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## Reexamining English Only in the ESL Classroom

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Despite widespread opposition to the English Only movement, support for bilingual education, and advocacy for language rights, many U.S. ESL educators continue to uphold the notion that English is the only acceptable medium of communication within the confines of the ESL classroom. Although the exclusive use of English in teaching ESL has come to be seen as a natural and commonsense practice which can be justified on pedagogical grounds, this article argues that it is rooted in a particular ideological perspective, rests on unexamined assumptions, and serves to reinforce inequities in the broader social order. Evidence from research and practice is presented which suggests that the rationale used to justify English only in the classroom is neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound. Further, the article details a growing body of evidence indicating that L1 and/or bilingual options are not only effective but necessary for adult ESL students with limited L1 literacy or schooling and that use of students' linguistic resources can be beneficial at all levels of ESL. Accounts from a number of projects, including two with which the author has been involved, document a range of uses for the native language in both initial literacy and ESL instruction for adults. Finally, because the issue of language choice is so intimately linked with issues of power, the article calls for reconceptualizing the notion of expertise to legitimate the knowledge and experience of nontraditional experts from the communities of the learners.

*To me the whole Rodney King case and the rioting proved that there is no American dream of opportunity for people of color said Jesus Vargas, 17, a high school dropout enrolled in a job training program in East Los Angeles.*

*We are treated like garbage. I kept getting suspended because when I spoke Spanish with my homeboys the teachers thought I was disrespecting them. They kept telling me to speak in English because I was in America. I wasn't going to take that... So I left and never went back. Some of those teachers don't want us. That hurts that really hurts. (Ribadeneira, 1992, p. 7)*

As a field, we face an unwitting yet pervasive schizophrenia. On the one hand we like to see ourselves above or beyond the kind of practices described by Vargas in the epigraph, taken from the Boston globe. Although some ESL educators support and have organizational ties to the English Only movement, many others advocate language rights and bilingual education, decry linguistic repression, and oppose the political agenda of U. S. English (see, e.g., Judd, 1987). The TESOL organization itself has passed a language rights resolution (TESOL, 1987) supporting "measures which protect the right of all individuals to preserve and foster their linguistic and cultural origins [and opposing] all measures declaring English the official language of the United States of America." More recently, it has issued a statement opposing discrimination in hiring based on language of origin (TESOL, 1992).

On the other hand, within the confines of the ESL classroom, many of those who may oppose the English Only movement on a policy level insist that their students use English as the sole medium of communication; teachers devise elaborate games, signals, and penalty systems to ensure the students do not use their L1 and justify these practices with the claim that use of the L1 will impede progress in the acquisition of English. Even official TESOL publications lend support to this view with the publication of articles like a recent one (Weinberg, 1990) extolling the virtues of fining students for using their L1. The author humorously tells her students, "This is an English-only classroom. If you speak Spanish or Cantonese or Mandarin or Vietnamese or Russian or Farsi, you pay me 25 cents. I can be rich" (p 5) The axiom underlying these practices, assumed to be self-evident, seems to be that English and English only should be used in the ESL classroom.

To the extent that this axiom is widely accepted among ESL educators, it needs to be reexamined. Whereas the political agenda of the English Only movement may seem obvious on a macrolevel, the ways in which our own practices reinforce this agenda on a microlevel are less visible, and yet, as Vargas says, what happens inside and outside the classroom are two sides of the same coin. Whether or not we support the use of learners' L1s is not just a pedagogical matter: It is a political one, and the way that we address it in ESL instruction is both a mirror of and a rehearsal for relations of power in the broader society.

### **SITUATING COMMONSENSE PRACTICES IN AN IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

Power, according to Fairclough (1989), is exercised by the dominant groups in two main ways through coercion (the use of force) or through consent (willing acquiescence). Consent, however, is not always the result of conscious choice; rather, it comes about through the unconscious acceptance of institutional practices.

*Institutional practices which people draw upon without thinking often embody assumptions which directly or indirectly legitimize existing power relations. Practices can often be shown to originate in the dominant class or the dominant bloc, and to have become naturalized.* (p. 33)

In other words, practices which are unconsciously accepted as the natural and inevitable way of doing things may in fact be inherently political, serving to maintain the relative position of participants with respect to each other--they help to perpetuate existing power relations. These everyday, taken-for-granted practices constitute what Fairclough calls *ideological power*, one of the central mechanisms of ensuring control by consent. He argues that language has a particularly important role in exercising this control: Authority and power are manifested by institutional practices around language use.

Several recent analyses document the ways that language policies in general, and policies around the imposition of English in particular, function as tools of domination and subordination on a global level. Tollefson (1991) argues that language policies are a central mechanism in ensuring that vast numbers of people will be unable to acquire the kinds of language competence required by modern social and economic systems. As he says, "Language is one criterion for determining which people will complete different levels of education. In this way, language is a means for rationing access to jobs with high salaries" (pp. 8-9), thus creating unequal social and economic relationships. Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) calls this type of control *linguicism* and defines it as "ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and nonmaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language" (p 13). Phillipson (1988, 1992) situates linguicism within a broader theory of linguistic imperialism, arguing that English linguistic imperialism (in which "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of

structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (1992, p. 47) has come to be a primary tool of postcolonial strategy: "Whereas once Britannia ruled the waves, now it is English which rules them" (1992, p. 1).

