

Challenging Dominant Language Ideology in the Adult ESL Classroom: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, dominant language ideology validates the use of Standardized English as the only appropriate linguistic practice (Lippi-Green, 1994; Flores & Rosa, 2015). In educational settings, dominant language ideology entails the beliefs in language standardization and monolingualism (Farr & Song, 2011). The present case study examines the beliefs and practices of one ESL teacher and investigates how dominant language ideology is reproduced and resisted in the adult ESL classroom. The study employs multiple sources and modes of data (a questionnaire, in-person observations, and a semi-structured interview) collected over multiple lessons. The study shows that the teacher generally resists dominant language ideology: she views students' code-switching as a resource, rather than a deficit and does not associate Standardized English with correctness. Accordingly, incorporating language variation in the ESL classroom is viewed as a necessary teaching practice. Nevertheless, the teacher reinforces the notion of the monolingual native speaker as the authority for linguistic expertise and, thus, aligns with the tenets of dominant language ideology. Ultimately, by offering an account of the beliefs and practices of one ESL teacher, the present study illuminates the ways in which teachers can resist dominant language ideology in the classroom and, thus, engage with critical language pedagogy.

Keywords: case study, critical language pedagogy, dominant language ideology, ESL, standard English

INTRODUCTION

“I can't even imagine what it's like to move to another country, sometimes across the world, to attend classes, find a job, pay rent. I always tell my students this and I really mean it; they are so

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brave. And I think it is important for them to know that.” (Genevieve, Interview, December 2019)

“Brave.” This is how Genevieve², an experienced ESL teacher, talks about her adult ESL students. In describing the efforts of language learners in acquiring an additional language, perhaps many of us who have had the task of teaching a second or foreign language would have opted for an attribute that emphasizes students’ performance rather than a trait that alludes to a character descriptor extending beyond linguistic ability. I selected this quote as it acknowledges that students’ identities transgress the confines of the classroom. Moreover, by mentioning everyday activities in which students engage (“attend classes”, “find a job”, “pay rent”), it draws attention to the ‘outside’ world as the larger space in which students negotiate and perform³ their identities. At the same time, it emphasizes the role of constructive communication between teacher and students (“I always tell them”, “it is important for them to know that”) in that it recognizes the fundamental role teachers play in creating narratives that formulate an “ethic of caring” (Noddings, 1988). While the hegemonic discourse often permeates the classroom, through interaction, the students and the teacher have the potential to challenge the status quo (Freire, 1970) instead of reproducing it (Bourdieu, 1991).

Language is “the most salient way we have of establishing and advertising our social identities” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 5) and, thus, functions as a social identification tool. Furthermore, as language is “ideologically saturated” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 271), certain language practices are praised and perceived as superior while others, in turn, are degraded and considered deficient (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Increasingly, educational research is becoming concerned with language ideology. Flores and Rosa (2015) question the legitimacy of standardized linguistic practices as “objective sets of linguistic forms” (p. 150) that are deemed *appropriate* for academic settings. They consider that such standardized linguistic practices originate in raciolinguistic ideologies⁴ that discredit the language practices of certain racialized bodies.

The present study examines the beliefs and practices of one ESL teacher and investigates how she reproduces and resists dominant language ideology in the classroom. As such, this paper contributes to the existing literature by highlighting how teachers in the adult ESL classroom draw on or resist dominant language ideology. While, ultimately, my goal is to engage in critical dialogue with both researchers and language teachers regarding the pitfalls of adhering to linguistic prescriptivism, I do not wish to preach any type of solution pertaining to pedagogy or curriculum design. Instead, I hope this paper serves to illuminate current efforts that are being made to de- or re-construct the dominant discourse in the language classroom. In the following section, I will summarize the theoretical foundations under which language ideology operates in the United States. Then, by drawing from previous research, I will offer an account of one ESL teacher’s beliefs and practices and describe the ways in which she either challenges or reproduces dominant language ideology in the classroom.

² For confidentiality reasons, the participant’s name has been anonymized through a pseudonym of her choice.

³ The use of the term ‘perform’ is not incidental, but rather connects to theories in the field of social and cultural studies in which individuals perform their identity through symbolic communication (see Goffman, 1959; Butler, 1988).

