization, Power, and Linguistic Hybridity in Education

Raciolinguistic perspectives on English as a second language practices reveal the nuanced and situated ways students access and use a range of Englishes. For example, students learning English in predominantly Black communities often participate in linguistic and grammatical traditions associated with historic and contemporary African American Language or African American Vernacular English (Paris, 2016). This is especially important when contextualized by AAL’s close ties to oppression, resistance, and success of Black and African American communities and thus a need for culturally and linguistically sustaining classroom practices (Paris, 2016).

Raciolinguistic perspectives also shape our understanding of complicated in-group, out-group linguistic dynamics in classroom spaces where students speak in multiple languages and dialects. For example, linguistic hybridity or the blending of multiple languages or dialects

enables students not only to navigate multilingual spaces but also to demonstrate belonging to specific linguistic in-groups. Students may practice language hybridity in classrooms when speaking with peers or educators – using Spanglish to signal belonging and subvert dominant, English-centered classroom practices (Rosa, 2016). Additionally, students may employ one or multiple dialects within this hybridity, for example, speaking a version of Spanglish which includes vocabulary from both Mexican and Puerto Rican Spanish, to signal belonging to particular ethnic or racial groups (Rosa, 2016).

Discipline as it Relates to Classroom Language Practices

Raciolinguistics allows for a deepened understanding of classroom linguistic practices such as naming (Bucholtz, 2016) and student speech correction (Rosa & Flores, 2017) as deeply political and racialized in ways that require intentional disruption. Discipline in classroom spaces, both in practice and when evaluated for its function conceptually, acts as an important element of a classroom culture. A central element of the hidden curriculum (Snyder, 1971) disciplinary practices either reproduce or disrupt relied upon cultural narratives surrounding who is “good”, “correct”, and “normal” (Sewell, 1992). Discipline which centers around “correct” linguistic and language practices (Rosa & Flores, 2017; Daniels, 2018) can show how discipline acts as an expression of value and worth in classroom and cultural spaces.

Linguistic Discipline as Training Students to Adhere to Colonial Whiteness

Discipline is often built around both hierarchical and lateral systems of surveillance in which student behavior is evaluated and “corrected” by both the educator and fellow students. In many of its current iterations, discipline is reliant upon deficit frameworks which anticipate or are centered around something being “wrong” with student behaviors. In many U.S. schools, this “wrongness” or deficit in behavior is reflective and reproductive of larger cultural narratives as

dictated by white, middle-class societal norms and the conventions of “white civility” (Coleman, 2006). Regarding language and linguistic practices specifically, deficit-based discipline is often used to seek out and “correct” students’ language through punishment. This “correction” or evaluation of fault is often determined based on subjective teacher analyses of students’ tone and appropriateness (Rosa and Flores, 2017).

Teachers sit in a position of greater power and privilege than their students and have knowledge that is seen as more valuable (Freire, 2020). This inequitable distribution of power, when combined with a deficit framework and heightened classroom surveillance, can yield relationships of control between educators and their students and between students and their peers. These narratives of discipline, when learned and practiced in classroom spaces by all members, place students as competitors for affirmations of behavior deemed positive and as mutual surveillers of each other’s actions in the classroom. Students are encouraged to monitor their own behavior, specifically as it relates to their peers, which can yield classrooms built around hyper-individualization and focused on who is “good” or “normal”. It becomes clear that, in addition to being a set of tools used to train behaviors, discipline can also be understood as the powered, surveillance-based, enactment of cultural schemas which dictate the ways of being deemed valuable in educational and societal spaces.

Despite growth in discussions regarding diversity and inclusion in classroom spaces, new classroom practices that claim to value many voices are still largely underscored with the subtext “if those voices are speaking English”. Within American classrooms, monolingual English-speaking students are still widely considered the “norm” and linguistic assimilation is not only expected but taught in ELA and ESL classrooms (Endo & Miller, 2010). This continual privilege of monolingual English language practices is further nuanced by expectations not only of

English speaking, but English spoken to the standards of the white middle class norm. Variation in dialect and accent is constructed as “inappropriate language for the classroom” and corrected, often violently (Rosa & Flores, 2015). White, middle class, monolingual practices tend to be valued and praised in educational spaces while cultural schemas are reproduced through the surveillance of the ‘white listening subject’ (Rosa & Flores, 2015). Whose language is understood to be outside what is known or “acceptable” is decided by both their educators and peers whose perceptions of language and normality are informed by cultural scripts and mediated by their respective positionalities (Rosa & Flores, 2015). Individuals who are racialized as “non-white” are read as less linguistically capable, regardless of competence by white educators and peers which leads to corrections of language and punishment for using language deemed “inappropriate” in classroom settings (Rosa & Flores, 2015).

Students with racially and/or linguistically minoritized identities describe linguistic labor, stress, and continued practices of self-surveillance within their language usage as elements of their relationships with both their white peers and their professors (Holliday & Squires, 2021 and Kubota, 2021). Relationships between educators and students within a classroom community can be a central element in disrupting violent and oppressive systems of knowing and being. Specifically, relationships grounded in authentic care and compassion can work to undermine many of the damaging constructions and practices of discipline as they exist currently (Rector-Aranda, 2019). Specifically, students describe experiences with stereotype threat as it relates to language practices and express fear of negative stereotypes being made based on their language usage in the classroom (Holliday & Squires, 2021). This fear is the impetus for a particular type of sociolinguistic labor (Holliday & Squires, 2021) in which students adjust their language practices to avoid discipline in environments rich with linguistic racism. Additionally, students

expressed strain and challenges within their interpersonal relationships with peers who they felt approached them with “pre-determined and essentialized categories of race, ethnicity, nationality, and language” (Kubota, 2021). Disciplinary practices based either intentionally or subconsciously in linguisticism or linguistic racism (Rosa & Flores, 2020) are especially damaging to the relationships formed within classroom communities as individuals with racially and/or linguistically minoritized identities are the targets of both lateral and hierarchical surveillance (Silva, 2021). Beyond the enactment of tangible disciplinary practices such as mandates of monolingualism and correcting of student language, larger cultural narratives surrounding whose language is acceptable permeate relationships and work to further ‘other’ students.

