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Dominant Discourses and Language Socialization in the Literacy Practices of a Spanish-Speaking Church

Katherine O'Donnell Christoffersen

ABSTRACT:

Over the years, research has investigated language in communities, schools and homes, community programs and to a lesser degree research investigates language use in religious communities. In particular, there is a lack of research on religious language and literacy practices in Hispanic communities, especially those in the United States, although incipient work has revealed the importance of religious literacy among women Mexican immigrants (Farr, 2000) and for the socialization of children into a Mexican identity (Baquedano-López, 1997). Given the hostile local sociopolitical environment of Spanish in the state of Arizona in the Southwestern United States, the church is one of the few contexts in which Hispanic communities maintain Spanish, especially Spanish literacy. The present study investigates a Spanish-speaking church in the Southwest of the United States through ethnographic and participant observation methods. Observations, field notes and transcribed audio-recordings of literacy practices in this context over the course of one year were analyzed based on dominant Discourses (Gee, 2008) and language socialization. The analysis demonstrates how a dominant Discourse of “holiness” is produced and reproduced within the community adherence to authoritative texts and socialization into specific community literacy practices such as scripture reading, directing worship services and interpretation of Biblical stories.

KEY WORDS:

church literacy, discourse analysis, language socialization, literacy, U.S. Spanish

1. INTRODUCTION

Scant research has investigated literacy practices in religious communities, especially in Spanish-speaking contexts. Nevertheless, existing work in this area reveals the importance of religious literacy among women Mexican immigrants (Farr, 2000) and its key role in the socialization of children into a Mexican identity (Baquedano-López, 1997). The present study is an ethnographic study of literacy practices in a Spanish-speaking church in Arizona, Iglesia La Paz. Notably, Arizona is a state where approximately 35.7% of the population is Mexican in heritage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In fact, in 1988, Proposition 106 required all levels of the state and local government to “act in English and no other language” (Arizona State Legislation, 1988). This proposition was later modified to outlaw all forms of bilingual education in public schools. In April of 2010, the state approved SB 1070, which allows officials to check the immigration status of someone who may be in the country illegally upon “reasonable suspicion” (Arizona State Legislation, 2010). To say the least, Arizona has provided a somewhat hostile environment toward immigrants and languages other than English. The official stance on language in Arizona is that English is the only

legitimate language and most certainly the prestige variety. All of the children and teenagers at Iglesia La Paz attend school where they study only English, and other subjects in English. In light of this context, it is notable that the church's consistent use of Spanish provides the adults and children of the community with the possibility of Spanish language maintenance. In part, it would seem that out-group pressures which actively discourage Spanish being spoken in the state of Arizona may influence the church community's identity construction as a Spanish-speaking space. Iglesia La Paz is not only a site of spoken Spanish, but it is a site of various forms of Spanish literacy practices. Thus, this ethnographic research study provides a unique site from which to analyze diverse literacy practices in this community, especially dominant discourses and language socialization.

This article provides an analysis of the power and ideologies surrounding the literacy practices within a Spanish-speaking Church of the Nazarene in the southwestern United States. Ethnographic and discourse analytic methods as well as a cultural anthropological perspective provide a point from which to examine the multiple literacy practices in this community as well as how different members of the community construct these literacy practices. Furthermore, in a political and societal climate where English is the dominant and prestige language, the consistent use of Spanish across Sunday school, youth group, and church services provides a site for language maintenance.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the early twentieth century, literacy was defined in a restrictive sense as the ability to read and write (see Scribner — Cole, 1981), and literacy research sought to demarcate societies as primitive or literate. More recently, literacy has been reconceived as a process of interpretation, or “one's orientation to a lived reality made meaningful through the interpretation of text, that is, to written and oral descriptions and explanations of events that are endowed with sociohistoric value” (Baquedano-López, 2004a, p. 246). As such, literacy is now understood as an interpretive developmental process mediated through language throughout a person's lifespan and in a variety of contexts. In light of this definition, the present article analyzes literacy practices through the use of two compatible frameworks: Discourse (Gee, 2008) and language socialization.

