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# An Ecological View of Language Choice in a Bilingual Program: A Dynamic Model of Social Structures

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The present paper proposes a Dynamic Model of Social Structures as a model of language choice which highlights and synthesizes two significant themes repeated throughout the history of language choice research: agency and function. This model stems from ecological frameworks advanced in the fields of language planning (Hornberger, 2002) and language learning (Lam, 2007). Central to the model is the notion of language as a social structure (Gafaranga, 2005) among infinite other social structures (e.g., broader society, social network, local context, and individual linguistic behaviors). The Dynamic Model of Social Structures integrates the concept of agency and function in demonstrating how social structures influence one another and how individuals enact social identities through the discursive functions of their individual language choices. Research from a primary school Spanish immersion program in Arizona illustrates the application of this model and its value as a framework especially suited for classroom language choice research.

## Introduction

Upon entering school for the first time, all students are surrounded by a new social language (Gee, 2010) consisting of different vocabulary, routines, and academic ways of speaking; however, certain students must also learn a language different from the language(s) which they acquired from birth. In addition to learning the social language of school, these students must acquire a new language and determine which language to speak, where, when, and with whom. How do students negotiate a new language variety in their linguistic repertoire? During an interview, a student in a Spanish immersion program provided his explanation below:

DAVID: Like, sometimes a friend speaks English, and then I speak English, and then like we have a conversation in English. And the teacher's like "Hey, this is Spanish class, not English class!"

Despite its brevity, this comment is extremely insightful. A fourth-grader in his third year in the Spanish immersion program, David acknowledges the differences between practice and policy, noting how another student's language choice influences his own, despite the established rules of language use at the school. Furthermore, David acknowledges various external factors which are agents in his linguistic decision-making, including the influence of social network (*a friend*),

interlocutor language (*speaks in English*), setting (*Spanish class*), and instructor (*“and the teacher’s like...”*). David’s self-analytical remark refers to the local context, but how do these individual language choices relate to the broader macro-societal level of language choice?

This paper proposes an ecological model of language choice as a productive framework of analysis to bridge the gap between individual language choices and societal influence. First, an overview of the predominant theories of language choice serves to demonstrate the value of the ecology of language metaphor as set forth by Haugen (1972) and elaborated by Hornberger (2002). Then, the paper turns to a description of how these principles can be applied to a Dynamic Model of Social Structures. Finally, the analysis of student language choice inside and outside of the Spanish immersion classroom further illustrates the application of this model.

### Language Choice

The study of language choice is remarkably complex, partly due to its multiple and varied definitions. Lam (2007) points out that the term “can conjure up a host of phenomena ranging from language planning made by the state to individual language choices made by language learners or users” (p. 68). The expanding literature examines a wide variety of influences, from broader societal factors such as globalization (Kemppainen & Ferrin, 2002) to localized agents such as parents (Roy-Campbell, 2001) and diverse family situations (Mills, 2001; Okita, 2002; Piller, 2001; Yoon, 2008).

Furthermore, while the concept of language choice is perceived as intelligible, the field lacks a clear definition by which to differentiate language choice from related topics such as code-switching. Some clarity may be gleaned from the history of the field, when the central questions were framed as “who speaks what language to whom and when” (Fishman, 1965). As this phrase suggests, early analyses sought to generate predictive models to determine which language would most likely be used in a certain context (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1965). Although now considered overly simplistic to describe diverse, multilingual contexts, Ferguson (1959) and Fishman (1965) made a significant contribution in connecting context and individual linguistic behaviors. So, even early research lent support to Wei’s (1994) categorization of language choice as existing on several levels: the macro-societal level, including the larger context, and the micro-interactional level, including individual linguistic choices. In these terms, language alternation phenomena such as code-switching, borrowing, congruence, and transfer would be included on the micro-interactional level, as one aspect or level of the study of language choice. Yet, important throughout the literature on language choice is the intent to bridge and explore the connections between micro and macro.

A review of the language choice literature reveals two significant repeated themes which capture important aspects of the macro-societal and micro-interactional: function and agency. The concept of agency in language choice research is rooted in the macro-societal level, particularly those studies which analyze the direct impact of institutional and ideological powers on the national level. In Spain, for example, numerous studies recount the impact of political forces, ascribed status and societal values and attitudes on language choice decisions

between the majority language, Castilian, and Valencian (Ferrer & Sankoff, 2004) or Galician (Loureiro-Rodriguez, 2009). More recently, Lam’s (2007) multi-agentive model connects individual language choice and broader state level decisions, through the identification of stakeholders at various levels of language education as agents, including policy-makers, educators, family members, learners, and other language users.