⁴ Under the framework of raciolinguistic ideologies, the speaking subject always emerges racialized and is “constructed as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative or innovative when produced by privileged white subjects” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 150).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language Ideologies in the United States

Simply put, language ideology consists of beliefs about language and language use. Since beliefs are not disconnected from the social world, but rather formed and informed by the existing discourse (Gee, 1996), language ideology links linguistic practices to a pre-determined social order and, as such, it grants privileges to some but not to others (Kroskrity, 2010). The predominant language ideology in the United States is a standard language ideology⁵, defined by Lippi-Green (1994) as “a bias toward an abstract, idealized homogenous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions” (p.166). In this view, the prevailing belief is that there is an *appropriate* form of a language to which all speakers should aspire, and hence, emulate in their linguistic practices, namely Standardized English⁶. (Farr & Daniels, 1986, as cited in Farr & Song, 2011, p. 653) note that it is easier to define Standardized English as what it is not, rather than what it is. In other words, Standardized English is not characterized by the presence of specific linguistic forms, but rather by the absence of forms which are deemed deficient.

Dominant language ideology connects language to identity and, thus, grants speakers characteristics based on their language practices (Davila, 2012; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Accordingly, although a speaker’s language practices cannot be (and should not be) taken as an indicator of their intellectual abilities, they influence the listener in the evaluation of the message (Lippi-Green, 2012). As such, dominant language ideology transpires in speakers’ everyday life.

The experiences that occur within educational settings are of particular interest to the present study since they reflect how dominant language ideology operates within institutions of power. In reviewing the literature concerning multilingualism and education in the United States, Farr and Song (2011) note language ideology’s direct impact in informing educational policy. Additionally, the authors identify the two most prevalent language ideologies in American education: the belief in language standardization and the belief in monolingualism. Historically, the ruling class’s hegemony over which language practices were deemed acceptable in public communication contributed to the ideology of language standardization. Monolingualism emerged organically from this ideology, condemning the mixing of various dialects and languages in communication. Consequently, although they might appear to be disparate beliefs, there is a “close alignment of an ideology of standardization with an ideology of monolingualism” (Farr & Song, 2011, p. 652). It is in this vein that Silverstein (1996) conceptualizes the construct of ‘culture of monoglot Standard’.

While language ideology is by no means a recent invention, it is still prevalent in modern society. Discouraging the use of vernacular dialects, code-mixing, as well as the English-Only movement, speak to the extent to which, to this day, social hierarchies are kept in place through the symbolic conferral of prestige upon certain language practices and the discrediting of others.

⁵ Henceforth, this paper will employ dominant language ideology and standard language ideology interchangeably.

⁶ Since the standardization of a dialect is an ongoing social process, many researchers have emphasized the problematic nature of the construct “standard language” reminding us that “there is nothing inherently standard about Standardized English” (Metz, 2018, p. 475). I use the attribute “Standardized” instead of “Standard” in solidarity with them.

As a result, the institutions that promote language standardization (e.g., schools) as a way for individuals to gain access to the “codes of power” (Delpit, 1988) fail to recognize their complicity in “favoring and disfavoring students based on the linguistic features they use” (Farr & Song, 2011, p. 653).

Language Ideologies in the Language Classroom

The consensus among educators and scholars seems to be that the use of Standardized English is intrinsically associated with better professional outcomes in mainstream U.S. society. Informed by dominant language ideology, this view leads to the stigmatization of certain language practices, such as the use of nonstandard varieties of English and code-switching, which are, then, perceived as deficient (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Bacon (2017) argued that, oftentimes, teachers are the ones who reinforce dominant language ideology in their classrooms. His study followed four cohorts of pre-service and beginner teachers in examining their beliefs about Standardized English⁷ before and after taking a course module on Standardized English and writing instruction for multidialectal learners. The course included activities concerning idiolects, language variation, and multilingualism. Bacon (2017) found that, after being familiarized with these concepts, the participants’ views towards what constitutes appropriate language practices changed. Initially, the majority of teachers described Standardized English as “proper” and “correct” and thought it was the most widespread variety of English (Bacon, 2017, p. 9). Similarly, they deemed the use of nonstandard varieties of English as inappropriate for academic contexts and deserving of lower scores. Nonetheless, after taking the course, teachers’ attitudes revealed a more complex understanding of Standardized English, language variation, multilingualism, and multidialecticism. The teachers recognized Standardized English as an idealized form of language that advantages privileged groups. Hence, Bacon (2017) suggested that teachers’ critical self-reflection on their beliefs could ultimately lead to changes in their teaching practices

Following in this line of critical self-reflection, the five teachers in Metz’s (2018) study explicitly stated that their goals were to construct linguistic counter-narratives against dominant language ideology in the English language classroom. However, while focusing on the literary text “Their Eyes Were Watching God”, by Zora Neale Hurston, which is written in a nonstandard dialect, four of the teachers failed to critically discuss language variation with their students. Thereby, the lack of activities around language variation reinforced dominant language ideology. Moreover, Metz (2018) noticed the remarks made by students during a translation activity that consisted in rewriting a paragraph from the book into Standardized English and noted that the students tended to associate Standardized English with “correctness”. Only two of the teachers addressed this matter by explicitly telling students that nonstandard dialects are not incorrect. Although he found a prevalent disconnect between teachers’ attitudes and practices, Metz (2018) argued that teachers can create linguistic counter-narratives by discussing dominant language ideology overtly with the students. Consequently, he proposed the incorporation of activities about language variation during lessons in order to foster the principles of critical language teaching.

