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Talking About Text

Engaging in Critical Metalinguistic Talk

Author: Jacqueline D'warte
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"Talking About Text: Engaging in Critical Metalinguistic Talk"
Jacqueline D'warte

Classroom teaching and curriculum must engage with students' own experience and discourses, which are increasingly defined by cultural and sub cultural diversity and the different language backgrounds and practices that come with this diversity" (New London Group, 1996).

Research has continued to reveal the dynamic sociocultural lives students lead in and out of school settings, and the rich and dynamic literacy practices that accompany them (Gee, 2003; Heath, 1983; Moje, Overby, Tysvaer & Morris, 2004; Orellana, 2001, 2009; Orellana, Reynolds & Meza, 2003). Schools, however, have failed to embrace this new knowledge in real ways. While research continues to highlight students' repertoires of practice it also increasingly underscores how students' own learning and literacy experiences are not often reflected in the school practices in which they engage (Gee, 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 1997; Gutiérrez et al., 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Luke, 2004; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carillo, & Collazo, 2004; Orellana, 2008; Street, 2003). This is supported by much of the work that has detailed what counts as literacy and what literacy practices are indeed valued across a range of disciplines and contexts (Barton, Hamilton &, Ivanic, 2000; Collins, 1995; Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984).

Unfortunately, it also happens that some educators consider the language and literacy skills and experiences of many students from nondominant backgrounds as being "linguistically deficient" (Gutiérrez, 2003). In the United States, and in many other nations, these students are often subjected to reductive remedial literacy programs that do not recognize the repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez, & Rogoff, 2003) that they bring to their language and learning. Luke (2004) suggests literacy policy and practice have not responded to the realities of new and culturally diverse student populations–students who are able to use multiple languages and traverse multiple registers. Despite the centrality of literacy-based practices in school, few opportunities are created in classrooms to explicitly address how language meets our social needs, and few opportunities exist to explore our linguistic repertoires.

This paper argues that engaging in talk about language is an important first step in building on students' strengths and details how two urban middle school classrooms engage in talk about language. I argue that student and teacher talk that interrogates how language is used to meet our social needs builds on students' strengths, while also deepening students' metalinguistic awareness and enhancing their linguistic repertoire. Analysis centers on talk that serves to mediate understandings of voice and register;

research reveals students displaying their metalinguistic awareness, and recognizing and exploring the appropriateness and application of their linguistic skills in multiple settings.

Theoretical framework and corresponding literature

Research into the Discourse of classrooms is both multidisciplinary and extensive (Cazden, 2001; Cazden, Vera, & Hymes, 1972; Gee, 1996; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999; Lee, 2006; Mehan, 1979; Mercer, 1992, 2009; Gutiérrez, & Rogoff, 2003; Wells, 1986). We know that talk is the dominant medium of instruction and that most often instructional talk tends to be controlled and directed by teachers Cazden, 2000; Mehan, 1979). The teacher is the authoritative source of knowledge and controls who speaks in the classroom setting. Research has also revealed much about the place of classroom talk in developing student learning (Cazden, 1988; Delpit, 1986; Gutierrez, et al., 1995; Mehan, 1976, Wells & Hodgkinson, 2008). But how talk shapes the learning taking place in classrooms is often taken for granted by many educators. Davies (1997) suggests that talk is something that is for the most part devalued in educational settings, and unfortunately, we have very little research on student and teacher talk about language outside of language learning classrooms.

Sociocultural theory suggests that external dialogue is a major resource for the development of thinking; it follows then that teachers must consider the nature of the talk in which children are engaged in the classroom. Drawing on Vygotsky (1986), Bahktin (1981) and Halliday (1978) recent research has yielded knowledge about how experiential and interpersonal meanings influence literacy learning in classrooms. Evidence suggests that giving students time to talk in pairs and groups in English or in students' first language, is a valuable meaning making activity that enhances and clarifies understanding (Cole, 1994; Cummins, 1979; Gibbons, 2006; Gutierrez et al., 1996; Halliday, 1993; Mercer, 2000). Rogoff (1989) has enhanced our understanding of how learning is collaborative; her research showcases how the mental resources of two or more people working together achieve more than the sum of each individual contribution.