On the micro-interactional level, research on the function of language dates back to Halliday (1977), marking a shift from language as object towards an interest in how language works and what purpose it serves in the world. Within the field of language choice, the functional perspective has produced a wide range of typologies of the functions of language choice and code-switching over the years (Gumperz, 1967, 1982; McClure, 1981; Shenk, 2007; Zentella, 1997). However, in spite of extensive lists of discursive functions, the field lacks an overall model of language choice which bridges function and agency. While the social networks approach (Gal, 1979; Milroy, 1982; Wei, 1994) connects micro-interactional and macro-societal levels of analysis, it does so through quantitative tabulations of factors, such as interlocutor and age, across speakers in order to describe trends across a large population. While this type of analysis has its merits, a more nuanced and qualitative approach is best suited for many multilingual situations, especially classroom research. The following section will explore the basic principles of the ecology of language metaphor, a conceptual framework which offers a vantage point from which to explore the interrelationships among functional and agentive levels of analysis.

### The Ecology of Language Metaphor

Although a few works referenced the ideas of ecology and language as early as the 1950s (Trim, 1959; Voegelin & Voegelin, 1964), Haugen (1972) is most often credited with bringing the ecology of language into mainstream. Based on the definition of ecology as “the branch of biology that embraces the interrelationships between plants and animals in their complete environment” (Park, 1966, p. 912), Haugen extended the notion of studying interrelationships to formulate language ecology as “the study of interactions between any given language and its environment” (1972, p. 325). Furthermore, Haugen conceptualized the environment of language as psychological as in “its interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers” and sociological as in “its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication” (p. 325). A later critique by Mühlhäusler (1996) argues for a shift from “given,” countable languages towards more general communication and a focus on “the functional relationship between the factors that affect the general interrelationship between languages” (p. 313). Common throughout each of these definitions is the word “interrelationship;” an ecological approach is in essence about studying interrelationships and thereby lends itself well to the multiple levels of language choice research. In order to better understand the implications of the ecology of language metaphor, two ecological models will be reviewed below.

Hornberger (2002) expands on three elements of language ecology from Haugen’s (1972) original writings as applicable to research in the following manner: *language evolution* as the study and description of multilingual interaction, *language*

*environment* as the interrelationships between the speakers, interlocutors and other factors in the environment, and *counteracting language endangerment* or *language maintenance* as the ultimate goal of discovering language choice and language policy. Based on this understanding, Hornberger (2002) developed the influential theory of the continua of biliteracy accompanied by a shift in terminology. For example, instead of investigating language choice as a monolithic Spanish or English decision, Hornberger's continua of biliteracy emphasizes the complicated, intricate, multiple intersections of literacies and languages. Due to Hornberger's field and the specifics of the theory, the research that stems from the continua of biliteracy framework (Basu, 2003; Cahnman, 2003; Hardman, 2003; Jeon, 2003) is strongly rooted in the field of language planning and language policy, where the concepts of language maintenance and language endangerment are key concerns.

In the field of language learning, van Lier (2000) put forth an ecological view as a way to question the assumption that interaction and context relate to learning in indirect ways. Instead, he argues that from an ecological standpoint activity and (non)verbal interaction are central to understanding learning. For van Lier, the learner is immersed in an environment full of potential meanings where language is a metaphorical jungle and speakers need to know "how to use it and live in it" (p. 251), an idea highly reminiscent of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

These highly influential ecolinguistic approaches have proven fruitful in advancing their respective fields with the goals of language maintenance in the field of language planning and policy (Hornberger, 2002) and teacher training in second language acquisition and pedagogy (van Lier, 2000). However, there is still room for an ecological model which is suited to the more general study of language contact in multilingual situations. The next section will propose the Dynamic Model of Social Structures as one such model and review the advantages it offers in its application to language choice research.

### Contributions of the Dynamic Model of Social Structures as an Ecological Model of Language Choice

Sociolinguistics is by nature concerned with the problem of how to relate language and society. While this exploration is a noteworthy aim, Cameron (1990) points out that research on language choice has been largely dominated by a "language-reflects-society" perspective which she critiques, first, for its reliance on "naïve and simplistic social theory," and secondly for its implication that "social structures somehow exist before language, which simply 'reflects' or 'expresses' the more fundamental categories of the social" (p. 57). Following Cameron (1990), Gafaranga (2005) suggests that another problem with the "language-reflects-society" perspective is "what counts as language" and "what counts as society," since society is formed of "an indefinite number of social structures" (p. 289). Instead, Gafaranga argues that language choice is an aspect of talk organization from which "what counts as language" and "what counts as social structure" may be derived in "language-defined-social structure" (p. 292). Gafaranga's valuable contributions include the view of language choice as a social activity and language itself as a social structure. However, while Gafaranga indeed advances the "de-mythologising" of language alternation studies, as his title claims, he de-emphasizes the influence, or agency, of social structures on other social structures.