In his conceptual paper, Metz (2017) collected concerns voiced by teachers about including multiple varieties of English into their lessons. He mentioned that, although English

⁷ I use *Standardized English* for consistency within the paper. Bacon (2017) refers to the construct as **Standard English* (*SE), indicating the problematic nature of the construct graphically through the asterisk.

teachers showed openness towards honoring students' diverse cultural backgrounds in their lessons (e.g., by choosing multicultural texts), there was a prevalent stigma around instruction that was not centered on Standardized English. In addressing one teacher's concerns regarding the tension between honoring language variation and allowing children to acquire the codes of power, the author advocated for familiarizing students with a more expanded linguistic repertoire rather than privileging one variety over another. One particular concern that resonated with the present study was the fear that teaching English language learners different varieties of English might confuse them. In response, Metz (2017) contrasted this perspective and suggested that teachers are, in fact, doing their students a disservice by only presenting one variety of English when, in their everyday interactions, they would encounter multiple varieties.

Similarly focusing on teachers' experiences, Motha's (2006) year-long critical feminist ethnographical study examined four novice teachers' negotiations of dominating images surrounding ESOL and race. Since linguistic and racial identity are not separate, but rather co-naturalized (Flores & Rosa, 2017), she assumed teachers' racial identities to be inextricable from the process of teaching ESOL. As such, the participants' racial background (three of the teachers were white American and one was Korean-American) played a fundamental role in their interaction with the dominant discourse. The author found that teachers constructed their identities by either contesting the dominant discourse (the three white teachers) or being contested by it (the Korean-American teacher). For instance, Jane, one of the three white teachers, explicitly addressed matters of racism and linguistic legitimacy in her ESOL class; in her lessons she made a conscious effort to not posit standardized American English as the normative variety and not stigmatize World English varieties. Conversely, Katie, the Korean-American teacher, described how her credibility as an ESOL teacher was questioned by some of her white peers regardless of the fact that Katie was a 'native' speaker of mainstream English. While acknowledging the efforts made by the four teachers to address issues of dominant language ideology, Motha (2006) noted that linguistic varieties other than Standardized English (e.g., World Englishes) were viewed as socially illegitimate. Lastly, she articulated the contradictory nature of teaching ESOL: "Single-mindedly teaching only nonstandard varieties of English [...] can simultaneously deprive students of access to socially favored ways of communicating, particularly disadvantaging students who do not have access to standard English in their homes and communities outside school. Conversely, teaching and acknowledging only standard English [...] reinforces its supremacy and marginalizes nonstandard varieties of English and the students who speak them" (p. 512).

The present study found its inspiration in considering the conflicting demands of promoting critical language awareness whilst equipping students with the necessary tools to succeed in their endeavors. As a result, the research question that guides this study is: How do teachers' beliefs and practices reinforce or challenge dominant language ideology?

DATA AND METHOD

The data were collected over multiple visits at a private university in New York that offers affordable ESL courses to adults. I met Genevieve through one of her fellow instructors who, upon listening to an incipient account of my study, recommended I introduce the research idea to her. Genevieve welcomed the opportunity to participate and allowed me to interview her and observe her classes. Given that she had a very busy teaching schedule (comprised of seven

classes per week), we agreed to arrange our visits in advance. Despite her busy teaching regime, Genevieve provided great support – making herself available as much as possible, as well as sharing with me all the materials she used in her class.

For this study, I used multiple sources of data: in-person observations, a semi-structured interview, and a questionnaire⁸.

- *Observations*: I attended three class sessions (nine hours in total), during which Genevieve taught two different level courses: a beginner level and an intermediate level. In order to accommodate both Genevieve’s and my schedule, I observed two consecutive sessions of the intermediate-level course. During these observations, I took detailed field notes and adopted a side-by-side notation system, so that I simultaneously included low inference and high inference descriptors in my notes (see Appendix C). This proved particularly helpful and facilitated the analysis of the data.
- *Interview*: On the last day of observations, I audio-recorded a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B). Conducting the interview after several interactions with Genevieve allowed us to establish rapport that was conducive to a more open communication.
- *Questionnaire*: During our second encounter (and before my first observation), I administered a questionnaire on Genevieve’s beliefs about dominant language ideology (see Appendix A). The questionnaire also served as a way to gather information about Genevieve’s racial and ethnic identity, as well as her profile as an ESL teacher.