Whereas the mechanisms of ideological control exercised through language policy have been examined extensively on a global level, they have been less fully explored on the level of day-to-day interactions between teachers and learners. What I want to show in this paper is that the insistence on using only English in the classroom represents precisely the kind of taken-for-granted and naturalized everyday practice which Fairclough discusses: Although it has come to be justified in pedagogical terms, it rests on unexamined assumptions, originates in the political agenda of the dominant groups, and serves to reinforce existing relations of power. Precisely because its mechanisms are hidden, it is a prime example of Fairclough's notion of covert ideological control. This paper, thus, is meant not as an attack on those who advocate the monolingual use of English, but rather as an invitation to reexamine these practices in light of their often invisible ideological roots, their pedagogical effectiveness, and their implications for the ESL profession as a whole.

## **HISTORICAL ROOTS OF ENGLISH-ONLY INSTRUCTION**

Historical accounts of language education in the U. S. show that monolingual approaches to the teaching of English have by no means always been the norm (Baron, 1990; Crawford, 1991; Daniels, 1990); rather, there have been cyclical fluctuations in policy often determined by political rather than pedagogical factors. In the 19th century, for example, the decentralized and locally controlled nature of public schooling allowed for bilingual education in accordance with the political power of particular ethnic groups. It was the resurgence of nativism and antiforeign political sentiment in the late 19th century that signaled the decline of bilingual education. The advent of World War I, the increase in immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, and the growing role of immigrants in the labor movement contributed to an increasingly xenophobia atmosphere in the early 20th century; "foreign influence" was blamed for the nation's political and economic problems and the Americanization movement was promoted as a means of countering this influence. ESL instruction became a vehicle to enhance loyalty both to the company and the country, with companies like the Ford Motor Company requiring employees to attend Americanization classes (Crawford, 1991, p 22). English was associated with patriotism--speaking "good" English was equated with being a "good" American (Baron, 1990, p 155). Children were encouraged to profess language loyalty through oaths such as one that began as follows:

I love the United States of America, I love my country's flag, I love my country's language. I promise:

1. That I will not dishonor my country's speech by leaving off the last syllables of words.
- 2 That I will say a good American "yes" and "no" in place of an Indian grunt um hum" and "nup-um" or a foreign "ya" or "yeh" and "nope" (Robbins, 1918, p. 175, cited in Baron, 1990, p. 155)

According to Baron, the spread of ESL instruction in the first quarter of the 20th century was a direct outcome of the Americanization movement; it was at this time that direct methods stressing oral English gained favor over methods which allowed the use of the students' native language, and English only became the norm in ESL classes. In the early 1920s, Henry Goldberger developed an approach to adult ESL instruction which focused on teaching practical English including lessons on opening bank accounts, visiting

the doctor, making purchases, asking directions, and showing gratitude. He recommended that English be the sole medium of instruction, and, in grouping students, "warned teachers to prevent the formation of 'national cliques' which would delay the work of Americanization" (Baron, 1990, p. 160).

Hand in hand with instructional approaches designed to promote U. S. values were formalized gate-keeping practices designed to exclude foreigners from the ranks of the teaching profession: Speech tests were instituted, and those who failed the pronunciation sections were denied licenses. Many states passed laws requiring teachers to be citizens. According to Baron (1990), country of origin and native language were more important for teaching ESL than training: "As a result of these efforts to homogenize the language of the teaching corps, schoolteachers remained by and large monolingual English speakers untrained in any methodology to teach English to non-anglophones and unable to empathize with the non-anglophone student" (p. 162).

Although this is not the place to proceed with a detailed account of the subsequent development of ESL methodologies I present this slice of history to show that practices we take for granted as being pedagogically grounded have antecedents in overtly ideological tendencies. Much of the discourse from the Americanization period is mirrored in the discourse of present-day "innovative" approaches which focus on survival English in an English-only classroom, with the notable difference that, at that time, the political agenda was more explicit.

Phillipson argues that more recent global roots of commonly held assumptions about English language teaching (ELT) can be traced to British neocolonial policies. He claims that the development of ELT as a profession was itself a direct response to a political imperative. English was seen to be a key component of the infrastructure required for the spread of British neocolonial control and, as such, there was a vast infusion of funding to support the development of ELT in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A conference held at Makerere University in Uganda in 1961 articulated this relationship of dominance and dependence between the developed and developing countries through the ways ELT expertise was to be shared and disseminated. Five basic tenets emerged from this conference which, according to Phillipson (1992), became an unofficial and yet unchallenged doctrine underlying much ELT work. These tenets are:

- € English is best taught monolingually.
- € The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
- € The earlier English is taught, the better the results.
- € The more English is taught, the better the results.
- € If other languages are used too much, standards of English will drop. (p. 185)

Phillipson argues that these tenets have become the cornerstones of the hegemony of English worldwide. Thus, although the roots of monolingual approaches to ESL have been largely obscured, and despite the fact that they are based on arguments which have been challenged by research, they have come to be seen as natural and commonsense.

## **COMMONSENSE ASSUMPTIONS AND TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED PRACTICES**

To investigate the extent to which these same tenets underlie current attitudes among ESL educators in the U. S. I recently passed out a brief survey at a statewide TESOL conference asking, Do you believe that ESL students should be allowed to use their L1 in the ESL classroom? Only 20% of the respondents gave an unqualified yes to the question; 30% gave an unqualified no, (with comments such as, "It's a school policy" and "No... but it's hard"); the remaining 50% said sometimes (with comments such as "Usually not, but if I

have tried several times to explain something in English and a student still doesn't understand, then I allow another student who speaks the same language to explain in that language"; "They're going to do it anyway"; "As a last resort"). The essence of these comments is captured by the following response "In general ESL students should be encouraged to use English as much as possible, but in reality this doesn't always work." Thus, despite the fact that 80% of the teachers allowed the use of the L1 at times, the English only axiom is so strong that they didn't trust their own practice. They assigned a negative value to "lapses" into the L1, seeing them as failures or aberrations, a cause for guilt.