It is precisely at this point that the ecology of language metaphor could provide a beneficial perspective from which to view the situation. Let us take, for example, the water cycle. Various forms of water (groundwater, rain, clouds) all influence one another (through precipitation, evaporation, condensation) in a continuous, simultaneous flow. In other words, each form of water influences the other as it takes part in this dynamic, continuous cycle. A dynamic view of language choice emphasizes the constant movement and influence of various social structures upon one another. Just as we would not argue that groundwater is evaporated into the air or water in the atmosphere is incorporated into groundwater, the question of the realm of influence of language and society is not "either/or" but "both/and." As Garner (2004) explains, linguistic ecologies "shape and are shaped by social interaction" (p. 40). Based on this ecology of language metaphor, I have developed the following model: A Dynamic Model for Social Structures (Figure 1).

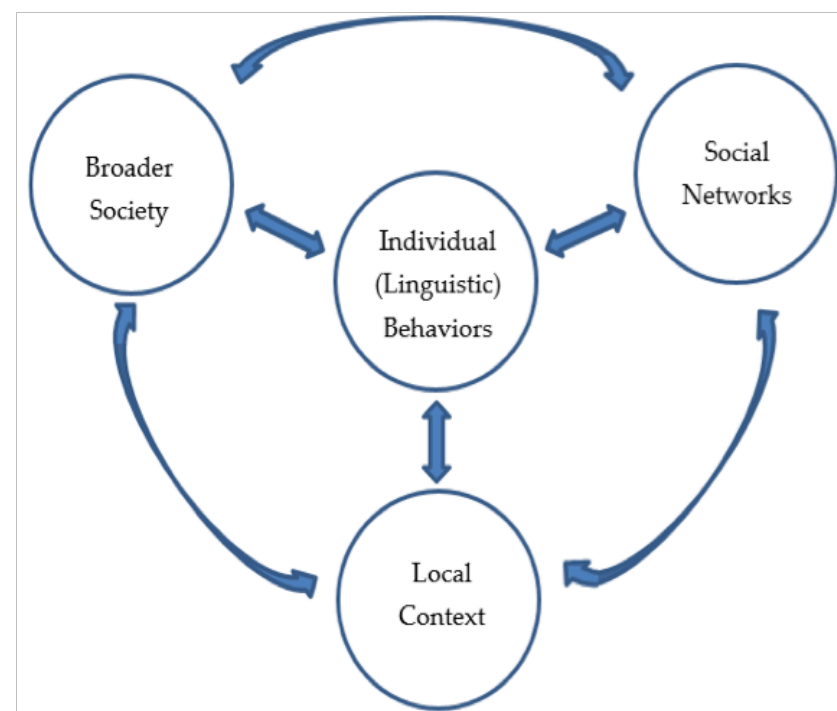


Figure 1. The dynamic model of social structures: An ecological model of language choice

Figure 1 presents a diagram of the Dynamic Model of Social Structures, an ecological perspective of language choice. As a conceptual model, the social structures in each of the circles are examples only and do not include the infinite social structures. In the context of language choice, *individual behaviors* would include linguistic aspects of conversation, such as topic, tone, hesitations, or specific language alternation behaviors (borrowing, code-switching, and interference); however, it may also include non-verbal behaviors, gesture, movement, expressions, etc. *Social networks* refers to the smaller-scale communities which one is involved in, such as

family, school, peers, neighbors, religious communities, and other groups. The *broader society* refers to such social structures as mass media, language policy, industry, and social services. The last example, *local context*, includes such characteristics as the physical environment and materials (small classroom), the context of the setting (in the middle of a lecture, small group work), languages involved in the local context, interlocutors (including the individual), and others present.

The Dynamic Model of Social Structures stands to make several important contributions as a complement to other ecological models and the field of language choice. As an ecological model, it accentuates the interrelationships between the levels of social structures involved in issues of language choice, such as the micro-interactional and macro-societal (Wei, 1994). Furthermore, it extends current ecological models by presenting those relationships as dynamic and simultaneous through processes which are continuously moving without a fixed beginning or end. Additionally, whereas Hornberger (2002) and van Lier (2000) apply their ecological models to the specific fields of language planning and policy and language learning, respectively, the Dynamic Model is well suited to the more general study of language choice. On another note, the model presented here responds to the persistent question which permeates sociolinguistics and language choice research - how to relate language and society - and it does so by recognizing language as one social structure among many other social structures.