Interestingly, studies of literacy in classrooms and communities show how both speech and literacy are active social practices that occur in the contexts of diverse everyday situations (Luke & Kale, 1997). Taking a sociocultural perspective then, it can be argued that in order to build on and develop one's linguistic repertoire it is necessary to interrogate how and in what ways language is used to meet our social needs. Taking up these ideas that children are socialized into discourse practices through language and in classrooms, sociocultural theory provides a lens through which teachers can consider how through learning a language students are learning the foundations of learning itself.

Halliday (1993) suggests that "learning is learning to mean" (p. 68) and learners "learn to mean" through language. Gutierrez, Banquedano-Lopez, and Turner (1996) advocate classroom communities that authenticate, integrate, and connect classroom literacy practices to the practices of the students' various communities. Effective language use requires competence and negotiation between and among language users. But language varies in complex ways in different contexts; this research profiles teachers and students exploring this complexity.

The curriculum presented here is situated within a sociocultural tradition that explores the relationship between language practices in and out of school. It draws on two clear bodies of research; the first is Marjorie's Orellana's extensive ethnographic work done in immigrant communities in LA and Chicago (Orellana et al, 2003; Orellana & Eksner, 2006 Orellana, 2001, 2009). Orellana examined the typicality of translation practices shared by children of immigrants and the rigorous skills they deployed while translating complex and high stakes documents for adults in their families (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003). An extensive body of research reveals immigrant students brokering language with regularity. Orellana (2009) reveals that students' experiences cover a wide range of purposes, audiences, and contexts, and students often possess sophisticated translation skills. Orellana et al (06-09) build on this new knowledge by developing curriculum that leads teachers and students in unpacking the language of texts, i.e., critically analyzing the social and cultural context, form, function and structure of texts.

This research also builds on the cultural modeling tradition established by Carol Lee (1995, 1997, 2001, 2007). Lee used ethnographic work to identify analogues between everyday, cultural and linguistic practices of African American students and disciplinary modes of reasoning. Orellana followed this work by developing a deep understanding of the practices predominately Spanish speaking, urban school students engaged in outside of school, and then determined the most generative ways of mapping these skills onto academic processes, in this instance translating across texts and contexts. Correspondingly, there are potential points of leverage for using students' translation skills as a resource for learning; in particular, students' facility with multiple audiences and their evident metalinguistic awareness (Orellana, 2001, 2009; Orellana, Dorner & Pulido, 2003; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner & Meza, 2003; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008; Orellana, 2009).

In considering middle and high school literacy we must recognize that the reading and writing tasks required of adolescents continue to increase in complexity and difficulty, and that the texts students work with in different contexts have their own

linguistic structures and features and require students to think in particular ways; directing students to explore these ways helps to unpack this complexity and difficulty while further developing their competence.

Mode of inquiry

Discourse analytical methods are applied to three years of data from two middle school classrooms, as teachers and students engaged in research based curricula developed by Martínez et al., 2008; Martinez & Martinez 2008-2010; Orellana, 2006, 2009; Orellana, Martínez & Reyes McGovern (under review).

Setting and participants

Research and development first occurred in 2006-07 in an urban school in East Los Angeles. Research began with a teacher and 30 students in a 6th Grade Language Arts/Social Studies block (Martinez et al, 2008). Of these students 99.5% were Latino and ten students were designated as English language learners with some students speaking more English than Spanish or Spanish than English, or both equally well. Research continued from 2007 through 2009 at a Charter Academy in Downtown LA, while curriculum implementation occurred in a 7th grade Language Arts/Social Studies core class and continued through 8th grade with 26 student participants. These students were immigrants and children of immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, Argentina and Korea; ten of the students were classified as English language learners (Levels 2-5).

Data Collection

Access to the schools was brokered by personal relationships between the teachers and members of the research teams over a three-year period. Data were collected from a wide variety of multiple and overlapping sources, including, participant observations, audio and video recordings, interviews, and curriculum artifacts. Curriculum development was ongoing, engaging teachers and researchers in experimenting with a variety of practices and procedures. Video and audio taped data and transcriptions from classrooms and interviews were analyzed to source material for this paper. Data are drawn from a series of lessons and two interviews that involved teachers and students in discussing their "linguistic repertoires"; these repertoires include students' translating/interpreting situations and experiences, and their ability to shift registers, styles and modes (Alim, 2004, 2007).