The rationale for this view is often framed in pedagogical terms. The more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn; as they hear and use English, they will internalize it and begin to think in English; the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it. There seems to be an all-or nothing view: Because the grammar-translation method has been widely discredited and concurrent translation (immediate translation of what is said in the target language into the L1 ) shown to be ineffective (Legaretta 1979), no alternative except the complete exclusion of the L1 in the ESL classroom is seen as valid.

## **EVIDENCE AGAINST ENGLISH ONLY IN THE CLASSROOM**

Evidence from both research and practice, however, suggests that the rationale used to justify English only in the classroom is neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound. Although there is extensive and widely accepted research supporting bilingual education for children (e. g., Ramirez, Pasta, Yuen, Billings, & Ramey, 1991; Snow, 1990), the relevance of these findings for either ESL instruction or the language education of adults is rarely examined. Bilingual education and ESL are seen to be separate beasts with different underlying assumptions. Even those who fully support bilingual education often justify their own practices within the confines of the ESL classroom with reference (either implicit or explicit) to studies of children who have become bilingual through immersion programs. Yet, as Irujo (1991) shows, claims for the relevance of the immersion model for ESL must be qualified. First, many of the immersion programs used to justify monolingual ESL instruction are in fact bilingual to the extent that students are initially allowed to use their L1 to communicate with each other and the teacher; the teacher understands the learners' language even if s/he doesn't produce it. A recent study of effective instructional practices for linguistically and culturally diverse students (Garcia, 1991) found that precisely this practice characterized the classrooms of academically successful learners: "In classes with Spanish speakers, lower grade teachers used both Spanish and English, whereas upper grade teachers utilized mostly English. However, students were allowed to use either language" (p. 4). Allowing the use of the L1 in early ESL acquisition was critical to later success; use of both languages facilitated the transition to English.

Further evidence suggests that strong initial literacy is a key factor in successful second language acquisition and academic success (Cummins, 1981). Whereas research indicates that immersion program can be effective in the development of language and literacy for learners from dominant language groups, whose L1 is valued and supported both at home and in the broader society, bilingual instruction seems to be more effective for language minority students, whose language has less social status (Tucker, 1980). This finding clearly indicates that relations of power and their affective consequences are integral to language acquisition. Acquiring a second language is to some extent contingent on the societally determined value attributed to the L1, which can be either reinforced or challenged inside the classroom. As Phillipson (1992) says, "The ethos of monolingualism implies the rejection of the experiences of other languages, meaning the exclusion of the child's most intense existential experience" (p. 189). Prohibiting the native language within the context of ESL instruction may impede language acquisition precisely because it mirrors disempowering relations.

Rivera (1988, 1990) argues that the underlying rationale for bilingual education for children applies equally to language minority adults. Yet implications of these findings for adult education have, until quite recently, been virtually ignored. Despite the fact that a growing percentage of students in adult ESL classes come from precisely the groups shown to benefit most from a bilingual approach- subordinated minority language groups and those with limited L1 literacy backgrounds--relatively few programs nationwide provide native language literacy or bilingual adult ESL instruction for adults. A survey of programs offering literacy instruction to linguistic minority adults and out-of-school youth conducted by the National Clearinghouse for Literacy Education (NCLE) indicated that only 68 of the almost 600 programs who returned the questionnaire offer classes in learners' native languages; of these, all but 10 have been started since 1980 (Gillespie, 1991).

Although research on adult biliteracy has increased in the past decade (see, e.g., Spener, in press), much of it focuses on ethnographic descriptions of literacy practices in the home, community, and workplace rather than on issues of acquisition and their educational implications. The NCLE survey was able to identify only two research studies (Robson's 1982 study of Hmong refugees in Thailand and Burtoff's 1985 study of Haitian Creole speakers in New York City) investigating the effectiveness of initial native-language literacy for adult students. Although both of these studies point toward "the beneficial effect of initial literacy in the native language on subsequent oral and written English language proficiency (Gillespie, 1991, p. 2)," there has been little research to follow up on these preliminary findings. Thus, until further research is undertaken, we need to look to accounts from practice and to related (but perhaps less direct) research to ascertain the effectiveness of native language and bilingual approaches to adult ESL.

In the remainder of this article, I will supplement research data with published and unpublished accounts from both practitioners and learners, including evidence emerging from my own work at the University of Massachusetts/Boston in two adult literacy training projects. The first of these, the Student Literacy Corps project, trained undergraduate ESL students as tutors and placed them in community-based adult literacy programs where they worked with learners from their own language groups. The second, the Bilingual Community Literacy Training Project, a collaboration between the University of Massachusetts and three community-based adult literacy centers (the Jackson-Mann Community School, East Boston Harborside Community Center, and the Haitian Multi-Service Center), trained people from the communities of the learners to teach ESL, Spanish, and Haitian Creole literacy, respectively.

