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## What About Linguistic Identity?

Micah Andrews, Ph.D  
University of Wisconsin-Platteville  
[mandrews@uwalumni.com](mailto:mandrews@uwalumni.com)

*The recent influx of Latino immigrants in the Mid-West U.S. has also increased the number of Mexican students in schools. As recent immigrants, one of the challenges Mexican students face besides learning a different language is the construction of new identities in unfamiliar environments. Learning a language involves acquiring another identity in addition to learning a novel vocabulary and a different grammar. Using critical discourse analysis, I argue that Gee's four aspects of identity though useful when discussing identity in the context of schooling, are limited when dealing with identity in the context of choice of linguistic code. They should be expanded to include linguistic identity when dealing with choice of linguistic code. In addition, schools should create spaces in the classroom for Mexican students to comfortably enact and develop their linguistic identities of Spanish-speakers since the primary language plays an important role in acquiring and developing literacy.*

Latinos<sup>1</sup> comprise the largest and fastest growing immigrant ethnic group in the U.S. with Mexicans being the largest of this group due to geographical proximity to the U.S. (Garcia, 2001; Stewart, 1993; M. Suarez-Orozco 1987). The influx of Mexicans to the U.S. Mid-West has increased the presence of Spanish-speaking students in schools thus creating the need for English as a second language (ESL) to be taught in many schools. However, learning a new language involves more than just acquiring a different grammar and a new vocabulary. It also involves taking on a new identity (Halladay & Hassan, 1989).

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<sup>1</sup> In general, the term Latino refers to Spanish-speaking individuals from Latin American and the Caribbean. The term is cultural and not racial in this sense (M. Suarez-Orozco, & Paez, 2002). Mexican students are also included in this term. Nevertheless, in this paper, unless used by the students in the interviews or to include all Spanish-speaking individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean, the term refers to the Spanish-speaking non-Mexican students who interact with the Mexican students at the school.

The issue of Mexican students' identities at school is pertinent to explore since Mexican students come from language and cultural backgrounds that differ from those of the school. At school as well as in their new environments, they need to construct new identities to meet the daily challenges they encounter (Wortham, Mortimer, & Allard, 2009). Thus, it is important to explore Mexican students' identities in the context of their language use since identity is connected to language (Halladay & Hassan, 1989). First, language forms part of the identity kit of an individual and transmits information such as gender, ethnicity, geographical origin, occupation, and social class among others (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Gumperz, 1982). This is to say that an individual's linguistic code transmits information about his or her community and the social status of that individual in society. In addition, an individual's linguistic code is closely attached to the individual since language is a behavior learned at home and transmitted through socialization of the individual with other members of the family (Ellis, 1985; Vigotsky, 1978). As a result, it forms part of the culture of the individual (Salzmann, 1993) and might contain strong emotions and memories of the home environment. Second, learning a new language involves seeing the world in a different perspective and acquiring a new identity (Lemke, 2002). And third, Gumperz (1982) has shown that even when a new language is learned, many concepts and non-verbal features associated with the primary language (L1) are sometimes transferred to the new language.

The study presented here is part of a larger study that examines the cultural models and identities enacted in the narratives of the educational experiences of 13 Mexican high school students. In this study, I explore the identity types Mexican students enact in their choice of linguistic code at a high school in the context of Gee's (2001) four aspects of identity. These are: natural identity, institutional identity, discourse identity, and affinity identity. Though useful when discussing identities, Gee's (2001) perspective on identity only discusses the identities of monolingual English-speakers and does not take into account non-native English-speakers in the context of their choice of linguistic code. I argue that when discussing identity in the context of Mexican students' choice of linguistic code, Gee's (2001) perspective should be extended to include an aspect that relates to language choice. The study also highlights the important role the primary language (L1) plays in the student's education and discusses the need to develop bilingualism and biculturalism in schools. Educators should devise ways to create space for instruction in the L1, Spanish, in the school curriculum whenever possible to enhance Mexican students' academic achievement.

The two questions guiding this research are 1) how effective is Gee's four aspects of identity for explaining the identities Mexican students enact when using the linguistic code of their choice? and 2) how can Mexican students' linguistic code choice be used by the school to educate them?

The rest of the article is organized in the following manner. First, I introduce the general concept of identity followed in this study and discuss the challenges of studying youth identity. Second, the theoretical framework that informs the study and the specific aspect of multiple identities that guide the study are then laid out. Third, the methodology used in the study and other pertinent details associated with it are presented. Fourth, the findings section describes in detail the identity types represented in the students' interviews. Fifth, the discussion section explores and highlights the implications and relevance of the identities enacted for educating immigrant students.