In terms of Discourses, Gee (2008) differentiates between discourse with a ‘little d’ and Discourse with a ‘big D’. According to Gee (*ibid.*, p. 34), the word discourse with a little “d” is reserved for “language-in-use or stretches of language (like conversations or stories)”. On the other hand, Discourse with a capital “D” represents “socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting, in the ‘right’ places and at the ‘right’ times with the ‘right’ objects (associations that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’)” (*ibid.*). Based on this distinction, the present article uses excerpts of discourse (‘little d’) to analyze broader Discourses (‘big D’), since discourses are “intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical





structure in society” (Gee, 1989, p. 19). As such, dominant Discourses are laden with social goods in a given community.

Language socialization analyzes how “children and other novices apprehend and enact the ‘context of situation’ in relation to the ‘context of culture’” (Ochs — Schieffelin, 2011, p. 1). Originally focusing on children, later work on language socialization has brought all ages into the research as adults frequently find themselves in novel situations. Scholars have analyzed language socialization in homes, schools, religious institutions and many more diverse contexts (Mead, 1928; Heath, 2008; Baquedano-López, 1997). Of particular relevance is Baquedano-López’s (1997) analysis of the socialization of children in a Catholic parish into a Mexican identity. The term “socialization” has been criticized as deterministic, goal-oriented and unidirectional (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1986; Zentella, 2005). However, the perspective taken here views socialization and language socialization as agentive, depending on novice participation and promoted — but not determined — by the environment.

3. METHODS AND APPROACH

3.1 METHODOLOGY

Through an ethnographic approach to the study of literacy practices at Iglesia La Paz, this study analyzes dominant Discourses (Gee, 2008) and socialization of literacy practices across the contexts of Sunday school classes and Sunday church services. The methods employed in this study are those of critical ethnography, including participant observation, audio-recording, and discourse analysis. Critical ethnography is characterized by its attention to language ideologies typified by its focus on “beliefs, values, and attitudes; and on contexts and institutions” (Schieffelin — Woolard, 1994, p. 59).

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

For two years (2008–2010), I was a participant-observer at Iglesia La Paz. During this time, I audio-recorded Sunday church services, analyzed published Nazarene literature, attended and recorded Sunday school classes and community celebrations, in line with the ethnographic commitment to holism (Smith, 1986, p. 264). More specifically, for one year I documented in notes and audio-recordings a variety of instructional activities, sermons, workshops, seminars and community gatherings. Over the course of the study, I audio-recorded 20 hours of worship services and 8 hours of Sunday school classes over 12 weeks in spring of 2010. The ethnography was systematic in the comprehensive observations as well as the length and depth of participation in the community prior to the data collection. Audio-recordings relevant to these topics were transcribed and coded for themes (Hymes, 1982). Each emerging theme and literacy practice was recurring across audio-recordings, exemplified in the majority of services and lessons. The theoretical lenses of dominant Dis-

courses and socialization of literacy practices were selected as sensitizing topics for the study.

My experience as a researcher and member at Iglesia La Paz are similar to other scholars who have struggled with the tension of anthropological fieldwork in various communities (Baquedano-López, 2004b; Zentella, 1997). My background as a Christian and Spanish-speaker facilitated my participation as a part of the community; however, I am not of Mexican heritage, nor was I familiar with the specific ideology of the Church of the Nazarene before coming to this religious institution. As a full member of the community, I taught a preschool Sunday school class. This particular community allowed regular Christian attenders from other denominations to fully participate and serve in the church in this way. This positional stance allowed for a combination of etic and emic perspectives and brought both challenges in terms of identity and in-group/out-group status as well as benefits of access due to close, established relationships within the community and extended exposure to the field, participants and data.