Students and teachers in one 6th grade and one 8th grade urban school classroom

are engaged in discussions that serve to acknowledge and celebrate their language backgrounds and/or varieties of home language. Students share their experiences of traversing multiple registers through translation and style shifting in a variety of settings. Analysis centers on talk that serves to mediate understandings of voice and register as students examine how and why language is used in particular contexts, and why some ways are valued over others. Students examine the linguistic resources they use in various contexts, for example, while translating, talking to authority figures, and communicating with friends, more generally they explore the choices they make and the ways they use language for different audiences and purposes.

Classroom talk predominately centers on register. Any or all of the elements of language may vary in different registers: vocabulary, syntax, phonology, morphology, pragmatic rules or different paralinguistic features such as pitch, volume and intonation in spoken English, or size and speed of sign production in a sign language. Registers may also include non-linguistic prescriptions, such as appropriate dress codes, body language, and proximity of speakers to one another. Halliday (1964) identifies three variables that determine register: field (the subject matter of the discourse), tenor (the participants and their relationships) and mode (the channel of communication, i.e. spoken or written).

Analysis

Ethnographic and discourse analytical methods (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 1999) have been applied to interview, videotaped and transcribed data to document evidence of metalinguistic talk, that is students' and teachers' talk about language (encompassing talk about language and learning to use language). Metalinguisitic talk is defined here as talk about language, and how it functions to create, structure, and form ongoing communication (Mertz & Yovel, 2003). Data reveals students displaying their emerging metalinguistic awareness, as they explore voice and register and reflect on their use of language. This paper discusses how students' discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984) is being facilitated. Discursive consciousness is a theoretical concept used to understand the hierarchy of the different levels of one's awareness of language and action (Giddens, 1984).

Transcriptions use standard conventions based roughly on the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) widely used by linguistic anthropologists in the fields of conversation analysis and ethnography of communication.

Evidence, conclusions, and interpretations

Talk about language: explorations of voice and register

I begin the analysis with two transcripts that involve teachers and students acknowledging and exploring the existent linguistic repertoires in their respective classrooms. Transcript 1 is from a 6th grade classroom and transcript 2 an 8th grade classroom, in these two separate classrooms students and teachers talk about language; more specifically they talk about how language is used differently in particular contexts and with different audiences in their everyday lives.

In transcript one, a 6th grade teacher and her students have been discussing their translation experiences and the kind of language and practices they used while translating. In the following excerpt the talk shifts to address language choice, as the teacher elicits responses to the question about the kind of language used at home.

Transcripts 1. Spanglish

Teacher: Ok- the voice that you use when you're translating … *LET'S GET* back to *TH?*

Teacher: Let's/ get back to this thing. about.the how you use different language at *h*ome. What kind of language do you use at home then? [*IF* you use lang-

Students: [Spanish,

Students: Spanish Spanish, Spanglish, Spanglish

Teacher: *OK* you use Spanglish

Students: No I actually use *SPL:::*anglish *Spl*anglish *Sp*anglish

Teacher: Yeah I heard you?

Teacher: SS:PAN::G::LISH/S-P-A-N-G-L-I-S-H (teacher writing on the board)

Ernesto: Blacksican?

Student: Blacksican? We also use that

The above transcripts details four students clearly responding to the question about the language used at home; they answer "Spanish" and "Spanglish" the teacher responds "Spanglish" and adds the response to the list she is compiling on the board at the front of her classroom. A number of students repeat the word placing emphasis on a variety of syllables. It is interesting to note, the teacher says "Spanglish" she repeated I heard you; perhaps making students aware of her use and acceptance of the term. Linguistic anthropologists argue that close examination of any given verbal interaction reveals how that interaction is being constructed moment-to-moment. Goodwin (1990) suggests, for example," The sequential organization of conversation provides built-in resources for elucidating how the participants themselves are interpreting the talk in

which they are engaged" (p. 6). The repeating and exaggerated pronunciation of "Spanglish" by several students may imply that they did not intend to use this term or that perhaps they are just realizing the play on Spanish and English. However, it is suggested that the repeating of the word is signaling solidarity with the practice, while video data reveal students' acknowledgment and agreement through smiles, nodding and repetition of the term. It is also suggested that one student's offering of Blacksian, is a play on Spanglish; the student makes a link to Mexican Spanish/English hybrid practices. It seems the reference is most likely being made in relation to African American English. These utterances index students' emerging metalinguistic awareness, in particular the knowledge that hybrid languages exist outside of the mainstream.

