Whose Language and Funds of Knowledge Are Legitimate?

A Reflective Analysis of Ways of Knowing

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Introduction

When I first looked at the required courses for the doctoral program, I wondered what I would accomplish in the Ways of Knowing course. Having just completed a Master degree in Education, I am quite familiar with Howard Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences and specifically how language teachers can enhance student learning by providing real to life communicative activities (Lee & Van Patten, 2003) in a non-threatening social environment (Krashen, 1982). According to many theorists and researchers (Vygotsky, 1978, Gardner, 1983, Collier, 1995, Cummins, 1981, and Wong Fillmore, 1991) language learners of all ages benefit most when they are allowed to construct their own knowledge in social situations where the instructor fosters peer collaboration. Given what I have learned over the last few years of my studies, I was apprehensive that the Ways of Knowing course would be beneficial. After the first class, I looked over the syllabus. I was intimidated and skeptical. I was intimidated because I had very little exposure to the course topics. Although I kept my skepticism to myself, I questioned how the study of feminist perspectives, critical race theory, and post colonialism-post structuralism ideologies and epistemologies would contribute to my being a better researcher, teacher educator and practitioner in the field of foreign language (FL) education.

What I did not realize during the first few weeks of this course is that while my Masters studies of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research are important for applying instructional methodologies, the topics on the syllabus for Ways of Knowing would actually challenge my own personal philosophies and lead me to question my own cognitive and meta-cognitive reasoning of these philosophies. During the last 13 weeks, I have reexamined the various memberships I have in both dominant and subordinate social groups and the implications these memberships might have on my own teaching practices and research. Through the course

readings of Bakhtin (1981), González (2004) , Bhabha (1995), Young (1995), and Bourdieu (1989), I have begun to understand terms such as heteroglossia, centripetal and centrifugal forces, post colonial perspectives, hybridity, and symbolic capital.

It was a slow process, but each week I found myself making connections between the readings as I began to question many of the philosophies and ideologies that I had previously accepted. The reading by Gorski (2005) provided insight as to why programs, such as that designed by Ruby Payne, do little to promote social justice or to close the achievement gap. Instead, these programs seek to promote and sustain White, middle-class standards. These standards include certain requirements (both explicit and implicit) that dictate who can teach ESL to ensure that students learn the "proper" English accent, in public schools. By mid-semester, a rather haunting question surfaced: Why haven't I questioned the integrity of the very programs that are supposed to help marginalized groups achieve equitable jobs, living conditions, and most of all an equitable education?

I believe that I was under the conception, or rather misconception, that the field of education had been making great strides in providing an equitable education to all students, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender. The readings by Gilligan (1982), Ladson-Billings (1998) and Matsuda (1991) helped me to see that in fact, very little progress has been made in gender, racial, and for that matter, language equity. Young's (1995) article explicitly states that "the interval that we assert between ourselves and the past may be much less than we assume (p. 159). Rereading my journal entries, it is evident that in the last 13 weeks, I have been discovering many new perspectives of the systems of inequality that continue to exist in our society.

By the end of the semester, I found myself reading critical theorist in FL education such as Firth & Wagner (1997), Marchenkova (2005), Bakhtin (1981), Moll & Greenberg (1990), and Grant & Wong (in press). It was in these reading that the common thread of language throughout the semester became clearer to me. I believe that it is through language that we can separate the "haves" and the "have-nots" and it is only through language that we can foster real change in areas such as gender, ethnic, and racial inequalities by recognizing the various funds of knowledge, or knowledge not related to formal education, (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) that individuals possess. But what is meant by language? How does language help us to generate, extrapolate, process and reprocess meaning of our social world? And, whose language and funds of knowledge are legitimate? This revelation of the role of language in promoting social justice and equitable education policies, specifically for FL education, will be the emerging theme of this reflective analysis paper. The following sections will elaborate on my personal journey and how what I have learned has greatly impacted my own ways of knowing.

Group Memberships

"To change the world, one has to change the ways of world-making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced."

(Bourdieu, 1989)

This quote by Pierre Bourdieu is powerful because it recognizes that making positive changes in social inequalities, requires a change how these inequalities have been produced and reproduced within our society. To make a change in society, Bourdieu (1977) in his Outline of a Theory of Practice, started with the individual habitus. A difficult abstract concept to define, the habitus represents the long process of acquiring dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977). These dispositions include present and past experiences, schemes of perception, as well as thoughts and

actions that tend to guarantee one's "correctness" in a given social situation (Grenfell & James, 1998). In addition, these dispositions "are structured because they unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they are acquired" (Thompson, 1991, p. 12). In essence, it is how each of us makes sense of our world and how we validate our individual place in that world.