In essence, the Dynamic Model of Social Structures highlights how various social structures simultaneously influence one another and, secondly, how individuals enact certain social identities through the discursive functions of their individual behaviors. In doing so, the model accentuates and synthesizes two significant, repeated themes throughout the history of language choice research: agency and function. First, the social structures as well as the individuals and groups within social structures are the multiple agents which influence language choice. Secondly, the Dynamic Model provides a conceptual model from which to analyze the functions of language choice. Furthermore, these discursive functions are inherently intertwined with social identity, since following Widdicombe (1998), social identity is not envisioned as something people are but rather "something they do" (p. 191). From this standpoint, individual verbal and non-verbal behaviors (i.e., language choice) serve certain functions in order to enact certain social and linguistic identities. Another notable feature of the Dynamic Model is that of power, as it has important implications in terms of agency, discursive function, and identity. The power ascribed to an individual, or a group or social structure, impacts that individual's degree of agency as well as the identities that individual enacts through certain discursive functions of linguistic behaviors.

The rest of the paper serves to illustrate how the Dynamic Model of Social Structures could be applied to research in a primary school Spanish immersion program in Arizona. Consistent with the ecological approach, this paper analyzes language negotiation inside and outside of school.

### Methods

The context of the present study is an independent primary language immersion school in Tucson, AZ which currently offers Chinese, Spanish, German, and French immersion classes for students from preschool (age 3)

through fifth grade. The preschool and kindergarten classrooms are described as full immersion, meaning that theoretically students spend the entire day with a teacher who speaks only the appropriate target language and the students speak only that target language throughout the day as well. First through fifth graders participate in a dual-immersion program in which students spend half of the day in an English classroom speaking English with the teacher and students, and the rest of the day speaking a different target language with the same students and a different teacher who speaks that target language. As a non-profit independent school, parents are charged tuition for enrollment. This understandably impacts the demographic situation of the student population, although 30% of IST students received scholarship assistance in the 2009/2010 school year.

The present study presents data from kindergarten, first grade, and second grade classes in the Spanish immersion program, which had nine, 11, and 11 students respectively. The kindergarteners were with one teacher, Sra. Castro, for the entire day, and the first and second graders spent half of their day with Sra. Alvarez; both teachers are natives of Peru. Although the first and second grade students spent half of their day in English classes, the present study focuses on language use in the Spanish immersion class only. In total, the participants of the study include 31 students, two teachers, and three parents. Out of these 31 students, 23 are non-native speakers who did not acquire Spanish at birth, while the remaining students are native speakers who have been exposed to Spanish since birth. This is an important distinction, because there are eight students for whom Spanish is not a foreign language. Instead, the Spanish immersion class reinforces a language they speak at home.

During the 2009/2010 school year, preliminary observations included all classes including electives such as music, as well as lunch and recess time. Based on these observations, the kindergarten, first grade, and second grade Spanish immersion classrooms were chosen as a focus set, since this was the space where students frequently made varied linguistic choices. The present analysis is based primarily on 24.5 hours of transcribed audio-recordings of classroom time. While more hours would have been preferable, the transcription of overlapping spontaneous speech is a very time-consuming process, amounting to nine hours per hour of transcript. Additionally, students, parents, and teachers were interviewed on language use and language attitudes, amounting to 3.75 hours of transcribed interviews. Short interviews with the students and teachers were conducted at the school while the parent interviews were conducted over the phone. The interviews were in the format of ethnographic interviews, in which broad questions about language use were outlined in advance, but other related questions may be addressed based on the participants' responses during the interview.

The audio-recorded data was transcribed and coded for language (English, Spanish, code-switching). The unit of analysis was a turn of speech (Ellis, 1994; Levinson, 1983), defined as any time an interlocutor stopped talking or was interrupted by another interlocutor's turn. Second, student turns were coded for communicative function, using categories which were meaningful based on the present data set (playing, positioning, evaluating and complaining, commanding and reprimanding, and politeness). Since traditional functional analyses tend to favor a systematic one-turn, one-function analysis, care was taken during the coding process to recognize that single utterances simultaneously serve multiple

functions. Additionally, the transcripts were coded for Spanish immersion student identities which emerged from the observations, audio-recordings, and interviews, such as an experienced Spanish immersion student or an aspiring Spanish immersion student. Examples of these analyses follow. Finally, student, parent and teacher interviews were analyzed based on the concept of agency in order to determine important influencing social structures in the negotiation of student language choices.

### Analysis

While the Dynamic Model of Social Structures emphasizes interrelationships between social structures, the analysis of the present research benefits from being organized in three distinct sections. First, an analysis of individual linguistic behaviors and their communicative functions provides insight into how students enact social identities through their language choices. Second, the agency of three notable influencing factors of language choice is analyzed, including school policy, parents, and students' individual language choices. Last, the interrelationships between social structures are analyzed based on the concept of language legitimacy at the level of the school community and the Tucson community.

### Functions of Individual Linguistic Behaviors

While traditional analyses of communicative function tend to favor the categorization of utterances according to only one function, the Dynamic Model of Social Structures recognizes that language serves multiple functions simultaneously. For this reason, during data analysis, an attempt was made to consider multiple discursive functions of turns where appropriate, especially through the use of ethnographic methods and detailed knowledge of the classroom contexts. Below is an explanation of how one conversational turn of talk may serve multiple discursive functions.