3.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Iglesia La Paz is located in an urban section of Arizona, where approximately 35.7% of the population is Mexican (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Each family in the church has at least one member that is a first generation immigrant, even though some children were born in the United States. The exceptions are four anglo-Americans, two of whom attend the church regularly. The rest of the approximately 60 members of the congregation, including the pastor, are Mexican immigrants. Although the church is situated in a primarily Mexican section, only three families live in that direct neighborhood. The pastor and his family live in the parsonage on the church property. When the church acquired the building, Pastor Educardo González was called from a pastorate in Hermosillo, Mexico.

During the week, the church building and its members are busy with a variety of activities. On Sunday, the morning begins with an 8:30am practice for the *grupo de alabanza* 'praise group'. Sunday School begins at 10:00am, followed by an 11:00am church service with approximately 30 in attendance. This service usually continues until at least 12:30pm but more often ends closer to 1:00pm. After that, many Sundays include a fellowship meal or party, celebrating a birthday or commemorative occasion, such as Mother's Day. At 7:00pm, there is another church service which approximately ten members attend, depending on the week. On Wednesdays, there is a *Servicio de Oración*, 'Prayer Service', with a similar average attendance of ten members. Individual church members participate in *células*, 'cell groups', which are Bible studies in the homes of individual church members. The youth group's meeting takes place in the church building on Fridays at 7:00pm. Church members are not only heavily involved in church activities but also the workings of the church. Members are voted into positions as teacher, treasurer, maintenance staff, missions' director, or Sunday School director, oftentimes without being asked whether the individual has interest in taking on that responsibility. Instead of an optional activity, service to the church is an expected sign of active participation and Christian obedience





in this community. Furthermore, the high level of participation, integration and contribution to this community may be related to the fact that most nuclear family units have extended family within the church, including cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents.

4. LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE IGLESIA LA PAZ

In the analysis of literacy practices in the Iglesia La Paz, several themes were repeated and salient in light of the sensitizing topics concerning dominant Discourses and socialization of literacy practices. The analysis first proceeds by looking at a dominant Discourse and language ideologies in the religious community, the prominent discourse of “holiness”, authoritative texts, and the creation of a Spanish-only space. Second, the analysis turns to socialization of literacy practices, demonstrated by how individuals observe and learn how to conduct *un informe*, ‘a report’, direct a worship service, and how children learn the story-telling and interpretation rules of appropriateness in the church context.

4.1 DOMINANT DISCOURSE OF HOLINESS

Within the Iglesia La Paz community, “holiness” is a pervasive and dominant Discourse, or way of speaking. The word holiness itself is defined as “exalted divine, devoted entirely to a deity or venerated as if sacred” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015). Within the Iglesia La Paz, it takes on additional meaning. The doctrine of “holiness” is commonly invoked through the use of words such as *cleanse*, *clean*, *sanctify*, *pure* or *separate*.

This discourse is deeply rooted in the history of the denomination at the institutional level. The Church of the Nazarene is a protestant religious tradition stemming from the Wesleyan revival of the 1730’s, with three of the denomination’s theological landmarks as professed in the church’s Manual being “regeneration by grace through faith, Christian perfection (sanctification by grace through faith), and witness of spirit to the reassurance of faith” (26th General Assembly, 2005, p. 17). Regeneration by grace through faith is the belief that once one believes in Christ, one can be saved. The second, Christian perfection, is the belief that the same grace and faith allow the Christian to become perfect or holy, set apart. The third cornerstone is the belief that the Holy Spirit is a sign of faith.

Within the “Church Constitution,” an article of faith entitled “Entire Sanctification” includes a 240 word description of what is commonly referred to as “a second coming to grace” (26th General Assembly, 2005). Generally, this is the belief that after the individual has been baptized, there is another significant turning point which renders an individual into “a state of complete devotement to God, and the holy obedience of love made perfect” (26th General Assembly, 2005, p. 34). The article is followed by a list of 73 citations of Biblical verses meant to sanction the Biblical authority of the *holiness* tradition. An emphasis on holiness, a word that denotes separation, caused the church to historically embody attitudes such that “theater, dancing, cards,



smoking, and jesting [...] must be avoided by the Christian as sins and abominations before God" (Redford, 1965, p. 7).