Lastly, after collecting the data, I transcribed the interview and began reviewing the data. I coded the interview and field notes focusing on evidence of dominant language ideology in the ESL classroom, which allowed me to identify instances of or talk about multilingualism, language variation, and Standardized English. Furthermore, in reviewing the data, I categorized these instances as either reinforcing dominant language ideology or challenging it, which allowed me to get a clearer overall picture of Genevieve’s teaching beliefs and practices.

Specifically, under the category of *Multilingualism*, I included (1) talk about the teacher’s or students’ multilingualism, (2) talk about or instances of code-switching, as well as (3) references regarding the socially constructed categories of ‘native’ and ‘non-native’. Talk or instances that explored, acknowledged, or brought awareness to language variation, such as explicit (meta-linguistic) discussions around language variation (e.g., mentioning dialects) or more informal instances oriented towards the functionality of communication (e.g., “Most people might understand you better if you use this term”) were included in the category *Language Variation*⁹. Similarly, evidence of multi-dialectal code-switching, as well as references to World Englishes was included in this thematic category. Lastly, under *Standardized English*, I included talk or instances that promoted (1) the idea that there is only one acceptable way to speak English, as well as (2) the idea that Standardized English represents the (only) correct variety of English.

Lastly, given that my own life experiences and beliefs have assuredly contributed to my analysis of the data, it is fundamental that I acknowledge my own bias. In the following subsection, I will address this bias by exploring my own stance and role in developing this project.

⁸ I also took photographs of teaching artifacts employed by Genevieve in her lessons (e.g., textbook, lesson plans) which included identifying information. To protect and ensure that her identity remains fully confidential, I have decided not to include these artifacts in my analysis.

⁹ While Standardized English is a variety of English, in this category, I included only those cases that do not impose the idea of correctness or appropriateness of one linguistic form over another.

Researcher's Positionality

The research idea for this project was motivated by my own identity as a multilingual living abroad for the past eight years. Personally, I value and deem my multilingualism as one of my strongest assets. I grew up attending a bilingual school in Romania, so my formal schooling took place both in Romanian and Spanish. At the age of six, I also began taking English language classes, which I pursued all the way until the end of high school. Though in my home country, my multilingualism had always been encouraged, upon moving abroad, I became aware of a different reality in which my multilingualism was not celebrated but taken as the grounds for exclusion and for othering. My *newly* ascribed identity as a non-native speaker¹⁰ impeded me from claiming ownership of the same status and positions given to native speakers. I acknowledge the privilege of my racial identity as a white woman, as well as the high language proficiency in Spanish and English that allows me to “pass off” as a native speaker. However, in my experience, inhabiting the identity of a non-native speaker meant that my language practices were constantly scrutinized, sometimes in the form of a backhanded compliment on speaking “so well” “for someone like me” (i.e., a non-native speaker). What resonated with me was that my language ability was a secondary criterion in these remarks. Rather, what stood at the front of all my interactions with native speakers was my background and my place of birth.

Having felt that, as a non-native speaker, I had to constantly legitimize my language practices, in my teaching, I aimed to create a culturally responsive environment that raised awareness around the status of language-minoritized speakers in the United States. I often asked my students to critically evaluate the judgments they attached to the language practices of underprivileged communities, thus developing students' critical language awareness. I intentionally incorporated examples of language variation in my teaching so that students could be exposed to multiple dialects and varieties. Lastly, I encouraged them to reconsider the “native” versus “non-native” dichotomy through their own perspectives as emergent bilinguals.

Despite my personal experiences as a multilingual and my own teaching philosophy, my purpose is not to criticize others' practices. Rather, I believe that by sharing our views, we can partake in critical conversations with each other, furthering our mutual understanding.

FINDINGS

The findings are divided into two sections, which provide examples of the instances identified as either reinforcing or challenging dominant language ideology.

Reinforcing Dominant Language Ideology

For most of our interactions, Genevieve praised her students' multilingual background. However, there were several instances in which Genevieve's views aligned with the dominant language ideology. In responding to the questionnaire, specifically to the question: “How would you define appropriate English?”, Genevieve wrote:

¹⁰ Through the phrase “newly ascribed”, I aim to illustrate that the identity of non-native speaker was not one that I had articulated for myself, but rather one that was imposed upon me by others.

I think I'd define it as language that doesn't involve slang, "text talk" or what is often heard "on the street".