STEPHEN ¿Sra, dónde esta la cara triste? La cara triste face. [Motions around face] Mrs., *where is the sad face? The sad face face.*

From a traditional communicative functional perspective, Stephen's comment may at first seem to function as a request for information. Indeed, it does serve that purpose; however, knowledge of the context adds additional layers of meaning. The "sad face" mentioned here is a behavior management tool used by Mrs. Castro. In the classroom, when students are speaking English, they receive the sad face, which is a construction paper circle with a symbolic image of a frown. So, Stephen also appears to be "blaming" one of his fellow students for speaking English. Additionally, this turn may also be a "complaint" that the student hasn't been punished. Another possible interpretation is a "reprimand" to the English-speaking student.

While the identification of discursive functions of student linguistic behaviors is interesting, the Dynamic Model of Social Structures does not end there. Instead, it aims to interpret how students enact social identities based on the communicative function of individual linguistic behaviors. In the above example, it is important

to note that Stephen is a five-year-old kindergartener who has been involved in the Spanish program since he was three years old, a full year longer than all the other students in his class. Based on this information, Stephen seems to be placing himself in a position of power, enacting the identity of the experienced Spanish immersion student.

Sra. Alvarez further validates "experienced Spanish immersion student" as one of Stephen's enacted identities during her interview in comparing Stephen with Ben, who has only been at the school for one year.

SRA. A: A veces Ben usa más [español] que Stephen. A Ben le gusta más hablarlo. Y esta es la diferencia entre los dos. Si tú los preguntas en español, te van a contestar. Pero Stephen, te das cuenta, cambia muy rápido. A pesar de que tiene tres años aquí. No es quererse esforzar a veces. **Pero Ben le gusta mostrar que sabe.** *Sometimes Ben uses more [Spanish] than Stephen. This is the difference between the two. If you ask them in Spanish, they'll answer you. But Stephen, you'll see changes very quickly, even though he's been here for three years. He doesn't want to make the effort sometimes. But Ben likes to show that he knows.*

In the above example, it appears that Stephen, the only student in his class who has been in the program for three years, enacts an identity of an experienced Spanish student by challenging the established classroom language policy. Other students who wish to gain access to the group or in-group status as "experienced Spanish immersion students," like Ben, seek to follow the rules in order to gain in-group status and gain favor with the educators.

The analysis of communicative functions has often been critiqued for its limits in terms of recognizing the plurality and simultaneity of functions; however as the above example shows, it does not need to be this way. In fact, more thorough accounts of communicative function afford a valuable insight into the variable and multiple uses of language. On another topic, this same example provides an instance of an individual Spanish immersion student's agency, as Stephen's linguistic decisions aim to influence his peer's decisions and his teacher's actions.

### Agency of Social Structures

The Dynamic Model of Social Structures demonstrates the simultaneous and multi-directional influence of one social structure on other social structures. For instance, the images of government officials making language planning decisions, parents talking with their children at dinner time, and kids laughing and chatting on the playground certainly may upon first consideration seem worlds apart. However, in each instance, there are overlapping layers of agency. For instance, the government officials take into consideration public opinion and popular parental consensus. Parents may consider the current government policy in determining which language to speak at home. And even children on the playground may pay attention to the school policy or choose to disregard it. The Dynamic Model of Social Structures seeks to connect these often disconnected agents in order to add an overarching view of how social structures are agents which simultaneously influence one another.

In interviews with teachers, parents, and students, evidence for the following

agents emerged: policy makers, parents, educators, learners, competent language users, and society. Three of the most prominent agents will be discussed here: a) policy makers, b) parents, and c) learners.

### School policy as an agent

Policy makers may be the most obvious agent in the process of language choice within the Spanish immersion classroom. When rules are set, students are expected to follow them. In the interviews, all students iterated the influence of school policy as an agent influencing their individual language choices, through the recitation of rules and categorization of certain choices as accidents or mistakes. Below two students recite school rules about language choice on the playground versus the classroom.

VICTOR: But inside I **had to** speak in Spanish. Out here [playground] **you can** speak um, any language.

CHARLES: Whenever we're outside we just speak English... And **we have to** speak Spanish, period, in our class.

Important to note here is the difference as well as the similarity between Victor's and Charles' responses. Although both have been at the school for three years, Victor is in kindergarten in a separate building, while Charles is a second grader. As well as denoting age, the two buildings mark the difference between the full immersion in the early grades and the dual immersion, split morning and afternoon, in the older grades. Both boys are keen observers of their own environments. As Victor states, it is much more common for the younger children in the preschool/kindergarten building to speak a variety of languages on the playground. In the older grades, it is almost strictly English on the playground and during lunch time. In both statements, the modal phrase "have to" is used in accordance with the Spanish class, signifying a stronger obligation that comes from the school policy. However Victor portrays language choice on the playground as an individual option, "you can," while Charles uses terminology that represents solidarity in a decision constructed among classmates, "we just." These students explicitly reviewed school policy with me through the recitation of rules; but, it is often expressed in interviews through more implicit means, as in the following examples.