In transcript 2, an 8th grade teacher also complies a class list of students' linguistic repertoires. In this excerpt the teacher gives her students a wide time frame in which to examine their language use in everyday life from waking to sleeping.

Transcript 2	**Creole**
Teacher:	I want you to think in your everyday? From the moment you wake up to the moment you go back to bed what are the different situations that you are in where you are speaking a different language?
Jasmine:	I have a questions do you mean language like the LANGUAGE? or like different words that you say?
Teacher:	I want you to think about that…. is it a language that you have when you have your own words…… that you use with certain different groups?
Walter:	Yeah that's right like when I speak at my house, it's like English but like sometimes you don't understand what we are saying so it's not like perfect English but its English
Teacher:	Do you want to call that English? (Teacher attempts to write this on the board.)
Walter:	But in my country it's called Creole
Teacher:	Creole, ok/OK (CAPITAL LETTERS) that's definitely a language
Teacher:	(Teacher writes on the board) Creole……. so would you say that it's mixed with English
Walter:	Yeah
Teacher:	OK
Teacher:	And you speak and understand (indicating list on the board)
Walter:	Yeah

Jasmine's question and the marking of both language variety and word choice gives students an even greater opportunity to consider the depth and breadth of their linguistic repertoire. Register is in focus as students think about the choices they make in their everyday communication and the teacher confirms this by listing the wide ranging practices and experiences in which they engage. Walter suggests that he speaks a

language at home that is "not perfect English" and that "you" perhaps referring to English speakers "do not understand." He provides a judgment about the standard and in so doing recognizes the hybrid language practice in which he engages; his response also signals recognition that his language is positioned outside the mainstream. Walter names the practice (Creole) and the teacher clarifies the status of Creole for Walter. Kroskrity (2004) proposes the notion of awareness as a *continuum* in process. In these classroom excerpts, students showcase discursive consciousness, what Kroskrity defines as speakers' ability to think about and explicitly comment on their use of language. I argue that interactions like these provide an opportunity for both teachers and students to explore their own language practices, while recognizing their linguist dexterity and its application across context including the school context.

Both teachers engage in talk that allows time for students to think about how language meets their social needs, and in this way they provide a rich tapestry for learning (Makoni et al., 2003), and a diverse pathway to generative learning and development (Rogoff, 2003) of language and literacy. Students' responses reveal emerging metalinguistic awareness and signal an ideological positioning of "core" beliefs and attitudes that recognize their membership of groups that use culturally specific language practices; in these contexts these practices include Spanish English, African American English and Creole. Similarly, while these practices are marked as outside of the mainstream, students are aware of their shared linguistic resource and associated identities.

Code switching

In the following three transcripts 3, 4 and 5 we return to the 6th grade classroom. In transcript 3 the teacher moves from introducing voice to discussing slang via a term volunteered by Sergio. He is asked to define slang and his explanation provides a classification, and, it can be suggested, an implied recognition of register as he points to appropriate speech for a particular purpose. This segment of data also illustrates the teacher code switching, establishing solidarity and indexing her membership through her linguistic choices. Blom and Gumperz (1972) combined linguistic analysis with ethnographic fieldwork to explore the social and conversational functions of code switching. Gumperz purports that participants alternate between two functions of code switching. One of these functions is called metaphorical (or situational) code switching. Within this code speakers use a *"they-code,"* which signals formality and social distance, and a *"we-code,"* which functions primarily as a way of establishing solidarity and intimacy among members of the same ethnic or social group. In transcript 3 we see how a

space was created for students to make meaning in two languages to explore the phonological, semantic, and schematic resources available to them in this participation framework[1] (Goffman 1981).