In distinguishing the bounds of appropriate English, Genevieve takes a prescriptive stance and defines it through the styles, registers, and practices (i.e., slang, text talk) that it does *not* include¹¹. Thus, her definition resonates with dominant language ideology that regards practices such as the use of slang as inadequate (Ferri, 2017).

Answering a similar question during the interview, Genevieve offers an anecdote about her father's language practices as an analogy to her views on language variation and appropriateness.

[Excerpt 6 (Interview) – He switches his speech]

- 01 Researcher: Do you think there is only one way to speak English?
02 In other words, is there a correct way to speak English?
03 Genevieve: Definitely not. *((lines omitted¹²))*
04 My father is a surgeon,
05 but when he's around his friends he grew up with
06 in a not so great part of Brooklyn,
07 he switches to,
08 he switches his speech to the way they might be speaking
09 and I don't think there's anything wrong with that.

As a whole, Genevieve's anecdote illustrates how the use of a common language variety or style functions as an in-group identity marker. In line 3, she provides a categorical response, "Definitely not", which signals the firmness of her beliefs. In the following lines (4–8), she evokes her father's language practices as a way to contextualize her viewpoints. Her father "switches his speech" (lines 7-8) in order to align with the language practices that are most predominant within his group of childhood friends. In this sense, the anecdote validates the prevalence of language variation in everyday communication (i.e., using different registers or styles based on the situation). However, in identifying her father as "a surgeon" (line 4), the turn operates under the belief that mentioning his profession is sufficient to offer insight into his language practices. In other words, being a "surgeon" is used as code for the assumption that holding such a position equates to being highly educated and, thus, adept at mastering standardized language practices¹³, an assumption that aligns with dominant language ideology. Moreover, the father's figure is contrasted to that of his friends. While there are no descriptors regarding these friends, other than being from "a not so great part of Brooklyn", in line 5, the adversative conjunction "but" clearly disengages the position Genevieve's father embodies as a surgeon (line 4) from the one he performs when communicating with his childhood friends (lines 5-8). Such associations of class and social status with specific language practices inherently

¹¹ Recall that the construct of standardized English is more easily defined through the absence of forms perceived as deficient, rather than through the presence of specific (Farr and Song, 2011).

¹² These lines were omitted as they referenced political commentary.

¹³ Under dominant language ideology, standardized language practices are taken as an indicator of higher-income professions (e.g., surgeons) (Davila, 2012).

operate under dominant language ideology, which privileges and affords higher status to those using standardized language.

Lastly, during one of the observations, Genevieve similarly invokes dominant language ideology in her framing of native authority as the epitome of linguistic expertise. Specifically, in this excerpt, Genevieve has distributed the midterms taken the previous week to the students and has spent the last part of class going over potential confusions and questions. As most students had issues with one of the vocabulary exercises that required them to define terms from the unit, she discusses the advantages of having a rich vocabulary. In doing so, she inadvertently reinforces the native – non-native dichotomy.

[Excerpt 7 (observation) – A lot of native speakers]

01 Genevieve A lot of native speakers,
02 who speak this language since they're little,
03 don't know how to use these words.
04 If you know these words,
05 your vocabulary will be better than that of most native speakers.

In line 1, Genevieve draws attention to the native speaker construct. Her perspective fuels the native – non-native dichotomy, which idealizes the native speaker and, in comparison, diminishes the abilities of non-native speakers. This constant comparison is further reified through the comparative “better (than)” in line 5, suggesting that the standard against which non-native speakers must compare themselves is the native speaker. Although it appears that Genevieve’s intention is to encourage the students and motivate them to enhance their vocabulary, she does so by positioning native speakers as the reference point that her students (non-native speakers themselves) should aspire to reach. As a result, she reconstructs the native – non-native dichotomy in her ESL classroom and adheres to a narrative that reinforces dominant language ideology. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in lines 4-5, Genevieve acknowledges learners’ potential to build a better vocabulary than native speakers, which contradicts dominant language ideologies that posit native speakers as the absolute linguistic authority.

Challenging Dominant Language Ideology

From our first interaction, Genevieve expressed her admiration for her multilingual students. As I mentioned in the beginning of this paper, she referred to her students as “brave”, underscoring the complexity of their life experiences. In teaching her ESL classes, Genevieve displayed openness towards multilingualism. In the lessons I observed, students with Spanish, French, and Russian as an L1 predominated. While engaging in class activities, these students partnered according to their L1 and sometimes communicated in that language and not in English. Instead of reprimanding them for not using English in the classroom, Genevieve allowed them to code-switch, both during private exchanges (e.g., pair or group work, and informal student talk), as well as during public activities that engaged the entire class (e.g., student presentations). In fact, what I deemed to be the most prolonged instance of code-switching occurred during a class presentation on wedding rituals. A student from Ukraine interrupted her presentation to ask one of her peers (also from Ukraine) if the tradition she was referencing was common in her region. The exchange between the two students took place in

English and Ukrainian and was preceded by the student’s announcement of code-switching: “Sorry, I want to ask [her] something in Ukrainian”.

