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Reflecting on Language Ideologies and Language Practices as an IEP Educator

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Abstract. The fields of language teaching, language learning, and English language instruction continue to expand and develop. Part of that expansion, for me, as an instructor of English as an additional language is a desire to move towards teaching practices that are more culturally responsive, enhancing a pedagogy of care and linguistic justice. It is because of this, and the language ideologies and language practices that I noticed at play in my classes (and language instruction as a whole), that I offer my reflections in the next few pages. Through this work, I sought to engage with the literature as well as with my own observations in order to investigate two main questions: 1) Whether language ideologies shape, constrain, influence, or dictate the language practices authorized in the classroom and 2) What the pedagogical implications of these language ideologies and language practices are for language teaching and learning in an Intensive English Program (IEP) context.

Keywords: *Language practices, language ideologies, culturally responsive pedagogy, pedagogy of care, IEP, linguistic justice*

Introduction

As a language instructor, I am aware of both implicit and explicit expressions of language ideologies (ideologies about language, language practices, language teaching, and language learning) in my classes, in curriculum, within institutions, and in the field of language teaching. This led me to reflect on the power of language ideologies and why it is important to critically examine them. For example, I started to think about why and how language ideologies might shape, constrain, or influence the language practices in our classrooms and beyond. The aim of this paper[1] is to provide a brief overview of the concepts of language ideologies and language practices and discuss their impact in an IEP setting. I engaged in this reflection because I wanted to think about two main questions:

- Whether language ideologies shape, constrain, influence, or dictate the language practices authorized in the classroom.
- What the pedagogical implications of these language ideologies and language practices are for language teaching and learning in an IEP context.

In a broad sense, the term language ideologies refers to perceptions held by people, institutions, or communities about language. Language ideologies might, for example, encompass beliefs about what language is and how language should be used (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). These beliefs are shaped by a plethora of factors and perceptions, including political, economic, and social ones. Because these language ideologies can surface explicitly or implicitly through verbal and nonverbal communication and influence language use and language instruction, they carry a lot of power (Woolard, 1998).

Another powerful aspect of these ideologies is that they may shape the types of practices related to language use that are deemed acceptable or not (Bourdieu, 1991). Examining these ideologies in teaching and learning is important in order to better understand how language ideologies are related to power dynamics, valuing and devaluating of certain communicative practices, and for finding ways to innovate English language education.

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[1] This paper is part of a larger dissertation. See Carvajal Regidor (2020) for more.

Language practices refers to the idea that how one communicates (whether verbally or non-verbally) is a combination of knowledge and action. These practices embody habits connected with language that go beyond structural notions of language use (Garcia & Li, 2014). By studying and observing language through the lens of language practices, language is then positioned as a process—languaging (Swain, 2006)—and is conceptualized as interconnected to a myriad of social actions, norms, and practices.

Language practices are emergent in context and include practices such as code-meshing, translanguaging, and discursive uses of language (Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia & Li, 2014). The focus on language practices within an IEP setting foregrounds students' use of language through multiple resources, purposes, experiences, interactions, and situations. This expansive view of language practices encompasses students' use of multiple languages, dialects, language varieties, and discursive functions of language because they are deliberate, strategic, and used for meaning-making and negotiating.

A closer look at language ideologies and language practices

There is an expansive amount of literature on both the concepts of language ideologies and language practices. In this section, I offer a brief overview of the literature I have engaged with that is most pertinent to IEP faculty, staff, and administrators.

Language Ideologies

Language ideologies are particularly important for language teachers to consider because these ideologies, and other perceptions, influence our teaching pedagogy (Razfar, 2012). Similarly, constant engagement and reflection with these ideologies can help instructors develop agency in looking for ways to create more multilingual classrooms and learning environments (Weng et al., 2019). Blackledge (2008) argues that language ideologies mirror the "values, practices and beliefs associated with language use by speakers and the discourse that constructs values and beliefs at state, institutional, national, and global levels" (p. 296). Importantly, language ideologies, which can many times be suppressed, are tied to value and power. Thus, creating languages that are seen as more powerful or useful than others. This is evident in categorizations such as lingua franca, world language, correct and incorrect language, appropriate and inappropriate language. This in turn, creates language hierarchies (Gal & Irvine, 1995) which are rooted in discourses of identity, social, and cultural policies that shape the ways and what we teach and learn. There are two main language ideologies that factor into language teaching and learning: linguistic prescriptivism and standard language ideology.

Linguistic Prescriptivism

The ideology of linguistic prescriptivism posits that there are established rules that make some language usage correct and others incorrect. Curzan (2014) argues that this language ideology emphasizes ways in which language use, and especially the language use of others, is regulated. This belief system then sees language use as something that can be and should be fixed to fit what are thought of as linguistic norms. What is important for us language educators to consider, though, is that these linguistic norms are often influenced by social constructions that become normalized (Otheguy, Garcia, & Reid, 2015). The power of linguistic prescriptivism is that there is a belief or perception that other language practices or varieties that do not fit these characterizations must then be changed, unauthorized or illegitimated because they are not considered linguistically pure nor appropriate (Janicki, 2006).

