Ethnographies Revisited: English Learners and Language Ideologies

Alondra Rosales

May 2017

Abstract

As the public school populations all over the United States continue to change to include more linguistically diverse student demographics, English language education continues to show many of the issues that it has faced for decades. With deep roots in colonization and imperialism, English language education policy and practice shows evidence of language ideology shaping the way education and policymakers think about the linguistic practices of their students. Using a critical lens that focuses on language ideologies, two canonical educational ethnographies that highlight the experiences of English Learners in the United States will be analyzed using three trends of language ideologies: Language as Capital, Language and Race, and Language as Deficit. Using this lens the two works—Fu’s “My Trouble is my English” and Olsen’s Made in America—to demonstrate how students view Standard English as necessary for gaining economic and cultural capital without always considering the role of their peers and teachers in distributing capital among those that are not in the culture of power. Additionally, they show how non-monolingual English speakers are racialized and excluded from being legitimate members of the school’s social structure. Lastly, the works show how the non-English linguistic practices of the English Learners are ignored and viewed as detrimental to their English language acquisition. This new lens on the works of Fu and Olsen sheds light on how language ideologies manifest in the actions and language of students and teachers, along with the effect these have on the educational experience of English Learners.
Introduction

Although language conflict in the United States has never been as disputed as in countries like Spain, France, or Canada, the United States has been witness to a heated debated regarding ESL (or English as a Second Language) instruction in public education. This debate has gone on for many generations and contemporary contexts have kept it from ever settling down into one consensus regarding what is best for U.S. students. Scholarly interests in the history and methods of monolingual and multilingual education are much more centralized in their overall ideas and beliefs. However, even if research points to certain methods as more beneficial to the learning experiences of students, the federal and state policies do not reflect many of these scholarly findings. For decades, a very public debate over English immersion methods—like English-Only—and multilingual methods—such as bilingual schooling—have been a topic for discussion in the smaller and larger scopes of the educational system in the United States.

Negative language ideologies, many of which is have deep historical roots, shape many of the instructional practices favored by policymakers and teachers everywhere. These language ideologies are complex and deeply embedded in the pedagogical practices are enforced or preferred in public schools nationwide. Educational researchers, anthropologists, and ethnographers have documented the experience of students who take part in English language programs in many parts of the country and from various language and cultural backgrounds (Valdés, 2001; Fu, 1995; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco, 2008). These ethnographies document the struggles faced by the students, families, and teachers as they try to navigate a poorly designed system that ultimately leads many students to failure and alienation. In this paper, I will revisit two canonical ethnographies—"My trouble is my English" by Danling Fu and Made in America by Laurie Olsen—that look at varying populations and utilize different research lenses to document the experiences of English Learners and the people that surround them. These ethnographies are highly read and regarded. They do a great job at depicting real students and their everyday concerns, struggles, accomplishments, and thoughts. They
humanize and nuance the way we typically see and learn about English Learners in the United States by giving the many issues we know about a story, voice, and name. Both authors do an outstanding job of focusing their analytic lenses to highlight different aspects of their subjects’ experience. Fu focuses on literacy and how bringing culture and opportunities for authentic language use allows the Savang siblings to practice different kinds of literacy (written, oral, etc) in a contextualized environment (Fu, 1995). Olsen focuses very specifically on race and how it plays a large part in the social and educational school experience of students in a highly multicultural high school. She highlights how a place that seemingly seems very inclusive of its diversity does not live up to its image (Olsen, 1997).

I attempt to add a new analytical lens that focuses on the most salient language ideologies that are present in each setting, concentrating on three specific ideological trends: language as it is connected to power, language as it is connected to race, and language viewed as a deficit. Although the authors talk about language and how it affects their subjects, they rarely dive deeply into what are the underlying beliefs about language are present in their subjects’ words or actions. Language has become an ever present issue in today’s educational practices and debates. English language education, with its complex history and present practice, must be analyzed under critical lenses that examine the many ways it is functioning within the cultural makeup of schools and its’ students. Remaining critical of the language ideologies that educators and students hold about language, whether it be the English language or the home language(s) of the students, is part of this constant analysis of educational policy and practice. This paper aims to explore the following three questions: What language ideologies are encountered throughout these two canonical ethnographies and how do they relate to how the ideologies typically operate in society? Hows are the languages ideologies expressed through the language and actions of the educators, students, and other subjects of these ethnographies? What effects do these language ideologies have the experiences of English Learners? By attempting to answer these questions, I aim to add to the typical discussion which looks at pedagogy, practice, and history, but rarely takes a
deep look into the underlying language beliefs that cause and promote many of the issues we see in these English Learner ethnographical studies.