Perhaps the strongest evidence against monolingual adult ESL comes from examining what actually happens when this approach is enforced in the ESL classroom. Very often, English and literacy skills are not differentiated in intake assessment and placement. Literacy is equated with English literacy, and English proficiency is equated with oral English proficiency (Wiley, 1990-91). The result is that students with little L1 literacy background are grouped with those who are literate in their L1 but have beginning oral ESL proficiency. For those with little L1 literacy background and schooling, the effect is often to completely preclude participation and progress, causing the "revolving door syndrome" in which students start a course, fail, start again, and eventually give up (Strei, 1992). Community-based programs like Casa Azatlan in Chicago report that the majority of students who drop out of ESL classes are precisely those who are unable to read and write in their L1 (1985 survey reported in Gillespie & Ballering, 1992). In one of the University of Massachusetts projects, students with minimal L1 literacy in monolingual ESL classes often told their bilingual tutors that they had no idea what was going on in class "I am always lost. I waste my time." Similarly Klassen's (1991) ethnographic study in Toronto's Spanish-speaking community found that monolingual ESL classes were virtually inaccessible to the beginning literate Spanish speakers despite their lack of Spanish literacy, the people he interviewed were able to manage in virtually every domain of their

lives *except in the ESL classroom*; there, they reported becoming completely silenced, making virtually no progress, or dropping out:

*Angela...said that she had never gone back to an ESL class she once started because the teacher embarrassed her by asking her about things she had never learned before. Maria and Dona Lucia described spending their time in class "drawing" letters and words they could not understand while everyone else read the words and learned. Maria said she left class knowing no more than when she first came... Pedro and Rebecca both said that, because they did not "know Spanish" (meaning that they did not know proper "schooled" Spanish), they could not understand the ESL teachers' explanations about grammar especially verbs. (p. 52)*

Moreover, the people Klassen interviewed reported a strong sense of exclusion in their English classes. Two of them "experienced the classroom as a place where teachers isolated them from other students" (p. 53), a response perhaps based on teachers' own sense of frustration at being unable to communicate or being forced to reduce lesson content to the most elementary childlike uses of language. The students' sense of exclusion within the class was compounded by the fact that it led to exclusion in the outside world as well. The lack of Spanish literacy was an obstacle to participating in the higher level ESL courses required for entry into job training programs which, in turn, limited their employment possibilities.

Thus, the result of monolingual ESL instruction for students with minimal L1 literacy and schooling is often that, whether or not they drop out, they suffer severe consequences in terms of self-esteem; their sense of powerlessness is reinforced either because they are de facto excluded from the classroom or because their life experiences and language resources are excluded. This, in turn, has consequences for their lives outside the classroom, limiting job possibilities and perpetuating their marginalization. Given the fact that monolingual ESL classes virtually assure that minimally literate language minority adults will be excluded from access to English and all but the most menial employment, one has to wonder why federal and state funding for bilingual and native language models is so limited; perhaps, as Fairclough would suggest, this lack of funding exemplifies how the dominant groups maintain their status through institutional practices.

## **EVIDENCE SUPPORTING USE OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE**

On the flip side, when the native language is used, practitioners, researchers, and learners consistently report positive results. Rivera (1990) outlines various models for incorporating the L1 into instruction, including initial literacy in the L1 (with or without simultaneous but separate ESL classes) and bilingual instruction (where both languages are utilized within one class). The first benefit of such programs at the beginning levels is that they attract previously unserved students--students who had been unable to participate in ESL classes because of limited L1 literacy and schooling. For example, because Creole literacy is now being offered, Boston's Haitian Multi-Service Center reports that former students who had dropped out are returning. Teachers at Centro Presente, a bilingual program for Central Americans in Cambridge, Massachusetts, report that current students often say they dropped out of monolingual ESL classes in the past because they felt intimidated. The data from this community-based native language literacy program were gathered through interviews with teachers and administrators unless otherwise indicated.

A second benefit of using the L1 is that it reduces affective barriers to English acquisition and allows for more rapid progress to or in ESL. Hemminger (1987) likewise found that a bilingual approach to initial ESL for nonliterate and nonschooled Hmong refugees was more effective than monolingual approaches had been; although students made almost no progress in 2 to 3 years of monolingual survival ESL classes, once a bilingual, problem-posing approach was introduced, progress was rapid. She attributes this in part to the

fact that the bilingual approach allowed for language and culture shock to be alleviated. Similarly, in a study designed to investigate the effectiveness of using "pedagogically unsophisticated" bilingual tutors to teach nonliterate Cambodians, D'Annunzio (1991) reports that the students made rapid gains in ESL. Despite a relatively short total instructional time, highly significant results were attained in speaking, reading, and vocabulary as indicated by pre- and posttest scores on a number of standardized tests, portfolio analysis, and ongoing informal assessment. Strei (1992) reports that a pilot native-language literacy program for Haitians in Palm Beach County resulted in the dramatic increase of their retention rate once they enrolled in ESL classes. The drop-out rate decreased from 85% prior to the program to only 10% after it was started.

Further, contrary to the claim that use of the L1 will slow the transition to and impede the development of thinking in English, numerous accounts suggest that it may actually facilitate this process. Shamash (1990), for example, describes an approach to teaching ESL used at the Invergarry Learning Center near Vancouver which might be considered heretical by some: Students start by writing about their lives in their L1 or a mixture of their L1 and English; this text is then translated into English with the help of bilingual tutors or learners and, as such, provides "a natural bridge for overcoming problems of vocabulary, sentence structure and language confidence" (p 72). At a certain point in the learning process, according to Shamash, the learner is willing to experiment and take risks with English. Thus, starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves "while at the same time providing meaningful written material to work with" (p 75).