CYNTHIA: It's okay if I speak Spanish at my house. It's because my mom wants me to learn more.

RESEARCHER: When would you speak in Spanish to him [your brother]?

HEIDI: Well, well like, when, well sometimes if like, well I know some ordinary time I do. Sometimes I do when I'm supposed to. Sometimes I do when, just an ordinary time.

After Cynthia had mentioned accidentally using English in Spanish class, I asked her whether anything similar happened at home. She noted that "it's ok" if she speaks both languages at her home, recognizing the difference between areas with a strict policy and those without. Since Cynthia's family does not use Spanish as a home language, either language is acceptable at home, which is different from the school's language policy. Heidi, on the other hand, does speak Spanish as a home language with her family. Their family follows the traditional one parent, one language model. Since her brother is also in the Spanish immersion program, both siblings are capable of speaking to each other in Spanish. However, Heidi similarly notes that at times she's "supposed to" speak to her brother in Spanish, but other times are expressed as "ordinary times" when it doesn't matter. Students clearly recognize that the school policy does not hold to every context, and neither does a home language policy.

### Parents as agents

School policy, however, is not the only factor in determining student choice; parents play an important role in student language use.

### Home language

BRIANA: Um, we used to actually have a **game** where we would you know every time we would catch ourselves speaking En- Spanish we would get a **point**. And when we would start speaking English, we would take points away. And actually when I was at the store I just um picked up the supplies to continue to play that game, because it was, it was, it worked.

SRA. A: Entonces, el idioma español es mucho más fácil para ella porque lo hablan en casa. Laura, le recuerdo que su mamá es Colombiana. Así que tiene mucho más facilidad. *So, the language is easier for them, because they speak it at home. Laura, remember that her mom is Colombian. So she has much more ease.*

Briana is the mother of two children, and they speak Spanish at home, just as Briana did as a child. While her husband's family is from Mexico, his parents never spoke Spanish to him or his brothers. Briana deems the encouragement of the home language to be so important that she has reinforced it with a game. The attribution of points to the language of preference correlates with several recent theories of linguistic economy (Shenk, 2007). In an overt way, Briana is choosing to reward her children for speaking the language she wishes them to maintain. Teachers recognize the ease with which students who have Spanish as a home language speak. This again correlates with the data that on average 20.3% of Spanish spoken in each class comes from native speakers.

Though some parents do not reinforce Spanish through speaking it at home, all students interviewed alluded to the reinforcement of Spanish outside of school. This is especially interesting, since the director claims that the school does not explicitly encourage this, and the faculty, "assume no language exposure outside

of school.” The chart in Figure 2 displays the uses for which ten non-native Spanish speaking students reported that they used Spanish outside of school. Most commonly, the students converse with relatives or others in the community.

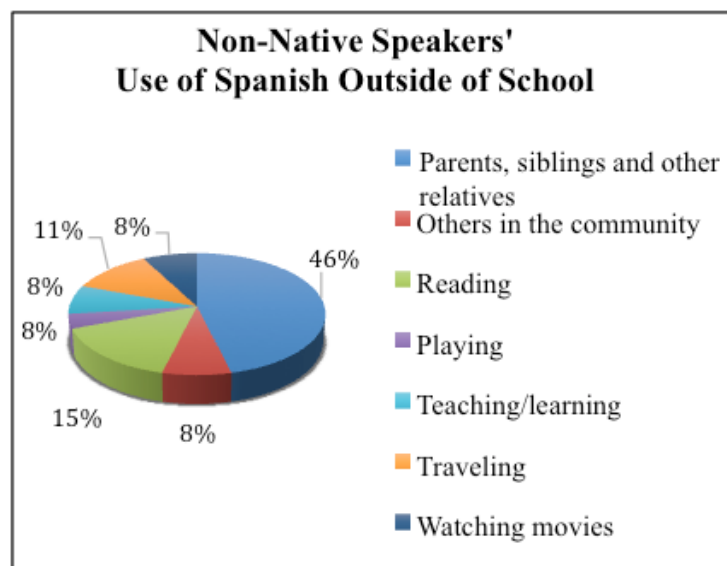


Figure 2. Parents as agents: Student use of Spanish outside of school

However, evidence for parent reinforcement of Spanish language skills extends beyond these responses to comments made by parents as well as students themselves. Although parents may not be talking in Spanish to their students, they strongly convey the value of language.