The historical importance of the discourse of holiness within the Church of the Nazarene influences discourse within the church community. For instance, the aforementioned theme of holiness was persistent across various contexts of the church. The material for the preschool Sunday School class was entitled *El Santo Amor de Dios*, or "The Holy Love of God". During church services as well, literacy practices relying on the "holiness" Discourse included songs (1), sermons (2), and testimonies (3).

Songs

- (1) GRUPO DE ALABANZA: Con manos **limpios** y corazón **puro**, y sin vanidades, enséñame a amar.
 PRAISE GROUP: *With **clean** hands and a **pure** heart and without vanity, teach me to love.*

Sermons

- (2) PASTOR: Y hermanos, el Señor quiere **limpiar**... nuestros corazones, quitar todo aquel que nos **separa** de Dios.
*And brothers and sisters, the Lord wants to **clean**... our hearts, to take out all that **separates** us from God.*

Testimonies

- (3) HNO. EDGAR: Y yo le doy gracias a Dios que me vio. Él me vio y me conoció y me **santificó**.
 BRO. EDGAR: *And I give thanks to God who saw me. He saw me and he knew me and he **sanctified** me.*

These examples highlight the power embedded in this "dominant Discourse" within the church. It is not particularly surprising that songs (1) created and distributed by the Church of the Nazarene would include an emphasis on this doctrine. The sermons (2) by a pastor who has been trained in the "holiness" tradition may also be expected to espouse the discourse. However, the above examples show that various aspects of the holiness doctrine resurface in the speech originating from individuals in the community. In (3), for instance, Hermano Edgar offers an example of oral literacy, a spontaneous individual "testimony" or a personal story of salvation, in which he produces a classic "holiness" Discourse. In this Discourse, God is the agent; God is responsible for seeing Hermano Edgar, knowing him and sanctifying him. Hermano Edgar in turn is the grateful recipient of this grace.

Thus, perceived prestige, importance and social good produced by the "holiness" Discourse is an important aspect of this community, motivating members to produce and create this discourse. Part of the inherent value of Edgar's statement is his potential recognition as a member of the Nazarene church. As Hermano Edgar espouses the "holiness" Discourse, he constructs an identity for himself as a member of the church, not only in his being privy to this preferred discursive style, but also in his description of his own coming to faith as a living example of the Discourse.



4.2 LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION

4.2.1 READING SCRIPTURE

With regards to the socialization of literacy practices, the participation of the lay person, or non-church leader, in church services is of particular importance. Speaking from the pulpit is not reserved for church leaders only. Lay participation includes everyone who attends the church regularly. On a Sunday, any church member may find his/her name printed in the bulletin to read scripture or direct the worship service. There were several instances where the church member who was listed for worship leader was not present, so someone else was spontaneously called on from the congregation. Adults and youth were invited to act as worship leader, pray, and read the day's scripture.

As church members and participants realize that they might be called upon to participate in these literacy practices, they pay attention to the routine activities as novices. The pattern for reading scriptures is demonstrated in example (4).

- (4) Greeting: Dios les bendiga, hermanos.
God bless you, brothers and sisters.
 Church Response: ¡Amen!

Instructions: Hoy vamos a leer en _____. Vamos a leer de la forma alternada.
Today we're going to read in _____. We're going to read in the alternating way.

Closing: Dios bendiga su palabra.
God bless his word.
 Church Response: ¡Amen!