Theoretical Framework

I examine the way racially and linguistically minoritized students narrate their experiences using language in the classroom through a theoretical prism of: Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and Raciolinguistics (Rosa & Flores, 2015; Flores & Rosa, 2017; Alim et al., 2020; Silverstein, 1996), and methodological theory rooted in the theories and practices of Interpretive Anthropology (Geertz, 1973). Through this theoretical prism, I analyze the narrated feelings, ideas, and experiences of students by studying the cultural cognitive structures (D’Andrade, 2005) on which they rely as they figure their experiences and navigations of identity (e.g., Holland et al., Omi & Winant, 1994) and my own interpretations of their comments. This theoretical prism centers race and racialization as it relates to language and linguistic identities within broad cultural cognitive structures. Taken together, these theories provide a framework through which to understand race as mutable and race and racialization to be plastic and changing (Alim, 2016; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Jackson, 2021). Further, through these theories, I understand racialization and language as intertwined and co-naturalized

(Rosa & Flores, 2015) in ways that are both liberating and oppressive for peoples and communities marginalized under systems of power rooted in colonial whiteness. Finally, this theoretical prism provides a way for me, as the researcher, to be attentive to the ways individual and collective interpretations of experiences are informed by cultural cognitive narratives and structures, particularly those structures that often maintain hierarchies of power and domination that favor whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In being attentive to the way these narratives inform our interpretations, this theoretical framework mandates that I am attentive to their power not only in student narrations but in my own interpretations and understandings of their stories. As such, all findings come from a deeply situated and positioned place in which I hope to render myself and my interpretive lenses visible (e.g., D'Andrade, 2005; Larkin et al., 2011). By surfacing the cultural cognitive structures informing student narrations of classroom experiences with language, I hope to illuminate the depths of linguistic racism as a central component of constructions and understandings of school as a space.

Interpretive Anthropology

Interpretive Anthropology is the main methodological theory which informs this study and provides a framework for engaging with and analyzing cultural cognitive structures and interpreting the meaningful aspects of the linguistic culture of schooling within student comments.

Methods

This study employs axiological, existentialist, and epistemological orientations to make sense of how students with racially and linguistically minoritized identities narrate their linguistic experiences in and out of explicitly multilingual, public high school classrooms. An investigation into the internalized cultural values associated with the assignment and

construction of racial and linguistic categories demonstrates an axiological orientation while an exploration of student feelings, cognitions, and interpretations of their experiences is indicative of an existentialist orientation.

Participants

School Site

This study used a combination of convenience and purposive sampling to identify a key high school site, classrooms for observation, and student interviewees. The study was conducted over the course of 6 months at a mid-size, public high school in a small city in the Western United States. To respect the privacy and confidentiality of both the students and educators who participated in this study, the city, public high school, educator, and student names have been fictionalized to mirror the actual study site. The selected high school will be referred to as Addison High School or AHS. Addison High was selected as an optimal study site due to connections between the research institution and the school as well as for its demographic makeup with specific attention paid to the racial and linguistic identities of both students and educators. AHS has a student body of 1108 individuals with a student to teacher ratio of 18 students to 1 educator. 79.8% of the student body identifies as a racially minoritized with 52% of students identifying as Latinx or “Hispanic”. Additionally, a majority of students are enrolled in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education (CLDE) programs with 93% of CLDE students speaking Spanish as their first or home language.

In addition to having a large proportion of racially and linguistically minoritized students, AHS stands apart from other public high schools in its district due to its prominent multilingual education program which includes several IB, and honors classes taught in both English and Spanish. These classes prioritize multilingual practices within curriculum and classroom

procedures. Multilingual classes are a unique example of explicitly multilingual pedagogy and provide an interesting space for analysis of student experiences using multiple languages.

Classroom Site and Student Interviewees

Within AHS, I selected a main, multilingual classroom site in which to conduct the majority of my ethnographic observations and from which I would select my student and educator interviewees. The teacher, Ms. Alcaraz, is a recent graduate of the research institution and maintains personal and professional connections with the Education department. Her commitment to anti-racist, anti-colonial, multilingual education practices made her bilingual Anthropology classrooms ideal for observation and analysis. Within this space, I selected student interviewees by extending an open and non-incentivized invitation to all students in Ms. Alcaraz's Anthropology class. The student interviewees self-selected to participate by volunteering to speak with me over lunch or during their off periods. In total, I formally interviewed seven students from Ms. Alcaraz's class and conducted informal conversations with twelve. The students who were interviewed ranged in grade from sophomore to senior year students but were chosen due to their enrollment in multilingual IB classes. All student interviewees identified as racially minoritized and five of the seven formal interviewees identified as linguistically minoritized with Spanish as their home or first language. To honor these students' confidentiality, all student names have been changed.

Instruments

Data collection for this study was conducted using three key instruments; (1) a questionnaire designed to gather information about student experiences using language in educational settings administered through verbal interviews, (2) a structured observational notetaking guide designed to foster timed observations regarding the classroom activities,

linguistic occurrences, and any notable quotes regarding language, and (3) Roy D'Andrade's gist proposition protocols.

Data Collection

Observational Data Collection

Observational data were collected over the course of four weeks during Ms. Alcaraz's morning Anthropology class periods. During my time in Ms. Alcaraz's classroom, it was my intention to observe rather than participate in the classroom activities; however, as my time in the class continued, I was increasingly involved both in class discussion and student activities but also in supporting curriculum and lesson development and execution. The purpose of observational data collection was twofold; to provide context for student and educator interviews and interactions as well as to allow for a more complete and nuanced understanding of the classroom community and educator engagement with language and classroom language practices. Each class period lasted one hour, and forty minutes and guided observational notes were recorded using a pre-designed data collection table stored in a running Microsoft Word Document. Notes were taken every thirty minutes with specific attention paid to language practices and notable student or educator quotes regarding the use of language. Following observational periods, I elected to write short observational memos which reflected on major themes, key moments, points of surprise, and areas of interest to add to observations in the future. Observational data collection was framed around the following areas of interest and guiding questions:

1. Who speaks in class? How do they speak?
 - a. What is the reaction of the educator?
2. How does the educator talk about speaking in class? Is speaking encouraged?
Discouraged? Punished or managed?

3. Do students read in class? What does this look like – independent vs. group vs. out loud etc.
4. Is certain language praised? How?
5. What languages are spoken?
6. Whose spoken ideas are valued? What does this look like?

Interview Protocols

In addition to ethnographic observational data collection, I also conducted a series of semi-structured, conversational interviews with seven students from Ms. Alcaraz's Anthropology class. Interviews were voluntary and conducted during lunch and student off periods. While there was no formal incentive, snacks were provided to all students who volunteered to be interviewed. The interviews ranged in length from five minutes to thirty-five minutes and were conducted in both group and individual interview settings with no interview exceeding two interviewees. Each interviewee was assigned a number (S1 through S7) and each quote was coded by student number for future citations. Though all interviews were conducted in English, all interviewees were asked what language they would like to have the interview in and closed captioning in Spanish was used for all interviews and all interviewees were invited to answer interview questions in the language that was most comfortable to them. All interviews were recorded using an iPhone voice-recording app and were then transcribed using the NVivo software transcription service. Following interview transcription, all interview transcripts were cleaned in Microsoft Word, a process which sought to ensure accurate transcription and to add emphasis, tone, and body language which was noted on paper during the interviews. Interviews were intended to

surface student experiences with language in school settings and were based on interview questions that inquired about experiences with and conceptions of language (see Appendix A).