**A Changing Nation**

As more immigrants from diverse places of the world continue to make the United States their new home, the stakes for teachers and policymakers to do what is best for these students is higher than ever. English learners have continued to rise since in the past decades. Currently, the estimated number is around 4.4 million students, which accounts for 9.9% of the k-12 public school student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Certain areas of the country have a longer historical record of high immigrant population. These tend to be urban areas and the western United States—Alaska, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas. All of these states have English Learners percentages that go above 10%, with California having the highest at 27.7% (U.S Department of Education, 2016).

The strong trend for English Learners to be concentrated in urban hubs will probably continue, however, they are also growing in new counties and suburban areas. Thirty states are experiencing growth in the population of English Learners, with Kansas having the highest with an increase of 4.6% (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). As immigrants continue to enter new parts of the United States, the number of English Learners along with diversity of spoken languages will likely increase as well. Hispanic immigrants showed a dramatic increase between the years 1990 and 2000, but have now slowed down in many previously booming parts of the country. In counties located in states like Alabama and Illinois, Hispanic immigrants are newly arriving and drastically changing previous demographics (Alberti, 2017). Although the Hispanic growth has fallen from 59% to 31% between 2000 to 2010, Asian immigrants have risen in growth rate from 19% to 36% in the same span of time (Piccorossi, 2012). This brings new language diversity to many new parts of the country and in numbers not previously seen. As seen in Figure 1, students with experiences in other languages and limited dominance of English are very present in k-12 public schools. It is
important to note that not all students that have knowledge and mastery of languages other than English need English language instruction and that not all students are foreign born. However, many students do and their needs are ever more salient in K-12 public school education. Additionally, it is important to note that English Language education is not solely a need of immigrant students, but of a highly diverse (in nationality and language practices) population of students. As the nation and our public schools continue to change, we must reflect upon policies and practices in order to truly meet the needs of our students.

English Language Education and Language Ideologies

With the arrival of new immigrants in the past 30 years, national debates and controversies about the role of our public educational system in meeting their needs, especially when it comes to English language education. These conversations about English learners are riddled
with various notions and beliefs about the English language and the many other languages that students bring into our classrooms. Although it is a prominent idea within the field of linguistics that no language is lesser than others, this notion remains largely ignored in the everyday lives of people. Whether it be consciously or unconsciously, the notion that some languages, or some varieties of languages, are in some ways better than others is fairly common throughout the world. The United States, being a linguistically diverse country, is not exempt from these beliefs. This notion of language hierarchies is then combined with other racial, historical, and class related notions to create language ideologies (Lippi-Green, 2001:174).

Despite its diversity, language conflict is largely unknown to most people in the United States. The U.S. has plenty of diverse native, immigrant, and ethnic English variations. Even though the United States has always been home to many languages, historically an image of linguistic hegemony, or idea that in the United States only one language is spoken by all the people, has dominated through many generations. It is perpetuated by the languages used in the press, media, and governmental discourse. It is believed that this began between the 18th and 19th century when the electoral process became almost exclusively monolingual (Sonntag & Pool, 1987). In this way, English began to be tied to a person’s level of citizenship or American belonging. As people wanted the United States to be generally perceived as homogeneously “American” as possible, English language instruction began to be enforce by governing bodies usually controlled by English speaking majority, with or without permission from various native and non-English speaking immigrant communities (Motha, 2014). Additionally, many non-English speaking people gave up learning other languages, even their native tongues, to speak an unmarked English (Sonntag & Pool, 1987).