### **Multiple Identities**

In recent years, some researchers have promoted the concept of multiple identities instead of one that is consistent and unchangeable in all circumstances (Gee, 2005; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Rodriguez & Trueba, 1998; George and Louise Spindler 1989, 1994; C. Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). This is to say, identity is not conceived in terms of core identities such as race, gender, and class. Rather it is the same individual taking on different roles in the same or different contexts. In other words, it is not a fixed property but one that is constantly created and recreated as the same individual being engaged in the contradictions of everyday life takes on different roles (O'Brien, 2001). Thus, multiple identities enacted by the same individual in different contexts are adaptive strategies to a changing environment (Rodriguez & Trueba, 1998).

To illustrate the concept of multiple identities, I provide the example of Dario with two contrasting identities (C. Suarez-Orozco & Todorova 2003). In the classroom context, the identity he projects fits the mainstream cultural model of a person disengaged at school while on the streets the identity he projects fits the mainstream cultural model of one who has leadership qualities. In the classroom, he gives the impression that he is not competent to lead, but on the streets, he exercises the same leadership qualities he appears not to have at school.

Studying youth identity presents challenges for researchers in view of the physical and emotional changes and difficulties adolescents face in this period. During this time, adolescents have the tendency to disconnect themselves from their parents and form their own identities instead (Noguera, 2003). They also experience physical and emotional developments and are influenced by social factors such as friends, music, and clothing to mention a few. At the same time, while going through the changes adolescence brings, adolescents might manifest oppositional identities to schooling.

Studies done on youth identities have shown multiple and shifting identities influenced by the socio-cultural, economic, and structural forces at school and in society (McKay & Wong, 1996). For Mexican students, in addition to the changes adolescence brings, they also have to deal with challenges in the new environment such as the acquisition of a different language, culture shock, and the adjustments they need to make in the new environment and at school. Their responses to their challenges influence the identity types they enact in their interaction at school and in society. The next section of the paper introduces the theoretical framework that informs this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study approaches the interpretation of the data from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective. CDA is both a theory and a method. As a theory it describes, interprets, and explains the relationship between language and the issues being investigated (Rogers, 2004). It is also concerned with social issues and not only with the study of language issues. At the same time, there is no unified approach to CDA. In this study, I have seen fit to use Gee's (2005) method of CDA to analyze the data. Gee's method (2005) has been used successfully to explore issues in the field of education and was chosen due to the way in which it integrates the analysis of the language and non-language elements of the text.

Gee (2005) approaches CDA from a big “D” and little “d” discourse. Big “D” discourse consists of non-verbal elements such as gestures, paralinguistic elements, beliefs, and attitudes. Little “d” discourse on the other hand is the verbal element of discourse or the grammar of what is being said. His method consists of seven building tasks and six tools of inquiry<sup>2</sup>. Since this study deals with identity, only this building task will receive emphasis in the study. Identity is further defined in Gee’s (2001) perspective of identity, which is summarized in the following subsection.

### **Gee’s Perspective of Identity**

Gee (2001) refers to identity as a “kind of person in a given context” (p. 100) and maps out four aspects of it. All four aspects of identity interrelate with one another at any given moment. That is, an individual could enact more than one identity in a given context. Each aspect is divided into process, power, and source of power. The first aspect is what he calls the nature identity. Here the process is a state, the power is the forces in nature called genes and the source of the power is nature. In other words, the process is outside the control of the individual and society. No one has any power to authorize or modify the natural identity of the individual because it is internal rather than external. At the same time, natural identities are not given by nature but are considered by people to be natural or acquired through birth. Lastly, natural identities can only be recognized as identities by “institutions, discourse and dialogue, and affinity groups” (p. 102). In the second aspect, institutional identity, the process is an authorized position that can either be ascribed by others in the institution or achieved by the individual. The power of the institution is carried out through the authorities of the institution and the source of power is found in the institution itself. At the same time, institutional identities are constructed and sustained by discourse and dialogue. For the third aspect of identity, discourse identity, the identity is considered to be a trait of the individual, which is the source. This trait can also be ascribed by others, achieved by the individual, and can be negotiated by the individual. The individual is not born with the trait nor is it obtained through authorization to a social position by authorities in an institution. The power of discourse identity is established through discourse or dialogue and the source of its power comes from recognition by rational individuals. The fourth aspect of identity, affinity identity, consists of groups of people that might be spread out over a large geographical area but who share and participate in distinctive practices. The process is shared experiences, the power comes through practice, and the source of power is within the affinity groups.