### Individual language choices as agents

One significant aspect of the Dynamic Model of Social Structures is that language is identified as a social structure, and the individual language choice behaviors are themselves agents which influence other social structures. The following examples depict individual language choices that resist existing policies of language choice and construct alternative opportunities for language use.

LAURA: But, but, she [the teacher] always warns us, but sometimes we still speak English and we don't get time off [short giggle]

Interestingly, while some students label the use of English in Spanish class as an accident, Laura acknowledges it as intentional at times. Instead of remorse, this student laughs expressing the humor of getting away with something which is not permitted. The “time off” to which Laura refers is the consequence for speaking English in the Spanish immersion classroom. If caught speaking English, students need to wait in the classroom for a certain amount of minutes before going out to recess. Laura recognizes that sometimes when students speak English, they don't have to suffer the consequences. The students resist the established school policy

by challenging the rules and avoiding the consequences. While this provides an example of individual linguistic behaviors in the classroom, students also described individual behaviors in which they resisted suggested language use at home, as seen below.

CHARLES: Mm. [I] pretty much never [watch movies in Spanish], cuz there is this movie called Kung Fu Panda. In Spanish, it's **horribly boring**. In English, it's **awesomely funny**.

LYDIA: I have some Spanish books. [pause] **I have no idea where they are.**

Although some parents make Spanish materials such as games, books, and movies available, Charles and Lydia demonstrate the problem with these attempts to integrate Spanish into the children's home lives. The Spanish immersion students' individual behaviors are often based on their interests. Charles comments that a single movie while “horribly boring” in Spanish is “awesomely funny” in English. Interestingly, this may be influenced by his experience at school, which provides much academic language but arguably fewer informal slang phrases which may be embedded in children's movies intended for entertainment. However, Charles still resists his parents' efforts to encourage Spanish language during entertainment. Similarly, Lydia has been given books to reinforce her Spanish at home, but the fact that she is not even sure where they are suggests that she does not use them.

In contrast, students also create opportunities for Spanish use outside of those mandated by specific language policies. One such opportunity is the use of Spanish as a “secret language.”

ALISON: Sometimes [my brother and I use Spanish] when we're playing games in Spanish, or when we're pretending that we have a secret language, because my mom and dad don't know very much Spanish.

While Alison does not use Spanish as a home language, her brother is also in the Spanish immersion program. Both siblings mentioned speaking Spanish as a “secret language” which her parents don't understand. Several other students commented similarly on the use of Spanish as a “secret language.” This provides an example of the creativity of students' individual language choice behavior in constructing an additional use for their school language. Though the students were taught Spanish for academic use at school, several sets of siblings described using Spanish as a “secret language” to keep secrets from others.

An analysis of agency based on the Dynamic Model of Social Structures, then, adds to an understanding of language functions by exploring the forces from various individuals social structures enacting these communicative functions. This analysis, additionally, has highlighted how students' individual language choices result in resisting or creating new opportunities for Spanish language use. Up until this point, the individual linguistic behaviors and the agency exerted by social structures may seem rather disjointed, but a major tenet of the ecology of language metaphor is the interrelationship between the various social structures involved in language choice.



## Interrelationships Between Social Structures

In order to analyze the interrelationships between various social structures, the particular methods taken here will seek to account for the ideologies pervasive in language choice by making natural social orders transparent. This fits with other researchers in this area who have taken the necessary next step by “unnaturalizing” discourses in order to clarify “what kinds of language practices are valued and considered normal, appropriate, and correct” (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001, p. 2). This work relies upon Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of legitimacies in language as ascribed, contested, and constructed by the members of certain groups.

### Contested language legitimacy in the Tucson community

The missing piece that still has not been covered in this study is the macro-level involved in language choice. How does individual student language choice connect to the broader society? This small, independent language immersion school is located in Tucson, Arizona, where approximately 35.7% of the population is Mexican in heritage (U.S Census Bureau). In 1988, Proposition 106 required all levels of the state and local government to “act in English and no other language” (Arizona State Legislature, 1988). This was later modified to include all levels of instruction, effectively outlawing public bilingual education. In April of 2010, the state approved SB 1070, allowing officials to check the immigration status of someone who may be in the country illegally upon “reasonable suspicion” (Arizona State Legislature, 2010). To say the least, Tucson has provided a somewhat hostile environment toward the Spanish language in recent history. Despite many frequent protests, the official stance on language in Arizona is that English is the only legitimate language.

Many of the parents in the school understand and oppose this situation. They refer to Spanish as a very beneficial language, especially in the immediate context, encouraging students to use Spanish at home, with family and in other contexts.

TRACEY: When [my daughter] could’ve done Spanish, English, or French, we chose Spanish because of **the immediate accessibility and use of the language**.

KAREN: Well I do really feel like **although America** keeps pretending it’s not true, **it is a global world**, and it’s going to serve them well for the rest of their lives to have at least a second language.