The use of Spanish and English calls on all the linguistic resources available to students to make meaning. Here the teacher not only recognized but also reinforced students' skills and abilities in engaging in the practice both inside and outside of the classroom. In this context students' language strengths in Spanish and/or English are acknowledged and celebrated creating what Gutiérrez, Rhymes, and Larson, (1999) define as a *third space*, a space in which *"alternative and competing discourses and positioning transform conflict and difference into rich zones of collaboration and learning"* (p. 286). It must be recognized that using two languages may not be replicated in all classrooms, however, explorations of sociolinguistic competence, i.e., what language is appropriate for each context and awareness of students' language varieties can be generalized across classrooms.

Transcript 3	**'Oralese'**
Teacher:	What's ***SLANG?*** Sergio? Since you used the word. What's Slang?
Sergio:	Like, like like something that is not a wor***d*** but you actually use it
Teacher:	***OK/***, very good? Something that's ***NOT****/not* a ***WORD/***word but you actually use it. Can you give me an example? Oh come on ?.
Students:	tis'
Teacher:	'tis?'
Students:	'tis? *hhhhh*
Student:	tis?
Teacher:	Sergio? I am sure you have used slang. all us of us use slang.
Student	[is it
Teacher:	Ok? like somebody saying 'orale ese' pero, oral ora ora
Student:	[como:::essta:::sss::(poya:::) (leans forward on his desk)
Teacher:	[I am not going to try and say it the way you say it but everyone uses it differently. But if you say 'oral e~se, ese,? quiere decir como ese libro, (does ese mean like that book) but if I say 'oral es~e (OK hey dude)

[1] Goffman's (1981) participation status sees the relation between any single participant and his or her utterance viewed from the point of the larger social gathering. The combined participation status of all participants in a gathering at a particular moment constitutes a Participation Framework (p. 137).

I mean like orale tu veda, like talking to him.

Student: []you

The student's definition of slang connotes a value judgment about what is a word, and his definition therefore identifies slang as a speech act that does not use *real* words. The teacher affirms this by first praising Sergio's definition and then repeating the utterance placing emphasis on the "not a word". She solicits an example and then prompts for a reply with an exasperated utterance "Oh come on," because the reply called for does not follow immediately after the initiation act. At this point a miscommunication occurs, students offer "tis" with this repeated several times; the rising intonation by teacher and students implies a conversation repair strategy (Sacks et al, 1974). Once again the teacher calls on Sergio and then directs the request to the entire class. A student is heard to respond "is it" and this may be in response "tis," the contraction meaning. In this case the student may have reversed the utterance but is demonstrating an adjacent response to all the "tis" queries. Unfortunately, an opportunity to explore the student's response and make a connection in clarifying understanding of voice is missed by the teacher. She asks for something that is not a word but is actually used; the contraction "tis" meets this example, i.e., it contracts two words into one. It is also offered perhaps as a response to the teacher's request to give an example of slang. The teacher provides a definition of slang and it is further noted in Spanish, or more specifically Chicano. This example calls on local meaning, acknowledging and celebrating bilingualism and community language practices by its very inclusion in the classroom talk. Also evident is how code switching is used as a semiotic tool with which to initiate and sustain the talk taking place in this classroom. Within this classroom context, code switching plays a central role in the sequential organization of the talk as it pertains to the broader topic of voice and register, and also in the role-playing of translating situations that were undertaken at the conclusion of this lesson.

As Goodwin (1990) suggests, "talk is itself a form of social action" and the code switching was a key feature of students and teachers' classroom talk. Code switching is consequential to the social construction of space in this lesson facilitating students' learning about their own linguistic skills. The example also provides two uses for *oral ese* which rely on a shift in phonological emphasis to make meaning from a more standard *oral e~se ese quiere decir como ese libro,* - like that book to a change in emphasis on the vowel consonant blend which signals an informal greeting in the venacular, and specifically *(orale es e- what's up).* The student's elongated *como esta* mimics the teacher's example of the linguistic emphasis. The teacher illustrates the use of slang and also voice in her movement from formal to informal address. The switch

between the two forms of address, both formal and informal, displays an indirect exploration of register; once again the teacher's choice of utterance indexes solidarity, and specific community language practices. The teacher makes components of register explicit in her example of slang using the context of situation, and the context of culture to consider the field (the subject matter of the discourse–defining and using slang), tenor (the participants and their relationships–peers, members of the speech community), and the mode (the channel of communication in this case spoken language).