Using the labels of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and African American, Gee (2001) goes on to show how an identity trait is not limited to one aspect of identity but can be construed by any of the four aspects of identity. I use the term Mexican to illustrate this point. The term Mexican can be viewed from a natural identity, an institutional identity, a discourse identity, and an affinity identity. From a natural identity, the term Mexican would be connected to biology and would set the individual apart from one who is African American. As

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<sup>2</sup> Gee’s seven building tasks are significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and signs and systems. His six tools of inquiry are social languages, discourse, discourse models (referred to as cultural models in this study), intertextuality, situated meaning, and conversations.

an institutional identity, institutions would create certain expectations that a Mexican would need to fulfill. An ascribed Mexican discourse identity would be the way in which an individual is spoken about or viewed by others while an achieved Mexican discourse identity would be the pride that an individual attaches to being Mexican. And from the perspective of an affinity identity, an individual can choose not to belong to the Mexican group or a non-Mexican individual who has access to the practices associated with being Mexican and master them can pass as Mexican.

It is pertinent to mention here that though identity is articulated within Gee's (2001) perspective of identity, the purpose of this study in no way seeks to merely confirm his perspective on identity. Rather, it uses Gee's (2001) perspective on identity to analyze and discuss the data and argues that when dealing with choice of linguistic code Gee's (2001) perspective of identity should be expanded to include an aspect that relates to language. With this background of Gee's perspective (2001) of identity in mind, I now turn to a discussion of the methodological approach.

### **Methodology**

Data for the study come from the narratives of real life experiences of 13 Mexican students<sup>3</sup>, six female and seven male students, at Blackwater High School (all places and people's names have been changed to protect their privacy) who at the time of the study were in grades nine through twelve and their ages ranged from 14 to 19. Thirteen students were chosen instead of a larger quantity since the interviews were discourse oriented and the students were interviewed between one to three times. The students' descriptions of their language use at school were obtained through multiple open-ended interviews in their homes. Students from Blackwater High School were chosen for the study due to the high number of Mexican students who attend there. Affordable housing within the territory of Blackwater High School influences this high number of Latino students at Blackwater.

Three methods were used to recruit students. In the first method, individuals of influence in the Mexican community were approached and asked to explain the project to parents who had children that qualified for participation in it. Second, parents whose children were participating in the study were asked about other children who they knew could participate in it. And third, the researcher made personal invitations to several students. In addition to being available to participate, the students had to have lived in Mexico and attended school there for at least three years. After meeting these two criteria, students were selected on their availability for the study and their willingness to participate in it.

Also, it was concluded that due to the open-ended nature of the interviews, some female students might feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in the presence of a male researcher or might choose not to participate in the study. Discomfort in the presence of an interviewer of the opposite sex could result in the withholding of relevant information or the giving of partial or misleading information, thus skewing the data in the process. This risk was eliminated with the researcher interviewing the male students and a Latino female graduate student interviewing the

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<sup>3</sup> Of the 13 students, only Maria is a U.S. citizen.

female students. At the same time, the students fully understood the questions being asked since the researcher as well as the female graduate are fluent Spanish-speakers.

High school students were chosen over primary and middle school students for the interviews. The researcher believed that the interaction with high school students, due to their experience and maturity, would produce varied and rich information. Furthermore, it is assumed that high school students can articulate and convey their thoughts and their views more adequately and coherently than students from the middle and primary school levels. Their experiences in high school with bigger facilities, a larger student population, more interaction with staff and other school personnel, more school programs, and services to deal with furnish them with more issues to talk about and give their opinions on school related issues. In addition, it increases the likelihood that issues that connect with the macrostructures of society would turn up in the interviews.

In-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted in Spanish to obtain the students' views on language use at school in a contextualized narrative form (Mishler, 1986: 2000). Each student was interviewed between one to three times for a total of 32 interviews separated by three days or more. All the interviews were performed in the space of two and a half months in the homes of the students. All of the students were asked the same questions in the first interview. The questions of subsequent interviews were based on their responses in the previous interview(s). They were asked to expand on the answers and comments given in the previous interview(s). The questions of the first interview were organized around themes that focused on teacher-student relationship, peer-peer relationship, parental involvement in their education, the language of instruction, and other miscellaneous themes. In addition to asking the questions, the interviewer prompted the students as they narrated their responses and guided the conversation, thus highlighting the co-constructive nature of the interviews.

For the purpose of this study, I selected portions of the transcripts that contain recurrent statements of the students' views on language use at school. These statements were then analyzed using Gee's (2005) method of CDA and his (2001) perspective of identity to identify, interpret, and discuss the identity types constructed by the students. All the data were transcribed into Spanish using a broad transcription due to the semantically oriented nature of the study. They were first analyzed in Spanish to capture the original nuances in order to better infer the identities conveyed by the students. After this initial analysis, they were then translated into English. In what follows, I examine the identities the students enacted when describing their choice of linguistic code at school in the following excerpts.