Similarly, teachers at Centro Presente report that use of the L1 naturally gives way to increasing use of English. Their students often say, "I can't say this in English, but I really want to say it"; once they have expressed their ideas in Spanish, the group helps them express them in English. Centro Presente teachers argue that since students don't start by thinking in the second language, allowing for the exploration of ideas in the L1 supports a gradual, developmental process in which use of the L1 drops off naturally as it becomes less necessary. Likewise, Strohmeier and McGrail (1988) found that allowing for the exploration of ideas in the L1 served to enhance students' ESL writing. When students were given the choice of writing first in Spanish, they went on to write pieces in English that were considerably more developed than their usual ESL writing. These findings from practice are supported by Garcia's (1991) more formal research on effective instructional practices which found that (a) academically successful students made the transition from Spanish to English without any pressure from teachers; and (b) they were able to progress systematically from writing in the native language in initial literacy to writing in English later.

These findings concerning use of the L1 are congruent with current theories of second language acquisition. They show that its use reduces anxiety and enhances the affective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates incorporation of learners' life experiences, and allows for learner centered curriculum development. Most importantly, it allows for language to be used as a meaning-making tool and for language learning to become a means of communicating ideas rather than an end in itself. As such, according to Piasecka (1986),

*teaching bilingually does not mean a return to the Grammar Translation method, but rather a standpoint which accepts that the thinking, feeling, and artistic life of a person is very much rooted in their mother tongue. If the communicative approach is to live up to its name, then there are many occasions in which the original impulse to speak can only be found in the mother tongue fit the initial stages of learning a new language, the students' repertoire is limited to those few utterances already learnt and they must constantly think before speaking. When having a conversation, we often become fully aware of what we actually mean only after speaking. We need to speak in order to sort out our ideas, and when learning a new language*



*this is often best done through the mother-tongue. (p. 97)*

## USES OF THE L1 BEYOND BEGINNING LEVELS

Even those who acknowledge the usefulness of a bilingual approach to beginning ESL acquisition often find it counterproductive beyond the very beginning stages, arguing that overreliance on the L1 will interfere with ESL acquisition. However, evidence from both research and practice again suggests that the L1 may be a potential resource rather than an obstacle. On the research side, for example, a recent study by Osburne and Harss-Covaleski (1991) suggests that the widely frowned upon practice of writing first in the L1 and then translating into the L2 is not detrimental to the quality of the written product. They cite the conventional wisdom that students should be discouraged from translating as this will "cause them to make more errors, result in rhetorically inappropriate texts, and distract them from thinking in English--and that all these factors would negatively affect the quality of their writing" (p 5). To investigate the validity of this claim, they compared ESL compositions written directly in English with others written first in the L1 and then translated into English; their results indicated no significant difference in the quality or quantity of the written products. They conclude, "It seems then that there is no need for teachers to become overly anxious if students choose to employ translation as a composing strategy at times" (p. 15). Friedlander (1990) cites numerous other studies reporting the beneficial effects of using the L1 for L2 composing; his own study provides further support for L1 use in planning ESL writing when knowledge of the topic has been acquired in the L1.

Although practitioners rarely advocate the nondiscriminate use of the L1, they do report finding the selective and targeted integration of the L1 useful; accounts from practice identify a multiplicity of clearly delineated functions for such use. Piasecka (1988), for example includes the following in her list of "possible occasions for using mother tongue (pp. 98-99): negotiation of the syllabus and the lesson; record keeping; classroom management; scene setting; language analysis; presentation of rules governing grammar, phonology, morphology and spelling; discussion of cross-cultural issues; instructions or prompts; explanations of errors; and assessment of comprehension. Collingham (1988) concurs with many of these uses, adding the following to develop ideas as a precursor to expressing them in the L2; to reduce inhibitions or affective blocks to L2 production; to elicit language and discourse strategies for particular situations; to provide explanations of grammar and language functions; and to teach vocabulary. G. Dove (personal communication, 1992) sees L1 use as a way to value cultural diversity as students teach each other vocabulary or expressions in their own languages.

Osburne(1986) describes all instructional strategy in which students are invited to reflect on their own L1 writing attitudes and practices; compare these with those of other ESL writers; write a composition in the L1; analyze their L1 writing processes, strategies, and strengths based on this composition; and discuss implications for writing in English. In this case, the L1 is utilized to develop metacognitive awareness of the writing process; as students identify similarities between themselves as writers in their native languages and in English, they approach composing in English with more confidence Brucker (1992) describes using the L1 as a tool for initial assessment, to identify student needs ally goals. She writes:

*I encouraged the students to answer this evaluation in Spanish Although I don't r earl Spanish well, I can always find a staff person or another teacher to translate for me this extra step is worth my time because students can give me "true," that is to say, more accurate and more complete answers, using their first language. They feel freer to express themselves and let me know what they want It also gives me a sense of the students' native language competency. This is important in order for me to understand where students are starting. (p. 37)*