Code-switching as a Resource in the ESL Classroom

Although I was surprised by Genevieve’s disposition towards allowing students to code-switch during class time, her own code-switching practices (in French and Spanish) were highly prevalent during class time, as I noticed throughout my observations. In the first excerpt, Genevieve was discussing traditional wedding rituals from around the world with the class. She offered an extended personal account of her grandparents’ wedding day, during which her voice cracked on multiple occasions.

[Excerpt 1 (observation)¹⁴ – *What you say in Spanish*]

- 01 Genevieve: (voice cracks) I’m losing my voice.
02 I have, what you say in Spanish, ‘gripe’.

In line 2, Genevieve switches from English into Spanish intra-sententially, offering the Spanish name for the virus she has, “gripe” (“flu”). In the same line, she prospectively draws attention to her code-switching, by prefacing the word ‘gripe’ with the announcement: “what you say in Spanish”. By code-switching in front of the entire class, Genevieve aligns with students’ language practices.

In the next excerpt, Genevieve assigned a collaborative activity about the U.S. states, allowing students to choose their partners. The majority of students formed groups that shared a common L1. Genevieve circulated around the classroom observing students’ work.

[Excerpt 2 (observation)– *Casi, casi*]

- 01 Genevieve: (approaches a group of students doing pair work)
02 Almost finished?
03 Student: Casi, casi.
04 Genevieve: Casi, casi.

As she approaches a group of Spanish-speaking students (line 1), Genevieve addresses them in English and inquires about their progress with the quiz (line 2). Subsequently, in line 3, one of the students contributes a reply to Genevieve’s question in Spanish: “Casi, casi” (“Almost, almost”). In closing this particular IRF (initiation – reply – feedback) sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), Genevieve repeats the answer given by the student in its original form in Spanish (line 4). While it is common that teachers repeat a student’s response to show agreement or acknowledgment, Genevieve also maintains the student’s choice of language (i.e., Spanish). Given the context in which this exchange occurs (i.e., during an ESL class), Genevieve could have opted for other types of feedback (e.g., asking the student to translate the phrase into English). However, by repeating the answer provided by the student in the language the student had chosen for their communication with the teacher, she shows affiliation with their language practices.

¹⁴ In parentheses, I specify for each excerpt whether it is taken from one of the classroom observations or from the interview.

The first two excerpts illustrate that Genevieve not only allows her students to switch language codes, but she adopts this practice herself, which serves to challenge the dominant language ideology by disrupting the normativity of monolingualism so often imposed in ESL classrooms. Furthermore, to further examine and compare Genevieve’s classroom practices around code-switching with her beliefs, during the interview, I asked her to reflect on her views about code-switching: “Do you think it’s appropriate to code-switch or use multiple languages in the class?”

[Excerpt 3 (interview) – *I think it’s okay to code-switch*]

01 G: You know what, I, for whatever reasons,
02 I tend to be the teacher who allows it,
03 even, I wouldn’t say, encourages it.
04 But I think, especially in the beginner classes,
05 if I know the word I am trying to explain in English in the student’s native
06 language, I will use the native language first and say, you know, this bla-bla-bla.
07 But I think that there are certain teachers here that are,
08 who are great teachers, but more traditional than I am,
09 and they do not allow the students’ L1 in the classroom at all.
10 I don’t know what’s best.
11 I think it’s okay to codeswitch; it’s fine.

In this excerpt from the interview, Genevieve self-identifies as “the teacher who allows it [i.e., code-switching], even, [...] encourages it” (lines 2-3). Although her favorable viewpoint is reflected through the juxtaposition of “allow” (line 2) and “encourage” (line 3), the hedge “I wouldn’t say” (line 3) downplays the strength of her assertions. The anecdote in lines 4-6 illustrates how she incorporates code-switching as a linguistic tool to aid language learning, especially at lower levels of proficiency. Moreover, in lines 7-9, Genevieve references other ESL teachers, whom she describes as “more traditional” than herself, who reject code-switching in the classroom. Thus, Genevieve’s construction of self as an ESL instructor from lines 2-6 is articulated in contrast to that of her peers. Nonetheless, in formulating an overall stance regarding the validity of code-switching in the ESL classroom (lines 10-11), Genevieve’s initial reaction shows caution (line 10). However, in the final line, the turn ultimately pivots from a position of ambiguity (“I don’t know what’s best”) to an approving stance (“I think it’s okay to code-switch”).