At times, this image of hegemony was enforced through systemic privilege given to individuals who identified as English proficient or English dominant (Crawford, 2001, p.3). An example of this notion of hegenmony even within English vaarieties is employment discrimination against speakers of African American English, Chicano English, or Southern American
English. These varieties of English are marked because of their ethnic or class ties. Potential employees that speak these varieties of English are dismissed in order to maintain distance between the ethnic groups and social classes that are associated with those English varieties. This systematic privilege has been one of the most efficient ways to promote English learning to non-Standard English speaking populations in the United States. The end results of this systemic privilege to speakers of a certain variety of English has caused a commoditization of what is known as “Standard English”, which is defined as an unmarked dialect of English in the United States (Farr & Song, 2011:653; Lippi-Green, 2001).

Throughout the history of the U.S., there are various examples that show the level at which these linguistic ideologies run in societal structure and even the field of educational research. A salient example of this is the terminology used for the different dialects of English. The use the label “Standard English” acknowledges that there are some forms of English that are “standard” and some that are not, such as American Sign Language, African American English, Spanglish, or Hawaiian Creole English (Godley et al., 2007:104). This kind of idea not only promotes a hierarchical way of thinking of language, but it is also something that I seek to change. However, because of how common this term is within the discourse and discipline, I will continue to use it. However, I would like to make its ideological context very clear.

There are many historical examples that illustrate the level of depth that language ideologies—specifically those that privilege Standard English over all other English variations or languages— influence educational policy making. In the U.S., language policies can often be traced back to power dynamics between the larger English speaking populations and smaller and linguistically different communities. As a way to maintain power, policies were usually made in favor of the larger English speaking population and their beliefs (Crawford, 2001:27). Although language ideologies do not always have a related policy that enforces them in daily life, the power of language ideologies has a strong influence in the implementation of new laws, not always the other way around (Farr & Song, 2011:654).
As I previously mentioned, there are many historical examples of language ideologies playing a large role in both language and general educational policy making and instructional practice. Evidence of these policies can be traced back into British Colonial times and periods of U.S. expansion. In order to keep power in the hands of the English Speaking populations, policies against non-English speaking communities that utilized education as a tool were put in place in areas with large settlements of Native Americans, German settlers, and (previously Mexican) Spanish speaking areas. A commonality among these policies placed upon these communities was an enforced (sometimes by physical force) prohibition of the use other languages besides English during instruction and other civil duties (such as voting or jury trials) (Crawford, 2001:4; Motha, 2014).

Similar policies were enacted in areas overseas that were colonized by the U.S., such as Hawaii and Puerto Rico. In both of these areas, a language was integrated into the community after a period of colonizations (by Spain for Puerto Rico and American plantation farmers for Hawaii). However, these languages established during these initial periods of colonizations—Spanish in Puerto Rico and Hawaiian Creole English in Hawaii—were then set in process to be replaced by Standard American English when the U.S. gained official control of the territories. This was due to fact that in both communities, the English speaking government viewed the English Language as a tool for democratization and imperialism. One way in which they carried through this process of imperialism was through educational language policies, where an educational system was completely redone in order to fully emerge the islands' student population in Standard English (Crawford, 2001:17-19; Motha, 2014:31). For this reason, it is important to note the role of English language teaching as a tool of imperialism, initially for the British crown, and later for the American government (Motha, 2014). The social repercussions—such as a generational erasure of native language learning or a hierarchical language system that favors Standard English—can still be felt today in both communities and in the English language teaching policies and practices (Crawford, 2001).
These historical examples date to periods of American expansion. However, the underlying language ideologies and their effects still remain very salient in the context of today’s language education throughout the United States. Bilingual education or dynamic language education is characterized as methods that build and maintain the student’s native language to learn English and improve overall literacy utilizing various linguistic practices (Garcia, 2009). This multilingual oriented instruction has been found to be much more effective and bring many more literacy benefits than English-Only education (García, 2009; Anderson, 2015). However, most districts still practice, and sometimes enforce through policy, English immersion methods of instruction, with only 2,000 bilingual or dual-language programs nationwide (Anderson, 2015). Most famous is California’s Proposition 227, which in 1998 put very strict bans (essentially abolishing) bilingual schools in all of California. Although California has the largest English Learner populations in the U.S., its policies still reflect many negative linguistic ideologies that then directly affect immigrant communities and non-native English speakers (Anderson, 2015). This ideology that by encouraging full English immersion learners will learn English at a much faster pace, and that bilingual education will only slow down or halt this process still remains central to current pro-English immersion advocates. To some degree, the notion of English as a language for social mobility and citizenship is also seen (Valenzuela, 1999; Crawford, 2001; Rojo, 2017), however, to lesser extent than during American expansion.