Tracey, in the above quote, notes her reasoning for her daughter studying Spanish, and Karen, a parent of three children in the immersion programs, advocates the importance of language learning. In a situation where public bilingual and immersion programs are disallowed by the state, sending a child to a private language immersion school is a form of contesting the legitimacy of the “only English” statute.

However, in the sprawling Southwestern city of Tucson, it is easy stay in one’s neighborhood or *barrio* without recognizing other linguistic realities a few miles away. This was evidenced by the fact that only one student mentioned the use

of Spanish with non-English speakers in this country, and surprisingly, he was referring not to Tucson, but Omaha.

CHARLES: Some of ‘em. And so I like pretty much ch-uh- in that, that was kind of like kind of a **Spanish-speaking place** [church in Omaha]. And sometimes when people c-, when there’s people who come over and when there were people who came over from other place from other places in America, they only know English. And so I have to trans-, and so like I kind of try to translate for them.

When Charles refers to Omaha as a “Spanish-speaking place” where he would translate church services from Spanish to English for people from other places, he indirectly ascribes a status of an “English-speaking place” to Tucson. So, although students in this community are firmly sent the message that speaking different languages is important, does this counter the surrounding negative language attitudes and ideology reflected in statewide language policy? Do students see Spanish as immediately accessible and relevant for speaking to non-English speakers, or is it simply a school language? Does this allow students to avoid the tension between contested language legitimacies among their local context (school) and social network (family) and that of the broader society in Tucson, Arizona?

## Conclusions

Language choice, instead of a static, monolithic construct, is an engaging, dynamic process, which is why an ecological model is an appropriate fit. Individual linguistic choices influence and are influenced by many social structures and various layers of meaning. Individuals are affected by speakers, interlocutors, functions, topics and other micro-linguistic factors that influence language change and evolution. However, those linguistic choices are also determined in part by the multiple agents in our linguistic environment. Furthermore, these are extended by interconnections between broader macro-political, social, and economic forces.

These insights into the inner workings of language choice, though intriguing in their own right, are particularly applicable to the field of education. Many educators may be unaware of the reasons for students’ varied linguistic behavior, wondering why students choose to speak different languages. Exposure to such studies may give educators an appreciation for how students’ individual language behaviors enact social identities and how various social structures, such as social networks, local context, and the broader society, influence the rich funds of knowledge which students bring to the classroom (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

### Acknowledgements

I am first very grateful to the school community, including parents, teachers, and students for their willingness to participate in this research project. Additionally, I am grateful to the Marshall Foundation for a 2013 Louise Foucar Marshall Foundation Graduate Fellowship which has funded this research for the past year. My thanks also go to my dissertation committee, Drs. Ana Carvalho, Iliana Reyes, Linda Waugh, and Peter Ecke, for their guidance. Finally, my gratitude goes to the

reviewers and editors of this journal for their thoughtful comments in the revision of this manuscript.

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## Challenging the “Non-Native English Speaker” Identity in U.S. Higher Education: A Case of International Graduate Students

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The present study is grounded in the theoretical understanding of U.S. graduate-level classes as a community of practice and the poststructuralist understanding of language use and identity. In this study, I use a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to explore how graduate students—both native and non-native English-speaking—perceive their own and others' participation in class discussions. Also, with a focus on their identity negotiated during their class interactions, I examine possible unequal power relations in graduate classrooms. The results showed that the native students had negative attitudes toward non-native students' participation, most participants felt that unequal power relations exist in classroom communities, and some non-native students felt marginalized in the classroom. Lastly, some suggestions are presented to bring about equal positioning and harmony in graduate classroom communities.

### Introduction

A traditional view of the ownership of English in which English belongs only to native English speakers has been questioned (Norton, 1997; Widdowson, 1994). That is, while there was a tradition of imposing native English language rules on non-native English speakers unilaterally in the past, many researchers nowadays attempt to problematize this lopsided imposition. There are a series of social trends in keeping with this shift in the way people view English use. Around the globe, more and more people are using English as their second or foreign language, and approximately 80% of English teachers around the world are so-called non-native English speakers (Canagarajah, 1999).

Similarly, the total number of international students in the U.S. is on the rise. Over the last decade, enrollment of international students in higher education has increased by 32 percent from 582,996 to 764,495 (IIE, 2011). After increasing for six consecutive years, the number of graduate-level international students was 300,430 in 2012, which constituted more than 44 percent of the total graduate-level enrollment in the U.S. (IIE, 2012a). Of these, international students from China comprised nearly 29 percent of the whole population of international graduate students, and students from South Korea and Taiwan each constituted more than 12 percent (IIE, 2012b). Thus, given an ever-increasing number of non-native English speakers in and outside of the U.S., we may assume that, in many cases, English is being used as a means of communication between non-native English