Perspectives on Language Variation and Standardized English

In incorporating language variation in their ESL classes, teachers face the dilemma of deciding which linguistic forms and features they should present. This predicament intertwines with standard language ideology, specifically on matters of appropriateness. As such, the way in which teachers frame language variation in their practices can either reinforce or contest dominant language ideology. As I did not observe any instances pertaining to language variation during the in-class observations, the interview and questionnaire provided insight into Genevieve’s articulation of her beliefs.

The following excerpt exemplifies Genevieve’s teaching philosophy as she elaborates upon the reasons why she does not teach only standardized language in the classroom. In

answering my question, “In terms of your teaching, do you only teach your students the standard¹⁵ language?”, Genevieve provides the following response.

[Excerpt 4 (interview) – I help them to learn]

- 01 G: No, because I think, especially if a student asks me,
02 hey Genevieve, I heard my co-worker or my friend say this
03 and I don’t know what it means,
04 as long as it’s not an off-colored or dirty thing,
05 I will explain what that expression or that words means
06 because I want my students to be able to function well in society.
07 You know, what you hear in the subway or online at the supermarket,
08 it’s a lot different from what you hear in a university classroom.
09 So, definitely. I help them to learn whatever they want to know,
10 whatever will help them in their daily lives.

In responding to my question, Genevieve quickly articulates her position (“No”) and states that she answers students’ questions about any expressions or practices that they might have encountered outside the classroom (lines 2-5). Furthermore, in line 6, she highlights how her pedagogy is oriented towards linguistically enabling students to participate in society.

Through lines 7-8, she indirectly provides a definition for language variation (e.g., language practices vary across different contexts), as well as offers a reason for incorporating language variation in the ESL classroom: since there are many registers, dialects, or varieties that students might encounter in their interactions outside “a university classroom”, it is essential that learners become familiarized with different language practices and resources. In this regard, the ESL classroom should not be expected to include homogenous language practices, but rather a variety of resources that mirror the rich and vibrant linguistic configuration of the outside world. This view is further reinforced in lines 9-10, in which Genevieve states her philosophy as an ESL teacher (“I help them to learn [...]”). Specifically, in line 10, she indirectly argues that teaching language variation in the classroom better equips her students to succeed in their interactions (“whatever will help them in their daily lives”). As a result, Genevieve’s accepting stance towards language variation reflects a teaching approach that does not prioritize one language practice or dialect over another, thereby counteracting dominant language ideology in establishing Standardized English as the norm.

In the next excerpt, Genevieve discusses the implications of speaking Standardized English as a way of accessing resources traditionally reserved for those who embrace and promote dominant language ideology.

[Excerpt 5 (Interview) – A type of language]

- 01 Researcher: Do you think it is necessary to speak standard English to
02 integrate better in society, to have access to better chances?
03 Genevieve: Yes. I think it is necessary to know it and to be able to use it.
04 But to know that is a type of language.

¹⁵ During the interview, I employed the attribute “standard” instead of “standardized”, which is reflected in the transcript. I opted for the former attribute since it is more widespread.

Although Genevieve argues that students should speak Standardized English (line 3), her description of “Standard English” as a “type of language” (line 4) reveals a counter-narrative against dominant language ideology. By referring to Standardized English as a “type” of language among many others, instead of privileging it as the assumed default, Genevieve clearly disengages from a dominant discourse that positions standardized language as the norm. To sum up, for the most part, both throughout my observations and the interview, Genevieve disengaged from dominant language ideology. Despite the potential ambiguity that could be inferred from some of her viewpoints, in her teaching practices, she usually employed counter-narratives against the “culture of monoglot Standard”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This case study set out to look at one teacher’s practices and beliefs and explored how she reinforced or challenged dominant language ideology in her adult ESL classroom. Given the prevalence of dominant language ideology in shaping our understanding of the world, I aimed to explore how Genevieve drew on or resisted its influence in her teaching.

The analysis illustrated that Genevieve’s position was, at times, ambiguous and displayed internalized beliefs that echoed dominant language ideology. Specifically, assuming the native speaker as the authority for linguistic expertise furthered the native – non-native divide. Similarly, defining appropriate English through the lens of normative language practices reified dominant language ideology. Nonetheless, the analysis also presented numerous instances in which Genevieve resisted the ideology of monolingualism that is often imposed in ESL classrooms. She honored students’ multilingualism and viewed it as a resource, rather than a deficit. Her own practices of code-switching articulated a clear rupture from dominant language ideology, which posits the ESL classroom as a place of expected linguistic uniformity (Nero, 2005). Therefore, by emulating students’ practices, Genevieve built a strong counter-narrative. Consistent with her practices, during the interview, she positioned herself as “*the* teacher who allows” code-switching.