As demonstrated in (4), the scripture reading routine comprises a greeting, an announcement of which scripture will be read (the book of the Bible and verse), instructions for reading, and a closing. The instructions for reading are that the church will read "in an alternating way". This is similar to a call and response approach, but it comes directly from the Bible and is not printed on a bulletin with instructions for "leader" and "others". In this context, the leader or scripture reader in the front of the church reads the first verse and the congregation reads the following verse. Then the scripture reader in the front will read the next verse, and the congregation will read the following verse. All the reading is aloud, and the congregation reads the verse together, although at slightly different speeds. Also, note that the congregation responds to the greeting and closing with "Amen".

Based on the distinctions set forth by Krashen (1982; 1985) and Krashen and Terrell (1983), Gee (1989) explains acquisition of literacy practices as the unconscious adaptation due to exposure to cultural models without formal instruction. He further describes the process as one that "happens in natural settings which are meaningful and function in the sense that the acquirer knows that he needs to acquire the thing he is exposed to in order to function and the acquirer in fact wants to so function"



(*ibid.*, p. 4). The acquisition of cultural models and literacy practices is a form of language socialization. As members of the church community participate in Iglesia La Paz services, they closely observe how to lead the scripture reading “in the alternating way”. Individuals become full participants when called upon to participate as an active member in scripture reading, without ever being given formal instruction or even asked whether they would like to participate in this way.

Praying at the beginning of the service and directing the service are two other elements of the church service which are announced spontaneously. The director of the service is written in the bulletin, and this is the person who will greet everyone with a “good morning” and select several songs to sing at the start of the service. Although a prayer “to open the service” is not designated in the bulletin, a random church attender is always asked to offer this prayer. Responding “no” to any of these calls is not an optional response, demonstrated by the fact that no one ever declined during my two years of participation in the church community. Given that this system does not rely on the previous organization of willing participants, there are times when the person listed for scripture reading or directing the service is not in attendance, and at these times, someone else is chosen at random from the congregation gathered on that day.

4.2.2 EL INFORME, ‘THE REPORT’

Church members with assigned official positions, such as treasurers or youth leaders, present an annual *informe*, ‘report’. These reports are typed, copied and given to all members, and then read in front of the congregation. The systemic pattern of these reports follows in (5).

- (5) Opening: Informe de ____, Fecha, Lugar
Report of ____, Date, Location

Presentation: Rindo este informe a ____
I present this report to ____

Account: The review of that individually assigned duties for the year
 Appreciation: Doy gracias a ____
I give thanks to ____

Verse: Citation of a Biblical verse
 Closing: Su hermano/hermana en Cristo
Your brother/sister in Christ

Signature: [Written but not read aloud]

The opening “report of” remains relatively unchanged except to specify that individual’s assigned duty as treasurer, secretary, etc. The presentation does not vary syntactically, as it is always presented in the form of “Rindo este informe a”, ‘I present



this report to'. The only difference is whether it is directed to the church, the church and the pastor, or God, church and pastor. All reports include a section for both an account of the year's activities and an appreciation for certain individuals and the opportunity to serve. Each report ends with a scripture, uniformly chosen from the New Testament of the Bible, and a closing that optionally includes "su hermano/hermana en Cristo", or 'your brother/sister in Christ'. Four out of five reports follow this pattern; however, the last report, offered by Pedro, differs significantly. Pedro's first statement (6) explains the difference.

- (6) PEDRO: Este es mi primer informe como presidente de juvenés.
This is my first report as the president of the youth.

This first report differs in terms of the opening, which does not use the uniform "Rindo este informe a", or 'I present this report to'. While it includes a section for appreciation, it mentions only individuals but no appreciation for the opportunity to serve as a leader in the church as the others do. A last noticeable difference is the lack of a verse or closing of any sort. This marked example of a report which does not fit the standard shows strong evidence for the socialization of literacy practices within this community. As other *oficiales*, or 'church leaders', had previously presented reports, they had already observed the practice and seen examples of reports. Pedro, on the other hand, had not been instructed as to what to include in his report, so he was not sure what to expect. The practice, however, allowed Pedro, a novice, to observe other reports from experts, experienced church leaders. During the 12 weeks of audio-recordings and observations, this was the only series of reports, but it is quite possible that Pedro would adjust his next report to more closely resemble the other reports.