The notions of English as it is tied to social mobility and citizenship are very important factors to keep in mind when analyzing the role of ideologies in educational policy and practice. Although at times it is not always the case, most large communities that encourage these English-Only policies believe that their educational methods are in the best interest of English Learners in the United States. However, given the degree by which these ideologies are woven into the makeup of mainstream language education and everyday language thought, it is not unusual to find traces of Standard English centered language ideologies even in communities that have a history of advocacy. A good example of this is the English-
Only rationalization of social mobility for the Hispanic community throughout the 90’s. The majority of the English-Only movements were supported by advocates from the Hispanic community who, regardless of the underlying assimilationist undertones of the cause, were looking to better the community (Crawford, 2000:39; Beck & Allexsah-Snider, 2002).

These policies have very real and salient effects in everyday class instruction. Additionally, they can have lifelong detrimental repercussions in students’ academic and personal lives. Some of the effects that are very common to see are inadequate English instruction and tracking for English language acquisition, which then leads to a cycle of ESL classes without ever being able to pass the requirements necessary to transition to mainstream classes. Related to this is inadequate content education due to inappropriately “watered down” subject curriculum, which then leads to higher drop out and disengagement levels among immigrants and English learners (Valdés, 2001:143). These large scale performance problems are typically also used to justify how a lack of English proficiency in students results in a difficult navigation through primary and secondary education, and thus students should be fully immersed in the English language in order to learn it as soon as possible. This then continues the cycle of inadequate language education and academic content. This rationalization for student failure often puts the blame on the student’s community or the student themselves, but rarely ever amounts to major policy or practice changes, even at the micro level (Valenzuela, 1999). For this reason, entire policy overhauls, even after programs seem to be repeatedly failing, are not common or likely to happen in these cyclical contexts (Valenzuela, 1999).

Similar effects can be seen on a more personal level. Although the macro effects of these ideologically charged policies are widely discussed in the media and press, the effects policies can have on a person by person basis are much less publicized. At the most micro level, notions of subtractive schooling, or schooling that “divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (Valenzuela, 1999: 3), can have serious repercussions on a student’s motivation and engagement, as their
Ethnographies Revisited: English Learners and Language Ideologies

home culture (including linguistic practices), is ignored or belittled through the school’s own educational policies or teacher’s instructional practices. Additionally, case and longitudinal studies have shown it can have deep effects on a student’s feeling of belonging with the larger school community along with causing issues with self-identity (Valenzuela, 1999). In many cases, the ideas and beliefs communicated through these subtractive schooling environments cause an internalization of the language ideologies by the students. These can produce feelings of shame for speaking languages other than English, a sense of marginalization due to language practices that deviate from monolingual Standard English, and self-blame for their academic language hardships (Lee, 2009). On some occasions, these notions are rejected and serve as motivators for student led change (Lee, 2009). However, an additive and welcoming school environment should be provided for all students and not through a series of student demands.

When discussing the state of English language education, it is important to consider its roots, current societal context, and the consequences it can have on students. As previously noted, English language education has its roots in colonization and imperialism and continues to perform its same colonizing roles in new and more subtle ways (Motha, 2014). The ideological concepts about language that emerged during colonialism have not been erased from contemporary language ideology and educational language instruction, and in actuality are very normalized in today’s educational language policies and practices. The oppressive and inadequate environments that these practices create for speakers of non-English languages is very real evidence that these practices need to change in order to provide students with language education that is both successful in its goal of creating authentic environments for language learning, is inclusive of multilingual and multicultural linguistic practices, and empowers students as critical learners. To do this, one must utilize a critical pedagogy that questions our normalized notions of knowledge, language, and language education (Canagarajah, 1999). Through this, English language educators can seek to “understand, reveal, and disrupt the mechanisms of oppression imposed by the established order, suturing the
processes aims of educations to emancipatory goals” (Grande, 2004:25). Thus, creating an environment that not only gives students the tools to navigate the educational and societal system that utilizes the English language, but also gives students the ability to question the societal structures that are imposed around them in and outside of the school contexts. By ignoring the need for critical pedagogy that analyses the role of language ideologies in English language teaching, an ever growing population already composed of millions of students are entering a public school system that views their knowledge and rich linguistic competencies as unrelated to current pedagogical debates or as cause for their systemically induced educational struggles.