Analytical Methodologies

In this ethnomethodological and interview-based study, I pull from Roy D'Andrade's work in cultural cognitive structures to examine the ways in which racially and linguistically minoritized high school students understand concepts of 'academic' or 'classroom appropriate language,' as well as the ways they conceptualize language learning, multilingual practices, and their own multilingualism. All interviews were analyzed using D'Andrade's (2005) method of extracting gist propositions from interview data, and then structuring shared cultural, cognitive schemas. Based on the colloquial phrasing, semantics, presuppositional phrases, and pauses or silences present within interviews, I cultivated a collection of gist propositions. I compiled and organized all gist propositions for each interviewee and compared across interviews. I then imported these cross-interview gist propositions into NVivo and coded thematically. NVivo 12 is a qualitative code software that, among other features, allows the researcher to categorize and sort specific words, phrases, or sections of an interview transcript into nodes. Nodes, constructed and organized thematically, then contain relevant quotes, words, and phrases directly from the transcript, allowing for future analysis. The thematic nodes were then reorganized and condensed before being exported into Microsoft Word and analyzed, a process that involves close reading of exemplary quotes which reflected the larger thematic nodes and revealed specific cultural narratives, cognitive structures, experiences, and feelings.

Limitations

A primary limitation of the current research is its relatively small sample size: in total seven students were interviewed; moreover, each interview was relatively brief, and students

were selected from a small classroom. Additionally, due to student scheduling and coursework, only a singular interview was conducted with each student meaning there were limited opportunities to ask follow-up or clarifying questions following the initial interview. Although the method of mapping cultural cognitive structures, originally presented by D'Andrade in 2005, outlines the steps for generating gist propositions and cultural definitions and understandings from larger groups of people; findings from this small sample are not generalizable to a larger population of student understandings of language and schooling.

However, the methods used in this study do present opportunities for future research and for a larger critique of cultures of schooling and discourses of race and language that seek to disrupt notions of schooling as an English-speaking space with practices of racialization and unequal power which centers whiteness. Therefore, this research may be of use to educators and policy makers interested in reimagining school as a linguistic space and acting in solidarity to work towards cultivating systems and understandings of schooling.

Researcher Positionality Implications

Additionally, there are limitations which arise from my positioning as the researcher. As a white, Western, monolingual subject, I carry with me both an immense amount of privilege and a multitude of potentialities for material and ideological harm. As a white, western researcher, my entrance into public high school classrooms for observation or interview data collection is always noticeable and uncomfortable in the way that it changes classroom dynamics and student feelings. Hierarchies in education have cultivated narratives which assign unequal value and power to the knowledges cultivated by colleges and universities, especially those identified as “elite” institutions, which makes my presence as a representative of a college intimidating within a classroom space. Additionally, as a monolingual subject within a multilingual classroom there

are severe limits in my abilities to interview, chat, and cultivate linguistic comfort with students. My knowledge and ability to communicate in Spanish is limited and thus students who are more comfortable speaking Spanish may have felt discouraged from the interview process or uncomfortable speaking with me. Though all interviews utilized closed captioning and there was an offer to respond in whatever language was most comfortable, all students chose to speak almost entirely in English which was likely due to my linguistic positionality. In this way, I may have caused linguistic discomfort and harm as well as discouraged students from participating in the study. Finally, as a neither racially nor linguistically minoritized subject, my interpretations of student comments do not stem from personal experience but rather from theory and thus are limited. Though there was a continuous awareness and reflexivity practiced on my positioned lens as a researcher and person throughout the research process, this is only one step in seeking to surface and reduce harm. However, I recognize the ways that naming and attempting to render visible my positionality and the impacts it has on the study do not absolve me from violence (Rose, 1997).

Findings

Summary of Overall Findings

In this study, I attempt to describe the ways public high school students with linguistically and racially minoritized identities narrate their experiences in relation to their teachers, peers, and in relation to broader narratives of language in schools. I hope to identify the role of cultural cognitive narratives of language within student interpretations of their experiences. Interview transcript analysis coupled with ethnographic observational research surfaced four key cultural cognitive narratives (a) narratives of language learning and fluency which construct learning a new language, as linear and hierarchical with fluency as the goal, (b) narratives which

understand bi/multilingualism to be socially enabling and also isolating, (c) narratives which construct school as an English-speaking space with strict linguistic rules and conventions, and (d) constructions of racial and linguistic identity as mutually definitive and linked.

Perceptions of Personal Linguistic Ability & Language Learning

Students continuously drew from broader cultural narratives on the process of language learning and its relationship to linguistic ability. Specifically, student comments seemed to pull from narratives which assert that language exists on a linear trajectory of levels where fluency is the ultimate indicator of mastery. These cultural narratives of language learning and ability have several key features that were evident in student comments. These features include (1) an understanding of language learning as leveled and linearly progressive and (2) a focus on fluency as the ultimate marker of language mastery. These narratives are widespread within the way languages, specifically second languages, are taught in schools, extracurricular programs, and language learning software within the United States. Many school and extracurricular language programs are leveled (i.e., Spanish 1, Spanish 2, etc.) and students are constructed as moving “up” through these levels on a trajectory towards fluency. The higher the level, the closer the proximity to fluency and thus the greater linguistic power. This societal and educational imagining and construction of language as leveled was reflected in student discussions of their own language experiences as well as in their descriptions of their peers’ linguistic practices.

Language Learning and Ability as Hierarchical

Language learning takes place on a linear trajectory in which language is leveled and these levels are hierarchical.

In discussions of their processes and experiences of language learning as well as in their descriptions of language ability, students described their own and their peers’ language level,

often within the context of fluency. For example, when asked about the process of language learning and personal comfort, a bilingual student whose primary language is English but who speaks Spanish and English at home stated,

“I think that if you're surrounded by people who are like similar levels to you, it makes it more comfortable. Because if you're around someone who like speaks all Spanish and then you speak Spanish too but not as much as them, yeah that it's a little intimidating”

(S6, Interview, December 9, 2022)

This student not only explicitly described language as leveled but also expressed feeling uncomfortable in linguistic situations where they believe they are not on the same level as those around them. Within this hypothetical scenario put forward by the student, they describe feeling “intimidated” by the fact that they do not “speak as much Spanish” as their peers. The comment demonstrates feelings of linguistic intimidation in instances when the student believes they are on a “lower language level” than the students around them. Interestingly, this comment also suggests a notion and fear held by this student that their peers will notice and judge their language ability. The comment highlights an anxiety that the students in their class who speak more Spanish will interpret this student as ‘not fluent’ and thus at a lower level with less linguistic power. In this way, the comment demonstrates not only a construction of language as leveled but also language levels as socially hierarchical. Being on a “lower level” leads to discomfort and places students in a position where they are vulnerable to judgment.