Using voice

In the following excerpt teachers and students explore register by focusing their attention on voice. The first utterance in transcript 4 is provided in response to the teacher's explanation of *orale ese* as an example of slang. The openness of the teacher to students and student-to-student interactions builds meaningful action in this excerpt.

Transcript 4	**Slang**
Student:	You talk:::ing to ***me?*** *Hhhhh/Hhhhh?* (student points at chest)
Teacher:	(*hhhhh*) **SO** that's an example of slang *hhhh* They are words~~*hhhhh* they're words but you mostly use them with your friend COMMA ***RIGHT?***
Teacher:	What's a.
Student: Teacher: Student :	like when you so you can say Ima/I'ma be right there watch° [***Right*** /Right. [like a word (….) say whatever you want°
Teacher:	Ima gonna be there right there watch? somebody like you are not actually telling them to watch ***YOU?*** y/You just mean like wa***tch*** like hold up right? ***LI***ke wait up?
Teacher:	What is another example of the ways we use ***VOICE***? (0.1)
Student:	explaining?

The student's offering signals knowledge of a change in register. The student's choice addresses the informality of slang in the utterance; tone is elongated and vowel sounds are flattened. The teacher reaffirms the student's utterance by making the change in register clear for students, and the inclusion of the intensifier *so* shows a move to a recognizable assessment of the student's response (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987). The teacher then explicitly names the audience for slang "use with a friend", "RIGHT" and includes "RIGHT" with rising intonation a call for agreement. A second student reinforces the teacher's utterance and his own understanding by giving a definition that

signals awareness of linguistic choice. The student provides an example of slang in use "Ima/I'ma be right there watch", making a language choice that includes colloquial expressions familiar to his specific community of students. The teacher makes a positive evaluation with "RIGHT" evidence of the first initiation, response, evaluation, (IRE) sequence (Mehan, 1979) in the classroom discourse.

A third student responds by elaborating on this understanding, detailing the options available in using slang; "you can say whatever you want." He clarifies his understanding by elaborating on the adjacent pair turn that gives an example of slang and the teacher's affirmation of "RIGHT." The teacher evaluates the student elicitations by repeating them and elaborating on the example of slang provided. She places emphasis on key words in the example of slang, suggesting a desire to clarify understanding and model the use of voice. The teacher elicits a response from a student, and in the final utterance he offers a language function, suggesting recognition of a change in register in relation to using voice for various purposes. This sequence illustrates exploration of register within students' varieties of home languages. Students display their knowledge of voice and register while engaged and learning in an active and relevantly situated way.

Exploring register

Once again in transcript 5 and 6 teachers focus on register; in particular, discussion centers on how language choice is influenced by the power relationships that exist between speakers and how that influences word choice, length, volume and tone. In transcript 5, the teacher explores the language function of explaining. While the metacognitive processes involved in explaining are not discussed, the teacher returns to register through voice.

Transcript 5	**Explaining**
Sergio:	Explaining, explaining
Teacher:	**Ok** and how do we use our voice when we are ***EXPLAINING?***
Sergio:	Um uma *hhhhh*
Teacher:	**What** kind of language are you using? How are you using your voice?
Sergio:	Like a ***normal*** language?
Teacher:	(writes on the board placed at the front of the room) **OK** let's put normal language, let's put it like, in quotation mark**s** normal? Cau**s**::e We'll think about that some more because What is what is normal ***RIGHT?*** Normal to me might not be normal to you-so we'll leave it up there-but I know what you mean Like, normal language when you are explaining something. (0.1)

OK what?

Student: Uhm, like, with your friends you talk a different language
Like you say bad words and at home you can't?

Teacher: OK, so that's kinda like slang, verd***ad***/*verdad*? ***Sl***ang ***p***robably in.cludes ***BAD***/*bad* words.
=**SO** how do you talk at home ***then***?