I make sense of the world in which I live based on my personal history. This history includes specific memberships to groups that are either dominant (with power) or subordinate (without power or with less power). As a White, American born, native English speaker, who is a Christian, I now realize that I belong to dominant groups based on my race, language and religion. Along with these dominant group memberships are certain privileges. For example, my Christian-based religious holidays were the accepted norm in the public school system in Fall River, Massachusetts. Before the Ways of Knowing course, I thought nothing of this. Now I view the power of Christianity as evidence of British colonization. I now see how religious superiority infiltrated and dominated the school system. Not only were school vacations planned around Christmas and Easter, but many of the symbols relating to these religious holidays permeated the curriculum and textbooks. I never once imagined how it must have been for anyone who did not share my religious beliefs. Perhaps it is because I didn't know anyone who was not a Christian. Maybe it was because they didn't have a voice. What it is like to lack a voice became evident to me as a female with a low socioeconomic status (SES). I am aware that I was not granted the same privileges as males with the same SES, or as females from a higher socioeconomic class.

In my freshman year of high school, I distinctly remember being placed in a business track, as opposed to a college preparatory track, even though I had always intended to go to college. I probably should have talked to my parents or siblings about this, but I didn't. Perhaps

it was because in my family, education was important, but it was not emphasized as much as starting a family or finding an occupation. This may be due to the fact that only one of my parents graduated from high school and neither of them went to college. They were (and still are) hard working individuals who raised a large family in a small New England city. They followed traditional gender roles. My father was the primary wage earner, while my mother was the primary care-giver. These gender roles were inculcated in each of us. They became part of our habitus.

Reflecting back to that time, I have often wondered why I had been placed on that track given that my middle school transcripts clearly showed my high academic performance in advanced math, science and foreign language courses. I now understand that my placement was most likely related to my address. I lived in a neighborhood where many residents had no formal education. They were working class Azorean immigrants whose first language was Portuguese. Not realizing what I was missing by being in the business track, I stayed enrolled in those courses for my entire freshman year. Although I was able to transfer to the college preparatory track the following year, academically I was behind my peers. Years later (and after having achieved much academic success), those old feelings of academic inadequacy still exist. How can that one event continue to have power? In the following section I will explore a possible explanation by connecting Bourdieu's (1991b) concept of symbolic power to Jerome Bruner's (1990) concept of "Self." To do so, I will examine the role of language as it applies to Bakhtin's (1981) use of term "dialogue" and to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of "inner speech."

Symbolic Power, the Concept of "Self," and the Role of Language

There are a variety of reasons that social groups form. One way is based on the comparison of similarities and differences, such as gender, race, religion, language, or sexual

orientation, of individual group members. More difficult to explain, is the way in which certain groups emerge as having power while other groups become subordinate to that power. Power does not have to be physical; it can be verbal or even symbolic, which may take on the form of a smile, a glance, or any of the many ways that we influence another's thoughts, perceptions, and/or behaviors (Bourdieu, 1991b). Groups with power are self-perpetuating or "are reproduced" because they possess something of value that becomes "the legitimate" to which everything else is compared (Bourdieu 1991b). What is deemed "legitimate" may be the color of one's skin, the language or accent with which one speaks, or the amount of property one owns. Therefore, what is "legitimate" is what is "correct" and often what has power. For a group to maintain its power over a long period of time (such as during colonization), both the dominant and the subordinate groups must recognize, or rather misrecognize, the legitimacy of that power (Bourdieu, 1991b). To Bourdieu, that legitimacy has roots as deep as the individual habitus.