Other students also discussed concern and feelings of anxiety related to self-constructed or externally prescribed language levels that are understood as “below” fluent. Within a social hierarchy of language learning, fluency is often cited as indicative of mastery and thus the ‘standard’ or goal. Throughout the interviews, fluency, or the word “fluent” arose over ten times

and, in several instances, was included in comments that reflect linguistic anxiety. Students described their understanding of their own language level in relation to notions of fluency which were assumed to be shared by peers or educators who might judge student language. Students also described their level of fluency as the thing that makes it either comfortable or uncomfortable for them to participate in multilingual classroom spaces. For example, one student who identifies as bilingual but described herself as “stronger in English” spoke about her experiences reading aloud in class stating,

“I feel like for that we're all kind of scared of failure and looking less than someone. I know in Spanish I'm always scared to read because there's some really fluent speakers in that class, and sometimes I'm just not that fluent in Spanish.” (S7, Interview, December 9, 2022)

In this comment, the student demonstrates her own assignment of linguistic categories to her peers. She understands certain students to be ‘fluent’ and thus is uncomfortable attending class and participating due to a fear that they will judge her language level critically or unfavorably. Some students associated hierarchical language levels with the formation of social and academic “cliques”. For example, this same student stated,

“It’s definitely pretty clique-y, I guess. Whenever we break off with our like friend group, our group that we do work together, it does feel more comfortable because everybody's around the same level of language...so it's more comfortable to talk” (S6, Interview, December 9, 2022)

Again, this student describes a higher level of personal comfort in spaces where everyone is believed to be on a similar level. Notions of comfort, in tandem with comments about linguistic

intimidation, suggest a shared notion among students that it is scary or uncomfortable to occupy different language levels within a classroom space.

Judgment of linguistic ‘correctness’

In addition to building their personal narratives of linguistic experience upon broader cultural cognitive structures which understand language learning and ability to be linearly progressive and hierarchical, students also drew from narratives which link linguistic comfort and fluency. This component was present in student narrations of linguistic discomfort and anxiety as common emotional experiences within the language learning process as well as in discussion of positive language experiences which relied on fluency. Students described linguistic judgment, specifically judgment about a perceived or actual lack of fluency, as coming from teachers, administrators, as well as their fellow students. Though they vocalized anxiety about linguistic judgment of any kind, there was a particular focus on fear of judgment from peers. For example, one student who is bilingual and whose home language is Spanish described her experiences reading out loud in class by stating,

“It’s scary sometimes yeah because people are really judgmental. And when it comes to like English being your second language, umm you do say some words wrong and some people laugh and stuff and that makes you like less comfortable” (S1, Interview, December 5, 2022)

By describing linguistic anxiety as attached to experiences where she felt that she said words ‘wrong,’ this student’s comment highlights a cognitive link between fluency and ‘correctness.’ This student’s comment reveals a pervasive cultural, cognitive connection between linguistic correctness, externally prescribed fluency, and judgment. Because she has historically read words in a way that is perceived as different or ‘wrong’, she believes she is being judged as

having a language level that is “lower than fluent” and saying words incorrectly. Such an understanding is deeply rooted in histories of linguistic practice which link fluency and correctness and rely on hierarchical structures of language (Kubota et al., 2021) Additionally, these understandings of language and fluency provide a basis for judgment which, in turn, contributes to emotional experiences of fear, anxiety, and discomfort. This student described speaking in front of her peers in her second language as ‘scary’ and highlighted how external judgment makes her “less comfortable” to speak in the classroom.

These three students’ comments are helpful in beginning to understand the ways students consistently interpret their peers’ linguistic ability and measure it against their own or using an external and assumed to be shared criteria. Relating these findings to the work of Dr. Aurora Tsai and colleagues (2020) I argue that these criteria are also racialized based on the identities of both the listening and speaking subjects (Inoue, 2006). Here I invoke the notion of the ‘listening subject’ as presented by Dr. Miyako Inoue (2006) which refers to the way individuals in a shared space might hear the language practices of minoritized speakers as ‘other’ or not fluent based on the way they racialize the speaker. Students that are racialized as Latinx, such as the students interviewed above, might be more likely to experience judgment from their peers based on the way their fluency in Spanish is interpreted by listening subjects who are of which race and/or ethnicity. The ridicule they experience can be understood as a form of lateral raciolinguistic profiling (Rosa & Flores, 2017) a phenomenon in which the cultural cognitive linkages between race and language lead to external over determinations about the linguistic practices and abilities of others based on racialized stereotypes (Johnston and Nadal, 2010; Inoue, 2006; Rosa & Flores, 2017; Tsai et al., 2020).

Based on my observations of classroom activities, I would argue that these social hierarchies also seemed to result in imbalanced power in the classroom where students who were seen as ‘fluent’ would speak out more frequently and answer questions in their primary language. Alternatively, students who commented on not feeling fluent in either English or Spanish, spoke significantly less. Additionally, student understandings of language and power were attached more to fluency and language level than to a particular language. Students were more concerned about their level of fluency as it compares to their peers in all languages, a feeling that was seemingly magnified in multilingual classroom spaces where very few students expressed feeling fully fluent in multiple languages.

Classroom v. Non-academic spaces

Alternatively, several students’ comments on linguistic ‘correctness’ and judgment from peers explicitly highlighted the role of the classroom environment in perpetuating these cultural cognitive narratives of fluency. When asked about their experiences in school generally, one student who is bilingual in Spanish and English and speaks English at home described her experiences speaking multiple languages outside the classroom. She stated,

“Outside of the classroom, like lunchroom, hallways, and stuff like that, everybody can feel comfortable talking with others because people don't usually like, pick fun at it if people mess up or things like that.” (S7, Interview, December 9, 2022)

While this comment also draws on the notions of linguistic ‘correctness’ by using the language of ‘messaging up’, it contrasts sharply with descriptions of peer linguistic judgment in the classroom by describing comfortable peer linguistic environments beyond the classroom.