Student: Outside

The teacher asks what voice is used in explaining. The first student response: "um uma" cannot be explained in the context of this sequence; its link to the function of explaining is unclear and could be peripheral to the teacher/student interactions. It can be suggested that the teacher's first inquiry about voice is related to the use of emphasis, tone and volume. The teacher then probes for further understanding by asking students what voice they use and includes an additional "what language" in her inquiry. A student responds addressing his understanding of word choice by identifying the language used in explaining as "like normal language." The teacher makes the point that normal is a relative term and explains subjectivity by stating "What's normal to you might not be normal to me." The teacher promised to return to this term at a later time "We will think about this some more." This response can also be clearly connected to the previous turn where teacher and students discuss slang and examples of slang are provided. In response to the teacher's elaboration of "normal" a student offers an explanation that demonstrates understanding rather than simply claiming understanding (Sacks, 1974).

The utterance makes a distinction between the language of home and the language of school, and also identifies a change in language choice "different language" for talking to friends, and at home. The word "bad" signals a standard applying to language at home, the suggestion being that some words, those classified as "bad", were inappropriate, thereby displaying emerging awareness of register. Interestingly, the student uses the words "different language"; this may be in reference to Spanish or English; however, the qualifier "bad" implies semantic choice as it relates to the previous utterance concerning what is normal. At the conclusion of this utterance the teacher confirms the student's identification of a different register between friends and home. The immediate response is OK, which can be categorized as a call for agreement (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987). The teacher then provided an analogy "kinda/ like slang", making an explicit return to prior talk about slang. Agreement is again sought with the inclusion of rising intonation "*verdad"*- true) and the code switch to Spanish, the *"we-code,"* The teacher affirms the student's use of "bad" repeating the utterance and using the modal *probably* suggesting bad words are to be classified as slang, a clear link to previous talk in transcript (4) where slang is associated with friends. The inclusion of *so*, an intensifier, signals contrast;

this affirms the implication that home must be different, a recognizable agreement. A student responds with "outside", perhaps a repair strategy or question that relates to awareness of registers appropriate for various places, in this case outside. Interestingly, it would seem that there was an opportunity here to explore "like normal" in more detail: what language was not normal? How was normal classified? Why is normal appropriate for explaining? Perhaps a deeper exploration of students' metalinguistic awareness and their use of register could have been facilitated around the notion of normal in this excerpt. Perhaps further discussion here would have taken up Gutiérrez et al (1999) *third space*, the discussion may have included the sociocultural dimensions of normal and how normal is realized inside and outside of school, as well as during interpreting and translating.

Considering reading, writing, talking, listening and viewing

In the following transcript we turn back to the 8th grade classroom where students discuss how they present a position on an issue to two audiences: a teacher and a friend. Like the two previous transcripts from the 6th grade classroom students are considering the language choices they make when talking with friends, but in this instance they compare those with the language choices they make when talking to a figure of authority, in this instance a principal. In this transcript, students explore metalinguistic awareness through multiple modes: reading, writing, talking, listening and viewing.

Transcript 5	**Two audiences**
Teacher:	Ok, so you have written to your friend Ok, now there are different ways you speak to a friend compared to how you speak to a principal. OK? So we have highlighted here two sorts of examples
Teacher:	So here we have highlighted two examples. So the bottom one here is the way you told your friend about the movie ticket um increase
Teacher:	(Teacher reads to students) So this here, did you hear that movie tickets are going up next year to fifteen dollars? That is such a rip off **Man!** It sucks because I am going to have to ask my parents for more money
Teacher:	OK, so this was the student friend to friend statement
Teacher:	(Again teacher reads) Now this is the statement to Ms Sawyer… Hello Ms Sobel did you hear, that the movie tickets will now cost fifteen dollars beginning January 1st?
Teacher:	Do you see any difference in these two?
Students:	Yeah, oh yeah, yeah
Vin Vin:	Yeah the tone

Teacher: (Teacher begins to list responses)

Teacher: Tell me about the tone

Vin: Like, Uh

Student: The second one is longer

Vin: It's like, kinda of like, like maddish?

Teacher: Oh, the tone is mad?

Students: Yes, yeah

Teacher: Well you think its cause I read it that **way**?

Vin: Not is it's like um, its like um Mrs Sawyer, you said it like really clear and really like softly though but, in the other one you talk like mean and like you know loud and stuff

Teacher: OK, somebody else? Anybody else? Jaxx?