**My Trouble is my English: Asian Students and the American Dream**

Danling Fu’s *My Trouble is my English* (1995) is a great narrative of the stories and daily lives of four siblings. The Savangs, a family of nine, came to the United States as refugees of the Laotian Communist takeover after the Vietnam War. In 1990, The Savangs, a formerly well to do business family, had to break up and escape into different refugee camps in Thailand. They were not able to live together in the camps and were not allowed to leave. Guards, Thai soldiers, were “mean” and living conditions were very hazardous. In 1988, the whole family was able to move to Massachusetts and later Riverside, NH. It took about a year for the family to be able to find an apartment that was affordable and large enough for the entire family to live together, for the first time in about fifteen years since Laos was taken over by the Communists (p.18-22).

The family struggles financially. Every single member of the family has a job, including the children that attend school. In 1991, the Savangs accumulated enough savings to buy a house to live comfortably. Fu describes some of the reasons Mr. Savang wanted to move to the United States:
When they left their homeland, they left everything behind except what they wore. But they had a dream, a beautiful dream: to search for a better life in America. That helped them endure losing whatever they had: their land, their houses, their people, and their culture—everything they were familiar with. They believed that they could start a new life in America—their dream life (p.25).

Their move to America was a very hopeful moment after experiencing the many traumas of war. Their need to work very hard in order to sustain their family is only one of the many adjustment issues The Savangs have to work through. Their family was broken up for many years, now they must learn to live together in one house (p.25), they must also adjust to social conditions in their hometown (p.26), and adjust to their school environment (p.27). Fu makes it very clear that The Savangs are still not quite living their “American Dream”. Although they are grateful for the opportunity to start over in the United States, there were many unexpected struggles that have been hard for them to work through, for both the children and the adults.

Fu’s ethnography works to give a story to a population of English Learners whose experience is not always nuanced. The Savang siblings are refugees of war. Their experiences in fleeing from countries and in refugee camps were very difficult, however, upon entering the United States, their lives have continued to be difficult. They came to the United States to find their “American Dream”, however, this has been hard to accomplish. Fu uses a framework that concentrates on literacy and culture to shed light on social and educational issues faced by the Savangs and how they affect each individual sibling in a unique way. She looks closely at the different kinds of literacy developed and demonstrated by each sibling, concentrating on how the school’s inability to view literacy in in a more culturally engaging and open way. She highlights ways in which poetry, arts, and songs are engaging ways to view the siblings abilities in English, while utilizing literacy skills they are familiar with. Additionally, Fu works against the often posed “model minority” myth of Asian students in U.S. school (Li, 2005). The Savang siblings work very hard at school and home, but this has
not reaped the academic success that they would hope for. In this way, Fu’s work nuances the often monolithic framework that is often used to understand the experiences of East Asian English Learners.

**Made in America: Immigrant Students in our Public Schools**

Olsen’s (1997) work is much different from Fu’s. Olsen concentrates her study on an entire high school and how race interacts with the experience of immigrant students. Madison High School is a very diverse school in an urban California city. Her study specifically looks at how immigrants are raced within the school environment and what the process of “Americanization” looks for them within the social environment of Madison High.

The school in focus highlights many of ways schools were seeing change during the immigrant wave of the 1990’s. At that time, Madison High School had been changing from a previously white working-middle class school, to a highly culturally, ethnic, and linguistically diverse school with immigrant students from all over the world—Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese, Pakistani and many others. At this time, the school is 60% non-White, about 25% of the students are English Learners or come from a home where languages other than English are spoken, and 20% were born in a different country (p.32). Even though the student body has seen a large change in a span of 20-10 years, the faculty is still largely white (p.33).