Similarly positive experiences of ‘messaging up’ in non-classroom spaces were described by a

different student, who is bilingual in Spanish and English but more confident in his English who stated,

“It can be a really fun experience at times because you, uh, like if someone understands you and you say something wrong, they'll like tease you for it and you'll mess around with it and like you'll even be kind of like a happy memory” (S2, Interview, December 5, 2022)

Though this comment relies on constructions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ within linguistic practices, it demonstrates acceptance, joy, and a lack of linguistic judgment from peers outside of classroom settings. These findings suggest that students may perceive the classroom as a particular setting in which language use, including fluency, skill, vocabulary, pronunciation are judged and valued as indicators of talent, competence, intelligence and ability. It is an environment heavily shaped by which the cultural cognitive structures of language in schools, in notions of linguistic judgment and raciolinguistic profiling (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Perceptions of Multilingualism

In the face of linguistic policing, judgment, and racism some students emphasized feeling protective and proud of their multilingual identities. One interviewee really stood out in their narration of multilingual experiences with specific attention paid to the way that his own and his friends’ multilingualism enables social bonds and interactions. Bilingualism allows one student to feel comfortable and confident within a broad range of linguistic settings that may arise within both class and social scenarios. For example, when asked about his experiences using language in both in and beyond classroom spaces, he commented,

“But it's been nice to know that I have others that also know Spanish. Like my friends, they are also fluent Spanish speakers. So, if I want to mess around with them I will, you

know, tease them a bit. I'll talk to them in Spanish, like oh, "tu eres un pendejo" {you are an asshole} or whatever the hell. But yeah, it's like it's always nice to know that other people can understand you" (S2, Interview, December 5, 2022)

Additionally, he and other students spoke about the role of bilingualism with specific attention paid to the role of Spanish in cultivating communities. Multiple students described an enjoyment of teaching linguistic skills or vocabulary to other students. For example, the same student described his experiences learning and teaching language in non-classroom spaces with his peers by stating,

"Yeah, but now like due to more time and like being older I guess being able to process things better and getting like my culture back and my language back, it's much easier.

Also, to like be able to see someone that doesn't know English and I guess translate to them. Or someone that doesn't know Spanish and translate to them as well.

Yeah, and knowing that no matter who talks to me, I can understand them most of the time, it's nice you know." (S2, Interview, December 5, 2022)

His comments were mirrored by several students who described similar experiences learning and teaching language with their friends and classmates.

"When I first get here, when I came from Honduras, it was hard because I didn't know English or it was hard for me to communicate with the teachers, the students and the {trails off}. But like, I learned and now I like to help people when they get here" (S5, Interview, December 8, 2022)

“And it's so like nice like you know, if you want to learn something new like they'll tell you and you'll tell them like you'll exchange like things that you guys know about the language.” (S6, Interview, December 9, 2022)

These comments illustrate the way students understand their own bilingualism/multilingualism and its positive implications for social interaction. Descriptions of student pride in their multilingualism aligns with findings reported in the existing body of literature (e.g., Flores & Garcia, 2017).

In contrast to these descriptions of linguistic pride and social mobility, two of the students interviewed did not identify as bilingual or multilingual and their interpretations of their peers' multilingualism focused primarily on the ways multilingualism in classroom spaces can lead to social fear and isolation. These students described feeling left out of discussions taking place in languages they are less familiar/comfortable speaking. While they seemed to support multilingual classroom practices, they described feelings of personal unease and discomfort in situations where they do not understand what is taking place in peer group conversations in class. For example, one student stated,

“Although it is kind of like un-inclusive, I feel sometimes just when everyone else is like laughing right at something that's being said and I'm like, “I don't know what you guys are talking about but I'm glad you're happy...”” (S4, Interview, December 7, 2022)

The final theme that arose from an analysis of student comments regarding their own and their peer's multilingualism was a collective drawing from cultural cognitive structures which link multilingualism to a nebulous concept of 'diversity'. Multilingualism was described consistently as being a 'marker of diversity' and a sign of tolerant or progressive

teaching/educational practices. This was interesting as it was discussed by students regardless of home language (who speak English as a home language and by students who speak Spanish as their home language) and was continuously cited as a product of/demonstrative of inclusive mindsets within the school. In this way, language became synonymous with difference or a constructed 'diversity'. Yet, students both supported and refuted the notion of diversity through multilingualism. While some discussed the broad range of Spanish dialects spoken within multilingual classroom spaces, others commented that, within the school, the languages spoken are "limited" to English and Spanish which, they pointed out, does not demonstrate diverse language usage.

Considering how students are narrating their own linguistic ability and multilingualism, I will now move to an analysis of the way school is constructed as a linguistic space within broad cultural cognitive narratives, specifically within the conventions of schooling, dictated by colonial whiteness.

Perceptions of School as a Linguistic Space

Raciolinguistics literature (e.g., Flores & Garcia, 2017; Flores, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017) often highlights the way that classrooms in American public schools are English centered/dominant/only spaces. In addition to English being understood as the privileged and powered language in these settings (Flores & Garcia, 2017; Endo & Reece-Miller, 2010, Chaka, 2021), there is also an emphasis on particular types of English (those which are rooted in whiteness) as the language of schooling (Chaka, 2021; Kubota et al., 2021, Silverstein, 1996; Bucholtz et al., 2018). These narratives of school as a particular linguistic space were, to an extent, reflected in student narrations. Students described anxieties around speaking, reading out loud, and addressing teachers in English. Additionally, students discussed their experiences with

linguistic policing and discipline, telling stories in which educators demanded they speak English or punished students for speaking Spanish or Spanglish within class. These narratives affirm descriptions of schooling as taking place in English (Chaka, 2021).

However, these constructions of school as an English-speaking space were also nuanced and made more complicated by student discussions of language at school in explicitly multilingual classroom spaces. Students described perceptions of ‘academic language’ that extended beyond centering English to notions of schooling, maturity, formality that are more closely associated with conventions of whiteness and discourses of class.

School as an English Centric, Dominant, Only Space

Students were asked about their experiences in explicitly multilingual spaces vs. classrooms more broadly defined, about their language in school vs. out of school, and about their understandings of ideas such as ‘academic language’ or ‘classroom appropriate language’. For most students, school is a distinctive linguistic space, specifically a linguistic space with power-ed conventions and norms. Of these conventions and norms, the privilege of speaking in English was mentioned in every interview. For example, three students, all of whom are bilingual in English and Spanish commented,

“In school, I was always taught like English, English, English” (S7, Interview, December 9, 2022)

“When I first get here, when I came from Honduras, it was hard because I didn't know English or it was hard for me to communicate with the teachers, the students...yeah school was hard” (S5, Interview, December 8, 2022)

“Well, my first language was Spanish, so I didn't know much English even though I was born in California, my first thing was in Spanish. Then, cause of school, I had to learn English. I lost a bit of the Spanish.” (S2, Interview, December 5, 2022)

Though these students occupy different linguistic positionalities, all three describe public schools in the United States as mandating English and thus as English-speaking spaces. While the first student states this explicitly, the second describes moving to the U.S. and attending public school as “hard” specifically because of not knowing English, a statement which implies that to attend school in the United States, one is required to know English. Finally, the third student comment links school and learning English by invoking a causal interaction; because this student attended public school in the United States, he needed to know English. Interestingly, this comment also demonstrates the way that learning and knowing English for and through the United States’ public schooling relies on the loss of home and heritage language practices. This student comments “I lost a bit of the Spanish” which implies that, not only did he have to learn English to attend U.S. public schools, but he also had to forget Spanish. This conception of school as an English-speaking space which demands students abandon their home languages reflects literature in the field exploring the costs of assimilation in school (e.g., Flores & Garcia, 2017).