4.2.3 STORIES AND INTERPRETATION

Children at Iglesia La Paz are also socialized into specific literacy practices. Fernando, age four, was a child in the Sunday school classroom who had been attending for six months, and the interaction (7) demonstrates that he is still processing the differences between types of literacies and what is considered to be the appropriate interpretation of church stories within the church community.

- (7) TEACHER: Ellos son los hijos de Adán y Eva. ¿Recuerdan de Adán y Eva?
They are Adam and Eve's children. Do you remember Adam and Eve?
 FERNANDO: Sí.
Yes.
 TEACHER: Ok. Y bueno:, tenían dos hijos.
Ok. And we:ll, they had two sons.
 FERNANDO: Do:s hijos (..) y una: hija.
Two: sons (..) and o:ne daughter.
 TEACHER: No, no hija. [laugh] Habí- Habían dos hermanos en la familia.
No, no daughter. [laugh] There were- there were two brothers in the family.



In example (7), we can observe how the teacher is about to present the Biblical account of Cain and Abel. The teacher first reminds the students of the Biblical account of Adam and Eve, which they had heard the previous week. The teacher first asks whether the students recall the story. Fernando responds affirmatively, and the teacher continues to the story of Cain and Abel by telling students that Adam and Eve had two sons. Fernando continues the story with “Two sons (..) and a daughter.” Here Fernando likely interprets the story as a part of a fictitious oral story-telling tradition. This explanation is derived in part from the intonation that Fernando uses while saying “Two sons (..) and a daughter”; his singsong-y melodic voice is typical to that used in fictitious storytelling. Another sign that this storytelling framework is being employed is that Fernando adds to the story without being prompted. He is not asked a question to answer. However, it is also likely that Fernando’s status as a new student in the class is also part of the reason for his statement. He probably is not familiar enough with the Bible to know the characters in the story of Adam and Eve.

The teacher corrects Fernando’s creative addition to the story, stating, “No, no daughter” followed by a short laugh. The laugh in addition to the correction tell Fernando that this is not the type of story that can be creatively changed through participation. It is unknown whether this caused Fernando some embarrassment. The three other young girls in the class did not laugh, and the teacher moved swiftly on with the story.

The situation depicted in example (7) is reminiscent of Heath’s (1983) in-depth study of varied story-telling practices between communities. In “Trackton” stories were truthful and based on a model, while “Roadville” stories were imaginative and expressive. Here Fernando uses a cultural model for story-telling that allows freedom in its telling. This seems understandable since the beginning story frame, “Tenían dos hijos”, or “They had two sons”, seems like it might fit into a story book after a “Once upon a time” beginning. Interestingly, the other three girls who had been attending the church since they were born were never observed to attempt this sort of addition or creative adaptation to the stories. This suggests that the girls had previously been socialized into the Biblical stories in church as accounts of real things, or at least stories which cannot be changed or altered.

4.3 POWER AND INEQUALITY

As a Christian religious institution, it is unsurprising that Iglesia La Paz would commonly refer to the Bible as an authoritative text for the community. Interestingly, however, there are several other documents produced by the Church of the Nazarene at the institutional level which are ascribed authority and power by the members. Official church documents from the wider Church of the Nazarene were explicitly referred to in 80% of the audio-recorded church services, including parts of the Manual and promotional booklets entitled *Conozca la Iglesia del Nazareno*, or ‘Getting to Know the Church of the Nazarene’ and *Bienvenidos a la Iglesia Nazarena*, or ‘Welcome to the Church of the Nazarene’.