### **Findings**

The followed format is used in the analysis of the data. Excerpts of the students' description of their language use at school are first presented then analyzed for the identities enacted using Gee's (2005) method of CDA and his (2001) four aspects of identity. The relevance of these identities for education is then explored in the discussion section that follows this section of the findings. I begin with a criticism by Maria of some Mexican students' habit of using Spanish in an ESL class instead of English. She states:

She, that teacher speaks some Spanish. The Mexican students knew she spoke some Spanish and they abused it. And there were many other students who did not speak

Spanish. There were students from Korea, China from many other places who did not speak Spanish. And in the classes they only spoke Spanish. An English word never came out of their mouths. And she would always tell me that I should not be like them because my level of English will never improve because they were always speaking Spanish. Then she told me to make other types of friends who would correct me when I speak English.

Maria is somewhat upset because some of her peers insist on speaking Spanish in class instead of English. This is seen by her as an abuse of the teacher's good will. The question here is what identity are the students enacting? Gee's (2001) perspective of identity would suggest that the students enact an affinity identity with the teacher since she speaks Spanish. However, they could also enact an affinity identity with the teacher by speaking English. Certainly, there is an affinity identity involved but the question is why would they choose Spanish over English in view of the fact that they are in an English-speaking class and Spanish is not the L1 of the teacher? There appears to be more than a desire to establish an affinity identity with the teacher in the above excerpt. At the same time, the teacher instructs Maria to disassociate herself from the Mexican students and associate with the non-Mexican students. The teacher suggests that the affinity identity with Mexican students would affect Maria's English proficiency and advises her to form an affinity identity with English-speaking students. In the next excerpt Maria shows off her achievement in English. She states:

Like in biology I do not understand anything. There are many things that confuse me. And in mathematics I do understand some things but I do not understand some other things. I understand everything in history. History fascinates me. I have an A in it. As for English, I read my books in it. I also do my reports and everything in it.

There is no doubt that Maria is enacting a discourse identity of a student who has achieved a high level of proficiency in English. However, she is also projecting another identity associated with language, which I discuss later in the study. The identity she is projecting is not covered by any of the four aspects of Gee (2001). Another student, Gabriela, gives us insight as to why some students would prefer to speak Spanish. Let us now examine Gabriela's reason for her association with other Latino students. She remarks:

I do not associate much with those who are not Latino students because I want to speak Spanish. And sometimes I do not know how to say some things in English.

Gabriela sees linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic benefits in associating with her Latino peers. She can practice Spanish and maintain her fluency with them. In addition, she feels at home with them and does not feel intimidated when interacting with them. Whenever she is not able to express herself in English, she can always do so with her Latino friends in Spanish. She highly values the cultural and linguistic benefits of an affinity identity with her Latino peers above the acquisition of what I term in this paper the linguistic identity<sup>4</sup> of an English-speaker. Apparently, Gabriela sees English as competing with her linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker and thus sticks with her Latino peers to protect it. Gabriela represents those students who see the

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<sup>4</sup> A speaker transmits his or her social identity through language. It is the type of speaker the individual communicates through language. Linguistic identity also incorporates cultural elements (Gumpersz, 1982).

acquisition of English as a threat to their linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker or in competition with it. They then resort to reinforce their linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker by speaking Spanish most of the time. But unlike Gabriela who sees her Latino peers as allies for speaking English, students like Javier see their Latino peers as resources for learning English. According to Javier, students who cannot speak English have developed a strategy to help them in their acquisition of English. He states:

Well, when I recently arrived here, what I would do is hang out with the Latino individuals who knew English and Spanish. In that way we could practice. I could practice with my friends. They could teach someone the way in which they learned. It was not more difficult or boring for me to follow the same way in which they learned.

Javier outlines the strategy of some Latino students who recently arrived in the U.S. and who do not have a command of English. Obviously there is an affinity identity between them since they practice English among themselves instead of going to non-Latino students. However, students like Erika do not limit themselves only to the Latino students. For her, Latino students serve as a starting point or as a springboard from which she branches out to the non-Latino students. Note her strategy. She states:

I participate more where there are at least a few Hispanic students. I associated with the Latino students because I feel comfortable speaking English. Because I do not know if I would say something incorrect. And when I am speaking with an American student or someone similar and I use an incorrect word they could make fun of me. But some Hispanic students are like that also. But I feel more comfortable with the Hispanic students who speak English.

The affinity identity Erika shares with the other Latino students enables her to mingle with them and learn English from them. She does not have that affinity identity with her non-Latino peers and as a result is uncomfortable speaking with them in English while she does not have a command of it. However, we see in another excerpt that she thought that way while she was not confident with her English-speaking skills. She states:

I associated with the Latino students. I associated with those who could understand me. And when I was able to speak English that was when I started to talk to the Americans, the Blacks, and all the others. In that way my English improved and I was able to speak to the other people and I began to communicate better with the teachers.