However, such a narrative understanding of school as a linguistic space was nuanced by students who described school in ways which broke it down into several smaller linguistic spaces, each of which was then linked to specific language practices and experiences. Specifically, students’ comments only demonstrated a cultural cognitive link between English and school in classroom and administrative spaces. Alternatively, hallway and social spaces such as the lunchroom, were often narrated as explicitly multilingual.

School as a Linguistic Space rooted in Conventions of Colonial Whiteness

In addition to demonstrating the way that school has been coded as an English dominant space, students' comments also surfaced notions of school as a space which demands 'academic or classroom appropriate language' (Flores & Rosa, 2015). These concepts, when interrogated more explicitly, were revealed to center conventions of schooling such as maturity, formality, and appropriate-ness that are rooted in conventions of colonial whiteness and discourses of class (Chaka, 2021).

Linguistic Policing and Classroom Appropriate Language

Throughout the interview discussions with students, the notion of linguistic policing, both by educators but also by fellow students arose consistently. Students described experiences in which they felt that they had to change their language or speak in ways that differed from their usual or authentic linguistic practices to be listened to, respected, and understood fully. Students described changing their tone, accent, word usage, and their language to appease both their teachers' and the peers' linguistic expectations and to avoid disciplinary action.

Most commonly, linguistic policing was evident in the described policies and attitudes of educators, a form of hierarchical linguistic policing. However, several student narratives also demonstrated different forms of lateral linguistic policing which occurred in contexts in which students felt there would be social or interpersonal consequences for not adhering to specific linguistics, even when these linguistic practices were at odds with those that might be understood as natural or authentic. Rosa and Flores (2015) describe the way educators and students often conceptualize linguistic practices that have been standardized as the only 'appropriate' practices to use within the classroom. They argue that this notion leads to students with racially minoritized identities being read as "linguistically deficient" regardless of their participation in 'appropriate' language. These models of linguistic 'appropriateness' force racially and

linguistically minoritized students to model their linguistic practices after white listening and speaking subjects in ways that continuously center and privilege whiteness in classroom spaces. To interrogate this phenomenon in the selected school site and within the cultural cognitive narratives of student interviewees, one question directly asked students if they had ever heard the phrase, “classroom appropriate language” and, if they had, how it had been used within their school careers. This question sought to draw out student understandings of cultural cognitive scripts more explicitly with specific attention paid to the way they understand and engage with hierarchies of language in the classroom, language ‘appropriateness’, and the policing of student language. All but one of the interviewees responded that they were familiar with the phrase “classroom appropriate language”; however, the contexts in which they had heard it used and their subsequent definitions and understandings varied. All student responses indicated that classroom appropriate language relied on specific conventions of “appropriateness” and a need to change their language to avoid personal or academic consequences (Rosa & Flores, 2015).

One of the main themes within student understandings and narrations of their experiences with ‘classroom appropriate language’ was that it is in opposition to swearing, cursing, or the use of presumably classroom inappropriate language. Several students commented that they had heard the phrase invoked by teachers when students in their classes swear. For example, two students commented that ‘classroom appropriate language’ does not include swear words and stated,

“Well in my in my mind the definition is basically like no swearing and whatnot. Don't swear and just like be more formal” (S2, Interview, December 5, 2022)

“For classroom appropriate language, that's not swearing, you know too much or at all. When you word something, trying to make it sound a little bit you know, classier.” (S3, Interview, December 7, 2022)

Interestingly both students changed their language in the classroom. By not swearing, these students described their language in the classroom as more “formal” or “classier”; notions deeply rooted in discourses of class and conventions of whiteness which privilege specific ways of speaking and choices of words (Chaka, 2021; Locher & Graham, 2010). Additionally, students who described classroom appropriate language as ‘not swearing’ also commented on the difficulty of this linguistic demand and described the way this type of speaking can feel unnatural or frustrating. The student who commented originally about swearing in the classroom felt strongly that swearing should be allowed as a form of self-expression and stated,

“it's also like kind of frustrating, cause like I tend to like to swear a bit. Like you'll hear me go like “oh, fuck, I missed it!” or like even like in in Spanish like, “ah mierda!”.

Because you know, that's just me, but like when I can't do that like I kind of have to hold it in, it's not all that nice because you also like want to release some emotion, I guess.

Not nice words just release some emotion.” (S2, Interview, December 5, 2022)

This comment demonstrates a shared sentiment across interviews in which students described feeling like they had to change their language when in the classroom to be read as “appropriate” by their teachers (Rosa & Flores, 2015). This feeling of ‘classroom appropriate language’ mandating linguistic change within the students was also evident in student comments which did not focus on swearing but focused instead on word choice and tone. For example, several students commented on the way the pitch or cadence of their voice changes when in classrooms

or when speaking with teachers and administrators. Two students whom I interviewed together, both of whom speak English as their home language, commented,

“Like, make sure you're like watching your words and make sure they don't sound harsh, even though you might just be asking questions and be like using “that tone”. Something like that, like your tone and your words yeah” (S4, Interview, December 7, 2022)

“I think, the way I talk to teachers, it's kind of very different because like when I speak to higher ups, my octave in my voice, like right now, if you could hear it, it's like going like 2 octaves higher then like my real voice” (S3, Interview, December 7, 2022)

These two comments demonstrate student awareness of the impact of their tone and word choice on the way they are read and interpreted by their teachers, an interpretation which is attached to disciplinary action and grades (Burrell, 2010). Their comments suggest that particular tones, words, and octaves of speaking, when practiced by racially minoritized students, are understood by some teachers as not “classroom appropriate” or ‘acceptable’. In some classrooms, students are explicitly forbidden from using their ‘real voice’ or speaking authentically and when describing these experiences students draw from cultural cognitive narratives which construct school as a space which follows and privileges ways of speaking that are proximal to “standard English” and subsequently center whiteness.

A similar centering of English and whiteness arose in student comments regarding classroom appropriate language in which students explicitly described experiences in which they were forbidden to and/or punished for speaking Spanish in the classroom. The student who commented on her difficulties learning English after moving to the United States from Honduras, also described an experience in which a teacher screamed at a student for using Spanish on a test.

She described this experiences and the racist language expectations and disciplinary actions of some educators by commenting,

“There was one math teacher that was racist with one of my friends and she was doing a test and he told her that she need a dictionary because she didn't understand what the question was about. And yeah, he scream at her.... some teachers say that they need to speak in English, but they can't because some of the students they like are new here and teachers make you like speak English and like that's not fair” (S5, Interview, December 8, 2022)

Other student comments also highlighted situations in which the language of ‘classroom appropriateness’ is invoked to discipline students for speaking Spanish in the classroom. Several bilingual students also described situations in which they were asked to ‘use classroom appropriate language’ by middle and high school educators who were asking them to speak English rather than Spanish. One student comment stood out for the way it articulates both the prevalence and violence associated with experiences of this demand. She stated,

“Some teachers don't like us speaking Spanish. But honestly, I think that's kind of racist because they can't speak Spanish and so now, we can't all speak our language.” (S1, Interview, December 5, 2022)

This student’s comment highlights the violence of this demand while also demonstrating the ways in which this demand is racialized. Both students describe policies or disciplinary actions which prohibit students from speaking Spanish in the classroom under the guise of classroom appropriate language as racist which demonstrates a raciolinguistics critique of ‘appropriateness’ (Rosa & Flores, 2015).