Related to Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the reproduction of symbolic power are the ideas, concepts, and theories of Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky, and Mikhail Bakhtin. In reading their work, I have a new understanding of the term "language" and how the idea of "language use" can be defined as more than a system of symbols. To begin, Bruner's (1990) concept of "Self" is in some aspects similar to Bourdieu's habitus. In his book Acts of Meaning, Bruner (1990) poses the question: "Is it not a way of framing one's consciousness, one's position, one's identity, one's commitment with respect to another?" (p. 101). He goes on to say that in comparing ourselves to others, a dialogue takes place. Is the "dialogue" Bruner refers to simply the use of semiotics in a Saussurian sense? Or, could "dialogue" mean the use of multiple languages as what Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossia? Marchenkova (2005) describes the term in a Bakhtinian sense when she says "language is permeated with dialogic relations on all its

levels…because there are many voices and, therefore, a multiplicity of dialogues involved with communication" (p. 177-178). It is without a huge leap of faith that one can connect Bourdieu's habitus, Bruner's concept of self and Bakhtin's heteroglossia to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social learning and his concept of internalization. By internalizing dialogues individuals form an inner speech that Vygotsky (1978) says is when the interpersonal becomes the intrapersonal. I believe it is when it becomes an individual's way of knowing.

I would like to end this section with my belief that Bruner (1990) would agree with both Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Baktin's concept of heteroglossia by his following quote:

> "…the child's acquisition of language requires far more assistance from and interaction with caregivers than Chomsky (and many others) had suspected. Language is acquired not through the role of spectator, but through use…the child is not simply learning what to say, but how, where, to whom an under what circumstances" (p. 70-71)

It is now evident to me that my feelings of academic inadequacy are rooted in my habitus. My socioeconomic status, the inculcation of gender roles, the language spoken in my neighborhood, my religious beliefs, and my race are all intricately involved in the formation of my habitus. The symbolic power I give to others is reproduced over time because, within my habitus, I deem their possession of that power as "legitimate." Therefore, I cannot attribute these feelings to one event as the roots of these feelings have taken hold in multiple dispositions. If I have not been able to change my habitus and release these feelings, then it must be significantly more difficult for those who have undergone a lifetime of being subject to or oppressed by the power of a dominant group. This realization has had a powerful impact on both my teaching of foreign languages and on how I would like to conduct my own SLA research.

Prior to the Ways of Knowing course, I had not examined my group memberships, nor had I explored the implications of said memberships. More importantly, I never asked myself how I would use the power and privileges I gain from my group memberships to help those who have been marginalized in society. This includes FL students and/or FL teachers that do not have equal access to the most recent curriculum materials and teacher training programs. I find myself asking "who will benefit from my research?" and "will this program truly meet the needs and give power to those who need it the most?" To answer these questions, I now know that I will need to examine the inequities that exist in the FL field and propose programs for both instruction and teacher training that will place value on the languages and funds of knowledge that have been traditionally regarded as sub-standard. This will require my use of multi-dimensional approach to SLA that was initially presented by Firth and Wagner (1997). In the next section, I will present my recent understanding of what it means to use multiple lenses in order to close the gaps of inequality in FL education

<center>Multiple Lenses and Equitable Education</center>

As soon as one treats language as an autonomous object, accepting the radical separation which Saussure made between internal and external linguistics, between the science of language and the science of the social uses of language, one is condemned to looking within words for the power of words, that is, looking for it where it is not to be found. (Bourdieu, 1991a)

Is there only one truth? If there is, would it have a feminine voice? Would that voice be in a language from the Middle East or even the Far East? Sandra Harding (1998) offers the notion of "cultures as toolboxes for sciences and technologies." In her book Is Science Multicultural, Harding (1998) proposes a break from positivism in order to change the traditional

view of what constitutes scientific knowledge. Harding recognizes that the use of language is one of the objectivity dilemmas of the positivist approach to scientific research. Because mathematical equations are not sufficient to report all types of scientific observations, science relies on a language that is free from cultural bias and human fallacy. But whose language is legitimate?

For centuries science has had a male dominated Eurocentric voice that has vehemently excluded the voices of women and the funds of knowledge from those that live outside Western Europe or the United States. Viewed as barbaric, entire groups and cultures, such as those of the Hopi, were marginalized because their language and therefore their ideas did not translate perfectly into the Western European mold (Whorf, 1950). Science has progressed in this one dimensional direction through the years of European colonization in what González (2004) describes as a centripetal force of bringing everything to the center, or to the Eurocentric view. It is this centripetal motion of taking what one wants from those who reside on the outer layers of society, disregarding their language and culture, and then certifying it as their own that is what Young (1995) loosely defines as hybridity. It is the repetition of hybridity that contributes to the multiple layers of a culture that Bhabha (1988) says is a good thing. Bhabha (1988) says that by redefining culture as multi-layered and by reclaiming languages as being legitimate, we create a "third space." It is in this third space that I believe Harding's (1998) "cultural toolbox" will have the most success in redefining scientific epistemologies.