Erika outlines her strategy of gaining confidence in English with those with whom she shares the same affinity identity. Once she has this confidence and is sure that native English-speaking students would not make fun of her English-speaking ability, she then speaks to them in English. Apparently, she has the goal of speaking in English to the native English-speaking students even though she starts out with her Latino peers. The value students see in acquiring English-speaking proficiency is apparent in Javier's statement. In speaking about the prestige a student achieves in his or her family when proficient in English and the danger it poses, he states:

For example, if a family who does not know English comes here and if the student does not know English and goes to school and he learns English and the parents see that he speaks English, they would think that he is doing well in school. But we know that in school it is not only English but other things that we must learn. And for example if our parents see that we have an A in English and if we are learning it well and getting better



in it. But they do not recognize that we could have a very low grade other classes that are different from English like mathematics, biology.

Since most parents do not speak English and depend on their children for help in translating for them in different contexts, they also think that being able to speak English proficiently is an indication of academic achievement. The children enact a discourse identity of English proficiency so that their parents, who have a limited knowledge of the American educational system, would then think that they are doing well in school. On the other hand, these same students could speak in English when they do not want their parents to understand what they are saying. In cases like these we are not dealing with a discourse identity or an affinity identity but another linguistic identity. I cite Ricardo's experience concerning the use of his linguistic identities at home and at school. He states:

Well many of the conflicts are for example the culture and the tradition I have at home which are from Mexico. It is not the same as those of the school. For example an obvious one for example is in my house I speak Spanish and at school I have to speak English.

Ricardo is aware that here in the U.S. he needs two linguistic identities to function. He uses his linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker at home and at school with his Latino peers and his linguistic identity of an English-speaker at school. He acknowledges that these two identities create some conflicts for him since he needs to switch between them at home and at school. At home he needs to connect with his parents and sibling through the language he uses. He needs to be viewed by them as a Mexican individual through his linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker. Speaking in English to his parents could communicate to them that he wants to be seen as an American person and not as a Mexican person. Here we see a connection between the natural identity and the linguistic identity. Perhaps, this observation helps us understand why some Latino students insist on speaking Spanish at school and why some students and teachers do not like this practice. Therefore, Ricardo needs to always have in mind the need to use the appropriate identity in the right social context. Conflicts could arise if he insists on using one of his linguistic identities in the wrong context since his message could be misinterpreted by his audience. Nevertheless, he still finds the space at school to use his linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker to socialize with his Latino peers and his linguistic identity of an English-speaker to interact in class with his non-Latino peers as the following excerpt highlights. He states:

In my sixth hour class there are two Latino students there. The rest are American<sup>5</sup> students. But as I like mathematics, when my teachers asks a question I answer. In my seventh hour class is the one where I socialize the most because that class is called Spanish for Spanish speakers. Only Latino students are in that class. And there I speak to all my peers and there I socialize with the teacher also.

The difference in social contexts demands that Ricardo shifts between both identities in the sixth and seventh hours. As he changes contexts, he shows his preference for the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker. He needs to use the linguistic identity of an English-speaker in the sixth hour since he is with his English-speaking peers. In the seventh hour, he is able to shift to the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker because all participants including the teacher enact the

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<sup>5</sup> In the interviews, the students refer to the Euro-American students as Americans.

linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker. There he socializes with both his Latino peers and the teacher with the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker. With this analysis of the data presented thus far, I attempt to answer the two questions posed in the introduction.

### **Discussion**

Gee's (2001) perspective of identity captures most identities enacted in the context of language use at school with the exception of those where the speaker shows a preference for a linguistic code. In the first excerpt where Maria complains about her Mexican peers speaking only in Spanish, there is an affinity identity at play between the students and the teacher who also speaks Spanish. However, there are other elements at play because an affinity identity could also be established with English instead of Spanish. The establishing of affinity by Latino students is not tied to Spanish since it was also seen that they speak English among themselves. Bear in mind, according to Maria, it is the students who make the effort to speak to the teacher in Spanish. But why would they use Spanish instead of English in an ESL class? Apparently, they do not intend to highlight their natural identity of Mexican students over their discourse identities of English language learners since the issue here is choice of linguistic code. One can also ask, what identity would they enact when they choose to speak in English among themselves? Or what identity would they enact if they speak English to their parents rather than Spanish? It is understood that in part, when they speak English to their parents they may want to demonstrate their discourse identity of proficiency in it but it seems that they might have other goals. One needs to be aware that an individual does not speak a language just for the sake of speaking it (Gee, 2005). In addition to providing and requesting information, there are also instrumental, regulatory, interactional, and personal goals among others (Halliday, 1978). But as was stated above, a speaker also communicates his or her identity or type of language speaker through language.