Most often referenced is *el Manual*, ‘the Manual’, a 400 page document accessible online. Although available in Spanish, it is not distributed to the church members,



and certain families at this time did not have access to the internet in their home. This highlights the role of power and inequality in discourses used in the context of the church community. Even if members had access, it is quite likely that they may not invest the time to read the extensive documentation of rules and guidelines for the church, based on an informal survey of several families at the church. Even still, the Manual was frequently mentioned during church services and meetings.

During a church meeting when members were voting for positions within the church, the pastor referred to a rule that no one could be elected to two positions. His phrase-final question “right?” is interesting as it asks others to reaffirm his statement without reading the actual manual to check. Instead of reading the text from the Manual, the community is asked as a checking measure in (8).

- (8) PASTOR: De acuerdo al manual, nadie puede llevar doble carga, ¿verdad?
According to the Manual, no one can have two jobs, right?

In another instance, Hermano Lima mentions the Manual in a Power Point presentation on church missions. Here the text of the Manual, the church’s mission, is displayed on the screen and not merely referenced through talk in (9). Yet the text is written in English, and the entire church service is conducted in Spanish, without translation into English. At least ten of the adults in the church are not fully literate in English, based on survey methods and participant observation.

- (9) HNO. LIMA: Esta es la misión de nuestra iglesia y está en inglés. No vamos a leerlo.
This is our church’s mission, and it’s in English. We’re not going to read it.

This example illustrates the power and authority of the Manual, implying that the display of the words on the screen, without any translation or explanation, is sufficient or somehow significant.

In (9), Hermano Lima acknowledges that the church’s mission is in English, a marked language choice given the context of a Spanish-only speaking church. It is also noteworthy that Hermano Lima chooses not to read it, and even states that he will not be reading it. In contrast, he reads the previous Power Point slides in Spanish out loud. It is possible that Hermano Lima may be uncertain as to the pronunciation of the English words, or he may think that the church understands the English text. Either way, this example seems closely linked to Heath’s (1986, p. 350) insights into written documentation as an oftentimes “ritualistic practice” describing how “more often than not, those who actually hold the written piece are not expected to read what they have”.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study provides insight into the literacy practices in a Spanish-speaking church in the southwest of the United States, in particular analyzing the domi-

nant Discourses (Gee, 2008) and socialization of literacy practices in this context. This is particularly significant given the banning of bilingual education in Arizona which disallows Spanish literacy in most public school contexts. As such, the Spanish-speaking church is one locale which provides a context for Spanish literacy practices. In fact, the church community's construction of an exclusively Spanish-speaking context may be a response to an overtly hostile surrounding environment which actively discourages the use of Spanish.

An ethnographic study, involving years of participant observation and three months of audio-recordings and observations in church services and Sunday school classes, analyzes the Dominant discourses in the literacy practices of the church as well as the socialization of literacy practices. The "holiness" Discourse is prevalent in the community and important as an identifying marker of a member of the church. This Discourse is invoked in songs, sermons, and personal testimonies. The authority of certain texts in addition to the Bible, such as that of the Manual, is an additional mark of dominant Discourse, which grants power to these texts. The socialization of literacy practices is demonstrated through the routines of scripture readings and reports which are not taught, but instead acquired through close observations of experts. Another example of socialization in this context is demonstrated in the Sunday school classroom where students are socialized into a particular interpretation and reading style for Biblical stories. Although the primary and dominant Discourses produced and reproduced in the church setting follow the ideology of the larger church denomination, the church members also actively participate in a number of literacy practices, importantly notably all of which are exclusively in Spanish.

Indeed, this is one of the most significant aspects of literacy practices at the Iglesia La Paz; the practice of a Spanish-only church community contrasts strikingly with the broader socio-political context which is dominated by societal Discourses of English-only laws and legislature. In this way, the church's dominant Discourse of a Spanish-only space with Spanish literacy socialization is a counter-discourse (Hill, 1998) or an "interruption" (Silverman — Torode, 1980) to the surrounding society which privileges English as the standard language (Lippi-Green, 2004).

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