Jaxx: Uh, with Mrs Sawyer it's like quiet and respectful and with a friend its like you're being whiny and you're all pissed off

Teacher: Ok/OK, whiny why don't I say p-o'd?

Rose: You're talking more comfortably with the friend

Teacher: OK, comfortably, COM-FOR-TA-BLY (teacher adds to list)

Slash: It seems like the second one is longer and because you're taking to your friend and Mrs Sobel it's like quick.

Teacher: Oh, longer this one is quick. Why do you think that?

Alfred: Because it doesn't include '*that sucks* and '/*it's a rip-off*

Here a discussion is facilitated that develops students' awareness of their own abilities and the strategic choices they make when using language. In this transcript students are beginning to see how the skills and strategies they identify can be applied to the literacy demands of school. Students are displaying their awareness of the power relationships that exist between the speakers (students and teachers) and how that influences word choice, length, volume and tone. Students identify the pragmatic functions, and shifting awareness of emotion "quiet and respectful vs. whinny and pissed off". Students also discuss what words are appropriate with Mrs. Sobel and how others might imply rudeness. Students are distinguishing the metalinguistic components that structure these two forms of communication, understanding what can be transferred across classroom contexts and tasks.

Metalinguistic awareness

The transcripts below are taken from two interviews where students reflect on their language use.

"And now that I do know the different meanings of translation I think that I do translate every day from

English thoughts to Spanish words or from slang to proper English" (Rick, Grade 7, 2007).

"When I talked to coach Jason I was doing the 'sportstalk'/sportstalk which is talking to a person in plain English except you talk a little bit different about the topic …like you could talk about like what's coming up next, what games we're gonna play, how about P.E., and then he'll teach you like a word, a sports word and stuff" (Vin Vin Grade 8, 2009).

Both of the interviews were conducted at the end of the project. These excerpts detail students' recognition and appreciation of their own linguistic dexterity and also showcase students' metalinguistic awareness. It is clear that both students are cognizant of how language changes in different contexts and how those changes are influenced by the relationship between the speakers and the purpose of the interactions. Rick is recognizing both his versatility with two languages and deftness within English. Both students signal an awareness of semantic choice. Vin Vin is acutely aware that he and the coach converse in a familiar and particular lexicon and that the interaction is constrained by the topic and their shared relationship.

Contribution to the field

Findings reveal students' explorations of their own linguistic and sociocultural knowledge of language, and presents evidence of how these explorations serve to make students not only aware of their own skills and abilities, but also, support students in further understanding how to use the appropriate language for specific audiences and purposes. Few programs explicitly address pedagogical approaches or knowledge of theory and best practices for engaging in service teachers in reconceptualizing their students' language and literacy. The research also considers Arnetha Ball's (2009) important idea that teachers can learn from their students and about their students and can apply this knowledge to making necessary changes in their practice (p.70). She suggests that only then can *"generative change"* occur in culturally and linguistically complex classrooms.

This paper contributes to the field by showcasing how teachers and students in two classrooms engage in discussions about how language meets our social needs, and offers a way for teachers' to recognize the skills, abilities and experiences students bring to the classroom. Olsen (1997) suggests, "Learning to read and write is essentially a kind of metalanguage for talking about the properties of speech" (p. 4). By creating opportunities to unpack the language of texts, i.e., critically analyze the social and cultural context, form, function and structure of the texts in use, teachers and students elucidate how language works, and the socially situated nature of language and literacy is revealed for both teachers and students.

This paper contributes to research and practice that seeks to encourage student

talk about language, in particular, talk that involves students in actually shaping their learning to become critical language users. When students' metalinguistic awareness is enhanced they are able to realize and draw on their own linguistic resources, and in this way transform their understanding as they construct meaning in action and interaction. By actively taking up new meanings, students can become critical and active participants in the transformation of the in school practice and knowledge in which they are engaging and continually being judged. A code is cracked that students have access to and can manipulate to develop and broaden mainstream measures of competence and assure their future success as highly literate individuals. This research details how a space for talk can be made in the classroom curriculum and can assist students and also teachers to learn language, to learn about language, and to learn through language (Halliday, 1977).

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