Perceptions of the Linkages between Racialization and Language

Linguistic Striving.

All seven of the student interviewees identified as racially minoritized and commented explicitly about the way their racial identities shape their experiences with language both at school and in other spaces. Throughout their comments there was a through line of what I will call linguistic striving, a term which is meant to encompass student narrations of linguistic anxieties, desires, and goals which are mediated by broader cultural cognitive pressures that draw links between particular racial and ethnic identities and languages. More specifically, students expressed feelings of linguistic anxiety which came from a broader cognitive cultural assertion that they ‘should’ possess certain linguistic knowledge or ability based on their racial or ethnic identities (Flores & Garcia, 2017). Students who are monolingual in English described feeling like they “should” speak Spanish due to their Latinx heritage and commented on feeling left out/confused/outside of their own culture and extended families because of their linguistic identities. Alternatively, racially minoritized students who speak Spanish as their home language or described themselves as in the process of learning English, expressed feeling anxious about English in the classroom. They described experiences of linguistic disciplining by white educators and talked about wanting or striving towards a pattern of speech which would allow them to avoid racial profiling (Daniels, 2018). In this way, students’ comments demonstrated linguistic striving regardless of their narrated experiences of multilingualism.

Students with racially minoritized identities who are monolingual in Spanish consistently expressed desires to be ‘better’ at speaking Spanish or to possess Spanish fluency specifically to be connected to their families and cultures. They articulated feelings of personal confusion and disconnectedness from their culture. Within student comments, language and culture were often used interchangeably, signifying their strong link within broader narratives of cultural identity

and language. When asked about their experiences with multilingualism, one student commented,

“Yeah, like speaking along that line and about Spanish, like I'm like, I'm like half Mexican and yeah you know like my mom she's like full like Mexican and we have a bunch of family like in Texas. One thing is like I've never felt really in-tune to my culture, either on my dad or my mom's side so it kind of hurts like when I see my family - -- If I start tearing up, I don't know why. I think I'm just very emotional like at this moment. But I guess I was just sad and feeling kind of left out that like my family we would have like conversations, but I wouldn't know what they're talking about, and they be like, well, “your mom didn't like raise you?” Like my cousins are like, “your mom didn't like raise you to speak in Spanish?”. I was like no... at the time we didn't do that, and my parents always work, so I guess that's... but Imma try to learn Spanish better.”

(S4, Interview, December 7, 2022)

This student's comments demonstrate a deep valuing of Spanish as a language as well as feelings of exclusion from her family and cultures. This student believes that to fully embody or identify with their ethnic or racial identities as Latinx individuals they need to speak Spanish. This desire is, of course, valid in its own right and should be taken seriously on the students' own terms.

They value speaking Spanish as a component of their racial or ethnic and linguistic identities and feel it is an important part of their identity development. In addition to hearing and honoring this expressed desire, it may be beneficial to interrogate what broader cultural cognitive structures inform student thinking that their ‘fullness’ as Latinx subjects is contingent on their ability to speak Spanish fluently. Specifically, how do categories of racialization and externally prescribed narratives about racial and ethnic identity mandate specific linguistic practices? This expressed

desire seemed to be fostered, at least in part, by their place in Ms. Alcaraz's multilingual classroom where Spanish is often privileged in class discussions.

Interestingly linguistic striving, rooted in specific understandings of race, language, and identity, were also present within the comments of racially minoritized and multilingual students. However, their comments tended to indicate strivings towards English, specifically 'standard English', to avoid racial profiling in school and society. For example, one student described her experiences speaking what she described as accented English. She commented,

“So yeah, like there's still times where you can hear my accent and I think it's funny like myself, because I catch myself sometimes and I'm like damn, like I said that really wrong, but {hesitation} I don't mind it and I don't think it's bad. I think it's like unique and everyone has different accents and I feel like mine is just {long pause} -- I mean it's unique to everyone, right? But yeah, it's funny” (S1, Interview, December 5, 2022)

This comment indicates self-consciousness around speaking in English in a way that is understood as 'accented' which may stem from previously discussed narratives of 'correct' English practices. This student states explicitly that she doesn't think her accent is 'bad' but does describe it as 'unique' which indicates that she might conceptualize it as 'different'. This same student commented on speaking in a particular way to avoid linguistic discipline and described feelings of pressure, externally, to speak in a way which is 'correct' and thus avoids disciplinary action and racial profiling.

When students were asked broadly, about their experiences with language at school, their responses could be divided into those which expressed perceptions of (1) language and fluency, (2) their own and their peers' multilingualism, (3) school as a linguistic space, and (4) language

as it relates to racial and ethnic identity. Their comments pulled from a range of cultural cognitive scripts which assert that language is learned linearly and exists on a hierarchy with fluency as the goal, which interpret school as an English-speaking space and assert that the practice of schooling takes place in “standard English”, a notion that was both affirmed and disrupted by student narrations. Finally, their comments drew from narratives which link particular racial and ethnic identities with specific language practices and demonstrated a type of linguistic striving rooted in racialized linguistic pressure.

Discussion

To understand the results of the study as generalizable is to flatten the specificity and attention to detail which was a driving force with data collection, interviews, and analysis. Keeping in mind the unique context in which this study was conducted and the role of my positionality as the interpreter of results, there are several potentially important implications of this study’s findings within the landscape of raciolinguistics research and within a broader critique of cultural narratives which assert school as a space that privileges ‘standard English,’ and reifies the linkages between race and language that maintain and center whiteness (Chaka, 2021), and understand language learning as a hierarchical practice subject to policing and anxiety. The prevalence of these narratives within my interpretations and the students’ narrations of their experiences as racially and linguistically minoritized high schoolers is important as it demonstrates the ways in which students become conscripted into values of schooling which problematize them as racially and linguistically minoritized subjects.