There are two revealing aspects of the studies and programs described here which reinforce the notion that the question of language choice is, in essence, a question of ideology. The first is the fact that many of those who advocate native language or bilingual approaches to adult ESL do so because they see language acquisition as intimately connected with addressing the problems learners face in their lives outside the classroom. Hemmendinger (1987), for example, identified use of the L1 as critical in implementing an empowering approach to ESL in her classes because it allowed students to discuss vital issues in their lives which they were then able to address in English. As she says, "The class members thus still learned new language they needed, but more important, they used that language to attempt to solve problems such as in [a work-related] incident where they were cheated" (p 20). Many of these programs support Paulo Freire's approach to adult education in which curriculum content is drawn from participants' experiences and invites reflection on these experiences. Goals are framed in terms of challenging and changing oppressive conditions in learners' lives. As Rivera (1988) says, "The role of education in this approach is to empower learners to use their native language actively in order to generate their own curriculum, and, therefore, their own knowledge" (p 2). Thus, a monolingual approach to ESL is rejected not just because it may slow the acquisition of English but because it denies learners the right to draw on their language resources and strengths; by forcing a focus on childlike uses of language and excluding the possibility of critical reflection, it may ultimately feed into the replication of relations of inequality outside the classroom, reproducing a stratum of people who can only do the least skilled and least language/literacy-dependent jobs. As Collingham (1988) says,

*To treat adult learners as if they know nothing of language is to accept the imbalance of power and so ultimately to collude with institutional racism; to adopt a bilingual approach and to value the knowledge that learners already have is to begin to challenge that unequal power relationship and, one hopes, thereby enable learners to acquire the skills and confidence they need to claim back more power for themselves in the world beyond the classroom. (p. 85)*

The second revealing fact is that many of the advocates for L1 usage cited here come from outside the U. S.--from Canada, Australia, and England, countries where multiculturalism rather than English only is stressed in the wider political and policy context. ESL teachers with whom I spoke on a recent trip to Australia expressed surprise that using the L1 in ESL classes might be considered controversial in the U. S.; they told me that they encourage students to use their L1 since teacher evaluation is based in part on the extent to which the students' cultures and languages are valued in the classroom. Although I certainly cannot generalize from these comments, I mention this to show that monolingual ESL instruction is by no means the taken-for-granted norm everywhere in the world. The fact that so many of the studies exploring the use of the L1 are published outside the U. S. (see, e. g., references in Hopkins, 1989, and Nicholls & Hoadley Maidment, 1988) again suggests that monolingual approaches to ESL may be ideologically rooted.

## **CLASSROOM REALITIES: LANGUAGE CHOICE IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSES**

However appealing the notion of a bilingual approach to ESL may sound in theory, the prospect of implementing it in the classroom is often met by resistance; teachers respond with understandable concerns "How can I incorporate my students' first languages when half of them want me to enforce English only, they come from 20 different language backgrounds, and I don't speak their languages?"

However, each of these concerns, I think, has ideological implications relating to how issues of power are embedded in classroom relations. The issue of language choice is really part of the broader question of teacher-student roles-who gets to decide what should happen in the classroom. Traditionally, the teacher

determines what is best for the students based on his/her status and knowledge of the field. But, as Freire (1970) argues, central to acquiring the skills and confidence for claiming more power outside the classroom is a shift of power inside the classroom. Labor example, very often the issue of L1 use is a source of classroom tension, with some students feeling that it wastes time or creates bad feelings and others seeing it as a necessary support. Whereas beginning-level students often say they prefer a bilingual approach (e. g., Hopkins, 1989; C. Howell, personal communication 1991), more advanced students may feel use of the L1 slows English acquisition. In cases like these, then, rather than the teacher making the decision for the students (either for or against L1 use), the question can be posed to students for reflection and dialogue. As such, the issue itself can become content for language and literacy work. Students can discuss when it is and isn't helpful to use the L1 in English acquisition. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of L1 versus L2 use and the functions of each in different contexts, students can establish their own rules for the classroom. Certainly, teachers can contribute their own knowledge and opinions in this exchange, but what is important is a shift toward shared authority. The teacher moves from being a problem solver or arbiter of tensions to a problem poser or facilitator of critical reflection.

Teachers I worked with in the Bilingual Community Literacy Training Project (BCLTP) who used this approach with several beginning ESL classes reported that each of the classes arrived at different conclusions; in some students decided to use the L1 as little as possible; in others, they enumerated specific functions/times when it was and wasn't helpful. Significantly, however, each class stuck to its decision regardless of the particular content of the decision. The teachers reported that they no longer had to mediate disagreements or act as the enforcer of language choice decisions. Similarly, Chang (1992) reports that when students are invited to regulate language use themselves, they consciously use the target language more, and the teacher's role as ESL enforcer or corrector diminishes. Of course, for beginning ESL classes, this kind of discussion can best take place in the L1; yet when reflecting on the ways that both languages are used to conduct this discussion can yield insights into the use of each language for various functions in other contexts.

The concern about L1 use in multilingual classes can also be addressed through a dialogical process, with students exploring the particular functions and consequences of using the L1 when several language groups are present. The pedagogical bonus is that students develop metacognitive awareness of language learning strategies; the classroom management bonus is that it takes the teacher off the hot seat; students develop empathy for each others' perspectives, and tensions are relieved. Most importantly, students gain a greater sense of control over their own learning. Ultimately, the process of decision making is even more important than the outcome of the decision, not because it is an effective mechanism for classroom management, but because it models a way of addressing problems and shifting power that can be extended more broadly. The tools that students develop for thinking critically, exploring alternatives, and making choices prepare them for addressing problems outside the classroom. The same process can be applied with other issues of classroom dynamics. If there are attendance problems, or problems with uneven participation, involving students in analyzing the underlying issues fosters a sense of control over their own learning and, in turn, becomes a kind of rehearsal for dealing with outside issues.