Similar to Harding's work toward a post-positivist approach to science are what I believe Bruner (1990) seeks to accomplish in Acts of Meaning and what Bourdieu (1972) intends to present in his Outline of a Theory of Practice. It appears that they both seek to develop multi-dimensional epistemologies that consider a socio-historical/socio-cultural perspective. The

historical rational behind their desire to create a new multi-dimensional lens includes Bruner's dissatisfaction with the Cognitive Revolution (Bruner 1990) and Bourdieu's desire to break from the clutches of objectivism without reverting back to subjectivism (Thompson 1991).

For Bruner (1990), the Cognitive Revolution set out to replace behaviorism by having "psychology join forces with anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and history" (p. 3). Instead, the field of psychology was greatly influenced by the emerging fields of computer science and the neurosciences. Bruner notes that in the early stages of the revolution, the emphasis of language use shifted from "the construction of meaning to the processing of information (p. 4) For Bourdieu (1989), the role of language in both objectivism and subjectivism was overtly limited by those who had studied language before him. He was aware that linguists and cognitive psychologist had ignored the socio-historical perspective of language use that he believed could only be found by sociological, anthropological and philosophical investigations (Bourdieu, 1989).

The emerging themes of language and language use in deriving meaning from one's social world became quite evident in the course readings. In seeking to redefine the various fields in the age of post-colonialism, Harding, Bruner and Bourdieu have all called for a new way to view the use of language, moving from a Eurocentric view that uses centripetal forces to maintain dominant Western epistemologies, to what Bakhtin (1981) explains as centrifugal forces that promote heteroglossia. The understanding that multiple languages exist and are being used depending on the context of the dialogue has serious implications for education. Do we allow for heteroglossia in our current state of mandates following No Child Left Behind? González (2004) says that "teachers and students operate in a context that isolates practitioners, mutes autonomy, and pushes for standardization and homogenization embedded in relations of

power" (p. 23). How then can I foster change in FL education that promotes the recognition of multiple languages, multiple lenses, and multiple ways of knowing?

<center>Whose Language and Funds of Knowledge Are "Legitimate"?</center>

"I take open-mindedness to be a willingness to construe knowledge and values from multiple perspectives without loss of commitment to one's own values. Open-mindedness is the keystone to what we call a democratic culture" (Bruner, 1990, p. 30).

Throughout this reflective analysis, I have attempted to show my growth both in the knowledge I have gained and in how I view my role as a FL teacher, an educator of FL teachers, and a researcher. I know my own ways of knowing have changed. At the beginning of the semester, I would not have asked "whose language and whose funds of knowledge are legitimate?" I simply did not have the background knowledge in critical perspectives of FL education. Now, not only can I ask that question, but I can also discuss the research and the theories that support the need for that question and those like it to be investigated and re-investigated.

On August 30th, I would have said that my research goals are to improve foreign language curriculum and instruction so that each will compliment and accommodate the diversity of learners in today's classrooms. While this is still the core of my interests, my thinking has changed. My research interests now include such questions as: Why isn't Arabic or Chinese offered in more FL programs? Why don't more universities support these languages and others in their teacher certification programs? Are we currently offering foreign languages to all students, even those with learning and/or physical disabilities? How are gender biases being addressed in FL curriculum and FL teacher education programs? When considering the fastest growing minority group in our country, why are so few courses available to Hispanic heritage

language learners in secondary and post-secondary education? And, who will we hire and train to teach these courses? Although these questions represent only a few of the issues of inequality that currently exist in the field of foreign language education, I believe I have made significant progress in the last few months.

My doctoral journey has just begun. I am very motivated to continue my studies of critical perspectives in SLA research. It is my hope that I might actually be able to contribute to finding answers to my rather long list of questions. To do so, will require collaboration with others who have memberships in the marginalized groups I hope to reach. I will need to have their help to design research questions that do more than blame the victim or that seek to reproduce the same programs that have done little to empower those that have been denied equitable opportunities. Thanks to this course, I have new expectations for myself. I must now be committed to placing value on the funds of knowledge and the languages of those cultures that have been traditionally viewed as sub-standard. I must conduct my teaching and my research through multiple lenses that view these funds of knowledge, these languages, the new "legitimate."

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