Throughout both data collection and analysis, I was continuously surprised by the cultural cognitive scripts that were unintentionally reified through my question development and prompting during interviews. For example, I asked students about their experiences with

language using notions of language ‘level’ and, when students answered with comments that centered on fluency, I did not interrogate their understanding of such a concept. This personal pulling from cognitive cultural scripts around language learning and usage as linear, in tandem with their presence across student comments, signifies a mutual reliance on such constructions and potentially provides evidence for their prominence as understandings of language which re-center conventions of colonial whiteness. Colonial whiteness can be understood as a form of whiteness grounded and inseparable from colonial legacies in which class and civility were valued and powered, particularly as characteristics of an imagined whiteness (Cote, 2009). Colonial whiteness is a fueling ideology behind ‘appropriate’ language (Chaka, 2021; Rosa & Flores, 2015) and thus is an important component of an analysis and critique of cultural cognitive narratives of language. When considering these narratives, I found they informed several questions I asked. For example, I have bought into the narrative of language learning as leveled, linear, and hierarchical and had never interrogated the way this notion devalues all language practices that do not demonstrate a particular form of ‘fluency’ that is externally assessed and prescribed. This means that, at some level, language level and ‘fluency’ are more about how one’s speech and self are read by others, rather than someone’s actual ability to communicate in and across language/s. To determine and assign fluency and language level, the listening subject must themselves possess a certain knowledge of the language and its values. An accent is not an accent unless there is a convention for ‘unaccented’ speech. Words are not pronounced ‘wrong’ unless there is a continuously reaffirmed and powered ‘right’ pronunciation. To externally decide if someone is saying something ‘wrong’ or speaking in an accent, one must have a knowledge of what is ‘right.’ This process of determination requires surveillance and puts the listening subject in a position of power with the ability to determine what is ‘acceptable.’ So how do students who

speak multiple languages come to understand themselves as saying particular words ‘wrong’, or as having an accent, or as not being ‘fluent enough’ in the language they use to communicate and learn in school? The findings of this study, along with the ever-growing body of literature exploring raciolinguistics (e.g Rosa & Flores, 2015; Flores & Rosa, 2017; Alim et al., 2020; Silverstein, 1996), indicate that this process is not accidental but rather the intentional construction and re-construction of narratives which privilege and center whiteness.

In addition to reified conventions of language learning and fluency, student comments demonstrated a shared notion of school as an English-speaking space, a collective narrative with deep implications. While student comments indicated that some educators are explicit in their invocation of the idea that classrooms are an English-only space, for example they have classroom policies or discipline based on language, there were comments which also demonstrated less explicit but equally violent reproductions of this notion. These classrooms, which explicitly centered whiteness throughout disciplinary policies and actions which policed language practices read as ‘deviating’ from ‘standard English,’ are one manifestation of a much larger problem. Specifically, these are but one component of the narrative violence central to constructions of language and schooling which center and reify conventions of whiteness.

The students I interviewed attend a school that is causally described as “multilingual” and are enrolled in classes which are marked as explicitly multilingual or bilingual spaces. Ms. Alcaraz is a brilliant educator who actively teaches students to value their multilingualism and encourages them to speak without ever participating in discourses of correctness, accented-ness, or fluency. Ms. Alcaraz speaks in a way that is genuine and accepts all forms of speech and language in her classroom. She speaks to students the way they speak to her, in both Spanish and English, and is continually fostering a classroom-wide critical consciousness about language and

power within her curriculum. And yet, students describe school, specifically classrooms, as English-speaking spaces. Despite the incredible and disruptive work being done throughout Ms. Alcaraz's pedagogy, these harmful and marginalizing narratives are still central to the way students narrate their experiences. In this way, the findings of this study indicate that narrative violence in constructions of language center conventions of whiteness. As such, these findings highlight the ways this narrative violence is not about individual teachers in individual classrooms but is a much larger problem within the way school has been culturally constructed and understood.

Putting racially and linguistically minoritized educators in classrooms with linguistically and racially minoritized students is a valuable and important step in disrupting these violent narratives and their material consequences (i.e., linguistic policing, disproportionate discipline, etc.), but the violence is so much larger than a singular classroom. The very construction of school as a linguistic space is one which seeks to surveil, punish, and marginalize students with racially and linguistically minoritized identities. This study highlights that even under liberatory linguistic conditions, such as those of Ms. Alcaraz's classroom, there is racialized, narrative violence being enacted on linguistically minoritized students: that even in spaces where multilingualism is deeply valued, students are still being conscripted into lateral linguistic surveillance and are still experiencing deep anxiety about how their language will be read and interpreted by their teachers and peers. Even when the material conditions are disrupted, students are still forced to 'fit' into externally constructed and prescribed narratives of linguistic and racial identity.

Conclusion

The findings of this study work to surface and attend to the ways students with racially and linguistically minoritized identities narrate their experiences using language in the classroom with specific attention paid to the role of broad cultural cognitive scripts within these narrations. Cultural cognitive scripts which understand language learning as leveled, linear, and hierarchical were present in the way students described experiences which involved perceptions of their own and their peers' fluency and problematize language practices that do not demonstrate a particular level of 'fluency' that is externally assessed and prescribed. Language level and 'fluency' are externally prescribed and racialized in ways which privilege and re-centers modalities of communication rooted in colonial whiteness. Additionally, student comments and anxieties about notions of 'classroom appropriate language' demonstrated the prevalence of narratives which center 'academic language' and linguistic 'correctness' within the classroom. In describing experiences of linguistic anxiety and policing, student comments highlighted the material and ideological violence at the root of schooling in the United States. Even in classrooms with radical educators actively working to disrupt marginalizing narratives of schooling, race, and language, cultural cognitive structures still inform student narrations of their experiences and could potentially cause deep and lasting harm.

By employing Critical Race Theory, Raciolinguistics, and interpretive anthropological methodologies this study adds to a growing body of study that seeks to problematize connections between race, language, and power within systems of schooling. The unique study site and focus of this study contribute to an existing critique of the culture of schooling and understandings of raciolinguistics by centering the narrations, feelings, and experiences of students directly impacted by these violent logics and material conditions. The findings of this study support an

area of educational research which posits that school as a space and practice are not neutral or benevolent but rather reflect and reify the values and conventions of colonial whiteness within the United States. Future research might engage with student narrations of their experiences using language in a wide array of school contexts.

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Appendix A - Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about what class is like for you – what do you like/dislike about being in this class?
2. Do you feel comfortable, confident, able to speak in class?
 - a. Is there anything that makes you feel more comfortable? Confident? Able? Less?
3. Would you say you answer/ask a lot of questions in class? Can you tell me a little bit about that? (Thinking why or why not)
4. Do you ever have to read out in class?
 - a. If so, what's that like for you?
 - b. If you don't, do you think that's something you would feel comfortable doing?
5. Do you speak to your friends in the same way you speak in class?
 - a. Why or why not?
6. Have you ever had to take language tests?
 - a. What was that experience like for you?
7. Are there classes you feel more comfortable talking, reading, asking questions in?
 - a. What are those teachers like?
 - b. What do you think makes them more comfortable?
8. What is your experience of speaking with me?
9. Have you ever heard the phrase, "classroom appropriate language"?
 - a. What does that phrase make you think of?
 - b. What do you think "classroom appropriate language" means?