## **WHO'S THE EXPERT HERE ANYWAY?**

The question of the teacher not knowing the students' L1 and thus being unable to use it as a resource in the classroom is also really the tip of a much larger ideological iceberg, namely, the question of who should teach and what counts as qualifications for teaching non-Anglophones. The taken-for-granted assumption in the field is that ESL teachers don't need to know students' languages to teach ESL. When we're at a party

and someone says, "Oh, you're an ESL teacher, what languages do you speak?" the automatic response is "You don't need to know the learners' languages to teach teens English." The assumption here is that native English speakers with TESOL degrees have the requisite qualifications by virtue of their linguistic background and advanced study. What counts is knowledge of English and second language theories, research, approaches, and methods.

Yet, as Phillipson (1992) suggests, the tenet that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker is a twin of the tenet that English is best taught monolingually. Both are aspects of the same underlying ideological orientation which privileges the interests of the dominant groups and reinforces inequalities. In the case of British neocolonialism structural dependence is perpetuated "as the presence of native speakers and books from [Great Britain], and all that they signify, is necessary to implement the native speaker tenet" (p. 199). Even the term native speaker itself is an ideological construct to the extent that it implies a single, idealized native English although there are in fact many native Englishes, some of which are valued more than others for sociopolitical reasons (Phillipson, 1992); the term has de facto been used to refer to white Britons from the dominant groups. Because these native speakers are seen to be the model speakers of English, British norms of usage and language teaching have become the universal standard. This, in turn, has diverted attention away from the development of local solutions to pedagogical problems and impeded the process of building on local strengths, resulting in the creation of ideological dependence. In the case of the U. S., as we have seen, the origins of the native-speaker fallacy can be found in the Americanization movement, where language instruction was seen as a vehicle for the imposition of U. S. cultural values and native English speakers seen as the only appropriate conveyers of these values. That this tenet is alive and well in the U. S. today is demonstrated by the fact that many states still require teachers to be native speakers. For example, at the time of this writing, there was a move to oust a first-grade teacher in Westfield, Massachusetts, because of his nonnative accent.

Although the pedagogical rationale for privileging native speakers is that their knowledge of the target language is better, examination of current theory suggests that being a model English speaker is not a sufficient qualification for teaching ESL and, in some cases, not a necessary one. Of course, it is widely agreed within the profession that it is wrong to assume that just because one speaks English, one can teach it; specialized training is required. Phillipson (1992) claims that many of those qualities which are seen to make native speakers intrinsically better qualified as English teachers (e. g., their fluency, appropriate usages and knowledge of cultural connotations of the language) can be acquired or instilled through training. Moreover, he argues, nonnative speakers possess certain qualifications which native speakers may not. They have gone through "the laborious process of acquiring English as a second language and have insight into the linguistic and cultural needs of their learners" (p. 195).

I would go further in arguing that, in the case of ESL (as opposed to EFL) where English is being taught to immigrants and refugees transplanted to a new country, it is not just experience as a language learned but the experience of sharing the struggles as a newcomer that is critical. If a central tenet of state-of-the-art second language and literacy theory is the importance of contextualizing instruction around real, meaningful usage centered on content that is significant in learners' lives, who is better qualified to draw out, understand, and utilize learners' experiences than those who themselves have had similar experiences? There is something about having actually lived these realities which enables immigrant teachers to make connections that are otherwise not possible. For example, I once, spent many hours struggling to elicit discussion about housing issues from a class of Haitian learners while one of my students, a Central American undergraduate with considerably less "professional knowledge" was able, with seeming ease, to instantly ignite animated discussion of the same topic just by sharing an anecdote from her own life dealing

with an exploitative landlord. Her lived experience was more powerful than my expertise in unlocking the doors to communicative interactions

Similarly, D'Annunzio (1991) attributes much of the success of his program to "the use of bilingual tutors who shared the students' experiences" (p 52). He argues that, with a short training period, "pedagogically unsophisticated" bilinguals (who, in the case his program were "only high school graduates") can become effective tutors and trainers of other tutors; this model "may break the chain of reliance on heavy professional intervention" (p 52). Hornberger and Hardmall's (in press) study of instructional practices in a Cambodian adult ESL class and a Puerto Rican GED (Graduate Equivarency Diploma) class corroborates the importance of shared background between teachers and learners. In the case of the Cambodian class, they found that despite the fact that the teacher (who had finished just 2 years of college and a vocational program) tried to speak English exclusively, the students used Khmer to respond to her questions and help each other; in addition, the teacher and students shared assumptions about the learning paradigm, and classroom activities were intimately connected with learners' other life activities and cultural practices. Likewise, in the GED class, instructional activities were embedded in a cultural and institutional context that integrated and validated learners' Puerto Rican identity. Their study suggests that the reinforcement of cultural identity, made possible by the shared cultural background of learners and teachers, is critical not just for L1 literacy acquisition but for ESL acquisition as well.