If we were to rely only on Gee's (2001) perspective of identity to mark identity in the context of choice of linguistic code, the following are some of the inconveniences encountered. A natural identity would require that the force of the language be internal and not external. In other words, individuals would have no control over the language if it were internal. If the force of language were internal then it would not be possible to learn the L2 since individuals would have no control over it. A language is not acquired through birth as the natural identity would require it. Rather, an individual learns a language through social interaction with others (Ellis, 1985; Gee, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). The findings show that students at times choose whether they would speak the L1 or the L2. This fact further rules out the use of natural identity to mark choice of linguistic code. Preference for speaking a language cannot be explained in terms of an institutional identity since the L1 is not ascribed by an institution even though proficiency in the L2 may be ascribed to some extent by others. With respect to a discourse identity, the manner in which the individual acquires the language or his or her level of proficiency might be considered a trait the individual has acquired through hard work. But choosing to speak one language over another cannot be explained in terms of discourse identity. And lastly, describing an individual's choice of linguistic code in terms of an affinity identity does not explain the reason a Mexican student would prefer to speak the L2, English, with another Mexican or Latino student who shares the same L1, Spanish. It follows then that none of the four aspects adequately explains the identity transmitted when choosing to speak in a certain linguistic code.

I want to suggest that in the context of choice of linguistic code, an identity associated with language, already mentioned above as linguistic identity, is being enacted. Our language or style of language is intimately connected with who we are as individuals. In this vein, linguistic identity would include those cultural and language elements from our social and or cultural group. Culture is included in linguistic identity in view of the fact that language is a part of culture (Hakuta 1996; Levine, 1984) since it is acquired through socialization. Linguistic identity should not be considered as a subtype of natural identity since individuals do not acquire this identity through birth but as they are socialized into the language. Linguistic identity would be the type of language speaker the individual wants to be viewed as.

Seen from the angle of the linguistic identity, when Latino students speak Spanish in class, in addition to establishing an affinity identity with their Mexican or Latino peers and reaffirming their natural identities, they communicate that they are Spanish-speakers and reaffirm their culture and language heritage in the process. As studies have noted, there is a connection between linguistic and ethnic identity and ethnic group affiliation (Baker, 2001; Cavallaro, 2005; Cho 2000). In fact, individuals may consider their linguistic identities as part of who they are and attacking or belittling these identities could be seen as an attack on them (Anzaldúa, 2004; Reyes & Vallone, 2007). At the same time, when there is positive support for an individual's linguistic identity, the individual's self identity would also be enhanced. Some Mexican students perceive their language and culture as being marginalized since they were not taught the history and culture of Mexico and were obligated to use only English in class. Students who perceive their cultural heritage as being marginalized might opt to affirm their linguistic identities of a Spanish-speaker by speaking Spanish and could develop oppositional identities since they would conceive the institution as attempting to impose European American values on them (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). On the contrary, when students such as Maria choose to speak English in addition to showing the command and proficiency achieved in English through an achieved discourse identity, they communicate that they are English-speakers through the linguistic identity. Or better said, they want to be seen as American students. In this context, students through their discourse identities of English proficiency and their linguistic identities of English-speakers show their affinity identities with the American students, thus establishing affinities with them. This corroborates with Gee (2001) wherein an individual can establish an affinity with a group by adopting certain practices and activities of that group. At school, Spanish is confined to social use in periphery spaces and English is expected to be used in the academic spaces. Some students complained that they were not allowed to ask the teacher questions in Spanish in class if the teacher could speak Spanish. I see fit to illustrate this conflict of linguistic identity with a comment by Javier. Note how Javier describes this situation:

There are students who do not know much English and sometimes in class they have questions and they ask the teacher in Spanish. But the teachers want us to speak in English but there are some students who cannot speak English and are ashamed and as a result do not ask any questions. And the teachers leave and are not concerned with whether or not they have learned. But they want us to learn English at that moment. But after class they speak in Spanish with us about non-class matters. But if we have questions about something we did not understand they would speak in Spanish but they would not want us to speak in Spanish during class. They only want us to speak in English

By not speaking Spanish to the students in class, the teacher hints at an unwritten rule that English is the language of the classroom. The teacher's action seem to communicate a deficit view that Spanish is suitable for social interaction but not for academic matters. By staying quiet, students might have perceived that their linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker was being despised by the teacher and felt that they are under pressure to enact the linguistic identity of an English-speaker. This situation could limit students' participation in school, cause them to disengage and disaffiliate from school, skip classes, or dropout from school. The teacher might have acted the way he or she did since the school values the mainstream culture, which has English as the medium of instruction in school.