Standard Language

Closely related to linguistic prescriptivism, is the ideology of standard language or language standardization. A standard language ideology "stigmatizes linguistic practices that deviate from "prescriptive norms" (Rosa, 2016, p. 162). Thus, we see the development of Standard American English and the marginalization of those who speak categorizations considered outside this standard (Endo & Reece-Miller, 2010). These beliefs are reproduced within society at large and Standard American English is then seen as powerful, given status, and is positioned as the language of the classroom and of the educated (Endo & Reece-Miller, 2010; Lippi-Green, 2011).

As language teachers, there is certain prescriptivism and language standardization at play when it comes to the IEP setting. Indeed, within educational spaces, language standardization and prescriptivism continue to play a role in both explicit and implicit curricula that are shaped by a monolingual bias (Gynne & Bagga-Gupta, 2015). For example, in the IEP teaching context, I do not have the power to define what academic language is. Still, I fully understand that in order to help my students succeed in their academic careers, they need to be exposed to and taught a very specific type of language. There are times in which rules and patterns (thus prescriptivism) need to be emphasized in my classroom. However, it is also my responsibility (and part of the agency I have and continue to develop as a teacher) to highlight and emphasize ways these prescriptivist notions are developed, emphasized, and broken. We should explicitly teach our students how language use has and continues to change over time. For example, ideas related to starting sentences with coordinating conjunctions, ending sentences with prepositions, using they as a singular pronoun, and the use (or not) of contractions are all instances of ideas relating to academic language and language standardization. As educators, we have a role to play in helping bring awareness to linguistic justice. Thus, part of our job as English educators should be to expose students to other Englishes and vernaculars such as African American Vernacular English (AAVE). These types of discussions give students an avenue of communication and truly shows the real-life, communicative aspect of language, which is the dynamic and ultimate goal of communication in our day to day lives. Furthermore, these types of discussions and awareness will help our students be better prepared for their classes, jobs, and roles within society. Because language ideologies are present and powerful, I believe language practices give us an avenue to push back against some of these ingrained ideas and make our classrooms more student centered and pedagogically caring.

Language Practices

The approach to language through practice pushes back against abstract binaries such as proficient or not and native speaker or not, to a broader view that focuses on the social talk of activities and practices (Canagarajah, 2013). Thus, language practices prioritize speakers' agency as part of a meaning-making process that is both interactive and agentive. It is an interactive and agentive process because language users use their knowledges as a starting point, as resources, that inform and guide their language learning and experiences with languaging (Garcia & Li, 2014). In this sense, language practices are strategic uses of multiple languages, dialects, language varieties, and discursive functions of language that are used for meaning-making and negotiating.

An Intensive English Program is an important place because language practices are abundant, and thus, a place where we can learn from our students' lives and language experiences and continue to center these language practices. For instance, the language practice of code meshing is one in which, through writing, language users shuttle between linguistic repertoires. This practice highlights creative strategies people deploy in order to interact with others, to bring out their voices, and to achieve communicative success (Canagarajah, 2011; 2013). Translanguaging, a practice that integrates the use of different languages, language varieties, and prioritizes individual idiolects that are influenced by gender, age, social, class, and geography, shows how language users use flexible linguistic resources that are not about the separation of languages, but more so about the integration of multiple modalities, ways of expression, and repertoires (Garcia & Li, 2014). Additionally, the concept of heteroglossia, introduced by Bakhtin (1981), highlights that there are different types of speech and voices that co-exist and influence the meaning of what is being communicated. Thus, language is dialogical and not just a structural concept.

Conclusion

Why are discussions and approaches to language ideologies and language practices important for us as language educators? I have tried to exemplify this in the discussion above by arguing that it is important to be aware of the influences on our language teaching and learning. In other words, we need to provide the language and structure that our students need to succeed academically but also find ways to push back against some of these ideologies by addressing them explicitly in our classes. This will help students be better prepared to participate in future university courses and to develop as agentive and critical thinkers.

There are several important implications brought about by this discussion. First, there is a need to expand conceptualizations and definitions of language, Education as a field itself, can then help lead the way in prioritizing the fluidity of students' language practices. What this means is that a shift in pedagogy needs to take place, centering stu-

dents' backgrounds and experiences as the starting point for teaching and learning. Additionally, with a paradigm shift from language to languaging, as instructors, we can offer more opportunities for students to engage in other language practices such as code meshing and translanguaging. This can further facilitate the incorporation of students' funds of knowledge and validate their experiences. Teaching is not a neutral, nor an isolated practice. This means that we must move away from thinking of classrooms as isolated and insulated. Instead, the life experiences and interests of students should work as guiding frameworks and approaches to learning (Gonzalez et. al., 2005). A final implication is that within higher education and IEPs, there needs to be a transparent and ongoing discussion of the language ideologies that play a role in the classrooms, curriculum, and in the system. These discussions should happen between colleagues, administrators, staff, incoming teachers, and students. Explicit conversations about these ideologies, and the roles they play in teaching and learning, can help teachers navigate goals and expectations while finding ways to empower their students. Discussing this with students is just as important, since, as I have highlighted throughout this paper, they do shape language learning experiences. Students need to be aware of the ideologies at play and the ways they can influence their language use and language learning.

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