Her beliefs remained constant during the interview. She expressed a favorable stance towards incorporating language variation in the classroom and argued that students should know that Standard English is a “type of language”. As such, she claimed that her teaching included occurrences of language variation. Nonetheless, I was not able to notice any such instances in my observations. It may be that the opportunity to witness such practices simply did not present itself due to the short amount of time I spent in her classroom. Likewise, it is possible that Genevieve reported this because she recognized the importance of teaching students about multiple dialects and language varieties and wanted to portray herself in a better light (i.e., the social desirability bias). Regardless of the reasons, the disconnect between her positive attitude towards incorporating language variation in the classroom and the absence of such instances in her teaching merits further discussion. On the one hand, the lack of talk about language variation in her teaching could be detrimental for students’ language development. By restricting the in-class occasions during which students are exposed to a variety of dialects and linguistic forms, students may not be able to increase their linguistic repertoire (Metz, 2017). On the other hand, attitudes and beliefs do not always translate into actions. This means that, despite the counter-narrative that Genevieve presented verbally during the interview, her actual practices in the classroom might align, in fact, with dominant language ideology.

In this case study, I have discussed the practices of one adult ESL teacher through the lens of dominant language ideology. Although I focused on only one teacher, I have presented an account of the various practices she embodied in the ESL classroom. However, several of the practices I analyzed in this paper were only reported by the teacher during the interview but not observed during her lessons. Therefore, it is possible that the teacher reported practices that do not reflect her actual teaching arsenal. Consequently, future research in this direction would benefit from observing the teacher's actual practices over an extended period of time to better examine the potential disconnect between teaching practices and beliefs. Conversely, it is equally essential that we ask teachers to reflect on their own beliefs, practices, and struggles – through interviews, questionnaires, etc. – instead of relying on classroom observations only. Lastly, we must continue to look critically at the world around us and use the tools available to contest and rewrite the dominant discourse, remembering to honor the practices of our multilingual students in the process, because they are, as Genevieve said, “so brave”.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire Instrument

Participant's Name (*optional*): _____

Demographic Information:

1. Age: _____

2. Racial/Ethnic Identity: _____

Teacher Profile:

3. Years of teaching experience: _____

4. What class(es) are you teaching at the moment: _____

5. Where do you teach? _____

Please answer the following questions as accurately as possible:

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---------|----------|
| 6. | My students come from diverse backgrounds. | | |
| | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
| 7. | I do my best to honor my students' diversity. | | |
| | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
| 8. | I teach my students only appropriate English. | | |
| | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
| 9. | How would you define 'appropriate English'? | | |
| | _____ | | |
| | _____ | | |
| 10. | I teach my students only correct English. | | |
| | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
| 11. | How would you define 'correct English'? | | |
| | _____ | | |
| | _____ | | |

Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX B

Interview Instrument

1. What are the main reasons your students are taking these ESL classes?
2. Have your students expressed that it is better to speak English to integrate?
3. Do you think students should only speak in English in order to be perceived better?
4. Do you think it is inappropriate for them to use multiple languages when talking?
5. Do you think there is only one way to speak English? In other words, is there a correct way to speak English?
6. Do you think it is necessary to speak the standard language to integrate better in society? To have (access to) better chances? (If the participant does not know what standard language is, provide the following definition: “Standard language is defined as “the correct or pure form of a language”).
7. Do you think speaking a non-standard language could represent a deficit for your students?
8. Do you only teach your students appropriate/standard English?
9. Have any of your students expressed being discriminated based on their language use?
10. You have a multilingual class. However, the norm in the US seems to be inclined towards monolingualism. How do you integrate these apparently opposite concepts in your teaching?
11. Do you think it is important to build a counter-narrative to some of the ideas the students might hear in society (e.g., that they are inferior)?
12. Have your students ever expressed awareness about the different types of English there are? How about interest?
13. How do you feel about students speaking in their first language?
14. Do you include colloquial language? Or do you make an effort to teach them the ‘proper’ language?
15. How do you take into account your students’ diversity when preparing your lessons?

APPENDIX C

Example of field notes with side-by-side notation system adopted

Low Inference	High Inference
Genevieve projects pictures of wedding outfits from students' home countries.	The teacher recognizes and showcases students' background and diversity.
Genevieve says "I know most of you are like me; working all day and coming here."	The teacher shows empathy towards and affiliation with the students.