Seeing the speaking of a language as the enacting of a linguistic identity also corroborates with Gee's (2005) concept of big "D," which focuses on the non-verbal elements of language. The linguistic identity of a speaker argues against objectivity of language in that language is not neutral (Bruner, 1986; Gee, 2004; Valdes, 1997). Consciously or unconsciously, the speaker transmits information about him or herself to the listener. When individuals show a preference for a language, they intend to enact certain linguistic identities.

Individuals are not born with linguistic identities nor are these ascribed to them. Linguistic identities are acquired through socialization with other individuals who have said identities. As a child, an individual is socialized into the L1 linguistic identity through interaction with other members of that speech community. At school, students are socialized into the L2 community through interaction in the classroom and in the school community at large with individuals from the L1 community who speak the L2 and with individuals from the L2 community. Thus, when students speak a language, they make a statement about the kind of person they intend to communicate at that moment through their language preference. For instance, students who choose to speak only in Spanish when among their Latino peers emphasized their natural identities, Latino, through their linguistic identities in addition to showing an affinity with their Latino peers. Here we see the linguistic identity being connected to the natural identity and the affinity identity at the same time. The linguistic identity should not be thought of as an isolated identity. But if the same students decide to speak English in class, then through their linguistic identities they display their discourse identities in that they have achieved the ability and proficiency to interact in English in the school community. They also enact an affinity identity with English-speaking students in their classes. Note also that the L1 is connected to the natural identity and the L2 is connected to the discourse identity. This connection between the different aspects of identity corroborates with Gee's (2001) claim that his four aspects of identity interrelate with one another at any moment. In this case, the linguistic identity connects with Gee's four aspects of identity. Therefore, when speaking about identity in the context of linguistic code, it is also necessary to talk about linguistic identity.

The possession of a linguistic identity of an English-speaker and that of a Spanish-speaker raises the possibility of hybrid linguistic identities. Instances of this were seen in the interviews. The students felt comfortable enacting the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker throughout the interviews. However, at times some students would say phrases or use certain terminologies in English to get their points across instead of trying to translate those phrases or words. Students gain experience alternating between two linguistic identities since they are obliged to do so in several contexts at school. In the process of alternating between the two identities, a hybrid

linguistic identity is formed. In addition, this shift between the two different linguistic identities at school, and at home where it is expected that the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker be used, can cause conflicts. Using the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker in the classroom brings problems with the teacher as seen above, and with other non-Latino peers. If the child insists on using the linguistic identity of an English-speaker at home, conflicts could arise. In fact, several parents have communicated to me their frustrations about their children not wanting to speak Spanish with them. Parents could think that their children are rejecting and despising them since they do not want to speak their L1. In sum, affinity through the linguistic identity is crucial for bonding among family members and can be cause for alienation among them.

At this point, I dedicate some space to the other question concerning the relevance of some of Gee's (2001) perspective of identity and the linguistic identity for the education of Mexican students. I focus on his aspect of affinity identity and my proposed aspect of linguistic identity. As Gee (2004) highlights, learning involves identity in addition to skills. It is important to draw upon the affinity identity of the students in their quest for learning instead of obstructing or weakening it as the teacher suggested to Maria. Mexicans, due to cultural practices, value close relations among themselves and are known for their tight knit social networks (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). It should also be expected that Mexican students would reflect this social practice in their peer relations at school. In other words, students carry their affinity identities to their academic work in the classroom. Teachers can build on this cultural practice by assigning group work with individual parts instead of emphasizing individual work. Once Mexican students form affinity identity bonds among themselves, with the teacher's guidance their academic performance would be very productive.

With respect to the aspect of linguistic identity, the data indicate that the Mexican students want to acquire the linguistic identity of an English-speaker. Attacking the students' linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker could alienate them from the school instead of getting them to take on the linguistic identity of an English-speaker. But if they see that their linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker is cherished and respected there is a possibility that they would make more effort to acquire the linguistic identity of an English-speaker. Opposition to their linguistic identities of a Spanish-speaker in the form of not wanting them to speak Spanish in class could breed opposition to the linguistic identity of an English-speaker and to schooling in general since it would be associated with the linguistic identity of an English-speaker.

### **Educational Implications**

Mexican students' choice of linguistic code at school has ramifications for instruction in the classroom. Theoretically speaking, the purpose of the school is not to alienate children from their cultural heritage or to sow dissention among family members but to empower the children and give them the necessary skills to be responsible citizens and succeed in society (Strike, 2010). The question that arises is how can the school strengthen both the linguistic identity of an English-speaker and the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker in Mexican students?