Both the BCLTP and the University of Massachusetts Student Literacy Corps (SLC) project were based on the notion that, with training, people from the communities of the learners who are usually excluded from teaching positions by virtue of a lack of formal credentialing can become effective language and literacy instructors. A comprehensive account of the rationale, process, and outcomes of these projects will be presented at a later date; however, some mention of their results is relevant here. In both cases, through a multidimensional participatory training process, trainees who were or had been ESL students themselves became tutors or teachers. In the SLC project, tutors not only contributed their energy, life experiences, and native language resources but were able to introduce innovative state-of-the-art approaches to literacy instruction to the classrooms of experienced teachers. The following quote, taken from a teacher's evaluation, indicates the power of this model:

*J. is a model tutor because he has a genuine understanding of our students based on his own experience and his ability to listen to them, and because he is able to follow his gut feelings. His initiative is extremely valuable. I wish I knew how to bring out that kind of leadership ability in other tutors.*

In the BCLTP, interns came from a range of backgrounds, including some who had themselves been beginning ESL students a few years earlier and others who were getting their GEDs or were undergraduate students. Despite the fact that they may have higher education in their home country, several were working in jobs such as housecleaning, factory work, and so on, because of lack of credentials and/or English proficiency. They were trained to become native language literacy or beginning ESL instructors through workshops, mentoring, and teacher sharing processes. As a result of their work, adult students in the native language literacy classes who had been unable to write their names at intake were writing dialogue journals, letters, and articles for site magazines after about 6 months of instruction. At the Haitian Multi-Service Center, interns developed a Creole proverb book for initial literacy; students in ESL classes wrote language experience stories about the coup in Haiti and its effects on their lives, studied the history of Haiti, and read and discussed news stories. All of this was possible largely because the teachers were integrally part of the learners' communities, sharing both language and life experiences.

Even in mixed ESL sites, like the Jackson-Mann (Community Schools where students come from over 25 language groups, the fact that the interns were themselves from the communities of the learners was an asset. In developing lessons, interns drew on their own experiences as language learners and members of the community. The adult learners, seeing their peers in the role of teacher, assumed more responsibility for the learning of others. In one case, for example, a student who had never spoken in class began to participate actively after being paired with a more advanced student; the advanced student then asked to remain in the class (even though he was ready for a higher level), because, as he said, "I can help here. You need me."

These projects demonstrate that the benefits of hiring teachers from the communities of the learners can at least balance the benefits of hiring native English speakers. Whereas nonnative speakers of English with nontraditional educational backgrounds can be trained in literacy/ ESL pedagogy, it is not clear that the reverse is true--that the understandings that come through shared life experience and cultural background can be imparted through training. These are qualifications which may be truly intrinsic to nonnative speakers (although these characteristics too are certainly not sufficient in themselves to assure good teaching).

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROFESSION**

The implications of the arguments presented in this article are neither-- that traditionally credentialed native--English-speaking teachers should commit professional suicide nor that ESL instruction should be totally abandoned in favor of illiteracy instruction. Rather, what I want to suggest is that we need, on the one hand, to rethink and expand the roles of native-English-speaking ESL teachers and, on the other hand, to expand the range of options and uses for the native language in initial literacy and ESL instruction. I hope to have shown that unveiling the mechanisms of ideological control can ultimately strengthen the field as a whole. By letting go of some of our unexamined and taken-for-granted assumptions about how ESL/literacy students should be taught and who is qualified to teach, we can open the doors to rich resources for addressing the language and literacy needs of immigrants and refugees.

The first step in this process is recognition of the fact that commonly accepted everyday classroom practices, far from being neutral and natural, have ideological origins and consequences for relations of power both inside and outside the classroom. As the evidence presented here indicates, monolingual ESL instruction in the U. S. has as much to do with politics as with pedagogy. Its roots can be traced to the political and economic interests of dominant groups in the same way that the English Only movement has been; the rationale and research used to justify it are questionable; and there is increasing evidence that L1 and/or bilingual options are not only effective but necessary for adult ESL students with limited L1 and schooling backgrounds. Clearly the accumulated body of research and practice points toward the need to expand much greater resources in exploring L1 literacy or bilingual ESL program models for these learners.

Further, the evidence suggests that current definitions of teaching qualifications must be reconsidered in order to implement this goal. As with language use, the question of who is qualified to teach is more than purely a pedagogical matter. Insistence on the irrelevance of teachers' knowing the learners' languages may be de facto a justification for maintaining the status of native English speakers. Alternatively, by expanding the conception of what counts as expertise to include other kinds of knowledge beyond those traditionally developed and validated through institutions of higher education, ties between the classroom and communities of the learners can be strengthened. Evidence from a range of programs suggests a new way of thinking about community classroom relations in which community people are seen not just as aides or cultural resources but as experts in their own right and as partners in collaborative relationships. Promoting the development of this community-based expertise does not by any means imply eliminating the role of

traditionally credentialed ESL teachers; these two kinds of expertise aren't oppositional or mutually exclusive. Rather, credentialed ESL/Bilingual educators and community-based bilingual educators can work together through a process of mutual training to share their knowledge, establish partnerships, and learn from each others' experiences. This may mean expanding the role of native English speakers in the areas of teacher training and classroom-based collaborations with nonnative English speakers.

Thus, returning to the opening epigraph, as Vargas suggested in discussing the reactions to the Rodney King verdict, we need to recognize that respect for learners' languages has powerful social implications. The extent to which ESL educators value participants' linguistic resources in teaching is a measure of our willingness to address basic inequities in the broader society. As we let go of the need to enforce English only in the classroom and open our ranks to community expertise, students will gain greater control of their own learning. Each of these changes represents limited steps that we can take as a profession to contribute to struggles for greater equity outside the classroom.

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