In answering this question, the school needs to look at its language policies and its attitude towards Latino students. Efforts should be made by the school to include in the curriculum subjects that acknowledge and respect the cultural and linguistic heritage of the students. This means that Spanish should be promoted as a medium for communicating academic thought and

content and not only as a medium for social interaction. Instructors chosen to teach in Spanish should be qualified individuals who in addition to being fluent in Spanish should have experiential knowledge in Latino culture. The purpose is not to replace English as the medium of instruction but to provide space for some core classes, such as history, mathematics, and biology, to be given in Spanish. This approach could be logistically viable not only for Latinos, but also for other linguistic minorities that have a sizeable number of students.

A similar approach has been tried at the high school where the Latino students interviewed for this study attended. Some electives were given in Spanish. However, classes in Spanish taught by unqualified individuals such as teacher aides or teachers who knew little or nothing about Latino culture. In other parts of the interviews some students did not hold them in high regard. They were considered unchallenging and were in the lower track classes at the school. In contrast, this proposal calls for instruction in Spanish in core classes at the high track levels. Having said this, it should also be taken into account that this approach might not be feasible at all schools or for some subjects at a school. To implement such a program, factors such as its cost, the available personnel, the number of Latino students, the availability of educational materials in Spanish, the size of the school, and the school budget play a role. In addition, educators would need to change their attitude towards Spanish and towards the students who speak it. In other words, educators should not orient to them as though they are culturally deficient but culturally rich. From this standpoint, the speaking of Spanish would not be seen as an obstacle to speaking English or be associated with cultural poverty. Rather it would be considered a springboard to learning English and as a valuable resource for the student.

The aim should be to enable students to become bilingual and bicultural in as much as possible. The investment in bilingual and bicultural instruction pays off high dividends in the end for both the students and the school. Students benefit since cognitive and academic development in the L1 assist academic performance in general (Cummins, 1979; Garcia, 1994). In addition, instruction in the L1 gives the background knowledge for learning English and assists in transferring literacy from the L1 to the L2 (Soto, 1997). The school stands to benefit since students would be happy and would feel that they belong to the institution and are part of it. They would be in a position to identify and align themselves with the school. Students would be bilingual and bicultural academically since they would value, maintain, and use appropriately the two cultural systems and languages at the academic level (McLaughlin, 1985; Reyes & Vallone, 2007). They would have mastery in academic Spanish and academic English and Latino and mainstream cultural expectations. Students would experience less stress as they shift between the different multicultural environments (Berry, 1990), which would also result in their better psychological well-being (Reyes & Vallone, 2007). At the same time, they would be proud of their achievements of having two linguistic identities; the linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker and the linguistic identity of an English-speaker. Though this proposition may not solve the inferiority complex associated with a linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker, it would go a long way towards developing positive ethnic identity and contribute to a higher esteem and confidence in their cultural heritage (Cummins, 1979; Soto, 1997). And positive ethnic identity would contribute to better academic performance and achievement.

I would like to conclude this section with an example of a history class in Spanish with a unit on the Latino family in the U.S. This unit on the family would in turn be broken down into several

subunits. The purpose of this class would be to foster Latino students' self-esteem for their cultural heritage, show the Latino cultural contribution to the concept of the family, and connect Latino students with the Latino family in the U.S. By teaching the class in Spanish students would be better able to transmit and articulate their ideas and concepts of the practices they perceive among the Latino families. And whenever possible, individuals of prestige and parents in the local Latino community would be invited to speak about family relations and other topics of the Latino family in the U.S. In this way, the lesson on the family would not be abstract and theoretical but would have a community connection and would not be divorced from real life in the Latino community. This approach also connects with the funds of knowledge concept (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) which holds that Latino students, Latino parents, and Latino individuals from the community have knowledge that should be used by the school.

### **Conclusion**

This study has reaffirmed that through language we project the "kind of person" (Gee, 2001, p. 100) we wish to convey to the listener. In this vein, language is closely tied to our identity since it is connected to who we are as individuals. Thus, when students speak a language, they make a statement about the kind of language-speaker they intend to communicate at that moment through their choice of linguistic code. Though Gee's (2001) perspective of identity is useful to capture the different aspects of identity enacted in our interaction, it is limited in the context of choice of linguistic code. The findings above suggest the existence of a linguistic identity when dealing with identity in the context of choice of linguistic code. In view of this observation, schools need to reexamine their language policies and their attitude towards Latino students. This implies that Spanish should be given a space in the regular curriculum and classroom in order for it to be viewed by the Mexican students as a language of prestige en par with English. Educators should devise ways to create space for instruction in Spanish in the school curriculum whenever possible. This can be done through bilingual programs at the school or through the teaching of some core subjects in Spanish. At the same time, Mexican students should not be inhibited from enacting their linguistic identity of a Spanish-speaker in the classroom. Further research should explore the identities students enact when they choose to speak English among themselves or when they speak English to their parents or guardians.

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