Madison High has a population of 1,800 students. When describing the school by the kind of student organizations present, the yearbook, and general school environment, Olsen describes a very diverse student body with a large visibility for its students of color. She cites slogans from the Afro-American Society, the Filipino Student Union, and states that the Spirit Queen runner up was Asian (p.34-36). However, as is the focus of the book, Olsen goes to describe the many educational issues, racial and identity struggles, isolation, and racialization experienced by immigrant students at Madison High. She leaves a clear idea that although schools like Madison High have gone through a period of high diversification
due to immigration for a considerable amount of time, and has made strides to be more inclusive, there is still a very long way to go. When it comes to being truly inclusive of immigrant students, having discussions about race, and making the school environment a place for true inclusivity and equity for a multicultural school and larger society, Madison High still needs many changes to happen.

Although there is so much about Olsen’s work worth mentioning, I think the main takeaway about her work is best summarized in the following words:

Madison High, one multicultural high school campus in one of many communities being changed by immigration, demonstrates how a community can both “celebrate its diversity”, yet continue to reproduce a stratified and inequitable racial and language hierarchy and a narrow version of what it means to be “American” (p. 239).

This notion of veiled progressivism that is seemingly accepting of multiculturalism is constantly observable in Olsen’s work. The consequences of which are exclusionary of students that do not fit the archetype of the what it means to be “American”. Through a strict racialized social structure that makes up the social structure of the school, immigrant students are excluded to labels that essentialize part of their identity. Highlighting that even when ethnic minority students are the majority in numbers, the structures that exclude them are still prominent and hard to escape (Olsen, 1997).

**Theoretical Framework for Analysis**

In order to develop critical pedagogical practices, one must become aware of how our notions about knowledge and language are embedded within educational practices, the school environment, and greater society. This consciousness is the first step necessary for further exploring language ideologies in English language teaching (Motha, 2014). This section looks
to further develop some of the language ideologies that have been previously mentioned in order to create a critical lens to examine two ESL ethnographies.

Language ideologies can, but are not limited to, being defined as a theoretical notion that seeks to “simultaneously problematize speaker’s consciousness of their language and discourse as well as their positionality (in political economic systems) in shaping beliefs, proclamations, and evaluations of linguistic forms and discourse practices” (Kroskrity, 2007). Additionally, I add to this definition, which concentrates on the political and economic nature of language perceptions, a raciolinguistic perspective, which aims to analyze “language’s central role in the construction, maintenance, and transformation of racial and ethnic identities.” (Alim, 2016). Utilizing this definition, I aim to understand the role of language in thinking about positionality within economic and political social structures, and the creation and categorization within of racial identities. In order to narrow the wide scope created by such a broad definition of language ideologies and their forms of operation, I will concentrate on three ideological trends that are salient in the current English language educational context: language and capital, language and race, and language as deficit.

Language ideologies operate in many distinct ways that may or may not always be a conscious action in part of the speaker or the listener. Many times, the notions held in place by the speaker or the choice of language used during conversation may seem as “self-evident” or “commonsense”, however these notions are responsive or rooted in a particular social positioning (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). These notions of held beliefs about language and the people that utilize language is then communicated, both directly and indirectly, through words or actions. Irvine & Gal (2000), highlight three ways in which language ideologies have historically been evidenced to work. They highlight icononization, fractal recursivity, erasure as ways in which linguistic practices serve to essentialize populations, create differences within groups, and ignore or render invisible people or activities on the basis on their linguistic practices (Irvine & Gal, 2000). Woolard & Schieffelin (1994), when describing the ways in which language has interacted with politics, lists the ideas of language hegemony
(in some ways a form of erasure), symbolic revalorization, and linguistic appropriation as ways in which linguistic beliefs are historically and politically significant in their operation (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). The way in which many linguistic ideologies may render discrimination on the basis of social positioning is publicly acceptable in ways that racial or ethnic discrimination is not (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994).

**Language and Capital**

Language is inevitably tied to creations of society, and it inevitably reflects the structures that we see present in society at large (Coulmas, 2017). In this section, I want to highlight the role of language in present structures of power and capital. As previously mentioned, the systematic privileges given to speakers of Standard English have commodified this variation of English within our social structure. Although I believe this to be true, I want to broaden from the notion of Standard English being the only variety of English that can be commodified. Bourdieu (1986) explains that “cultural goods can be appropriated both materially—which presupposes economic capital—and symbolically—which presupposes cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986). Because the students that are entering the ESL classrooms are marked as having zero or limited English proficiency, I will argue that they may not necessarily strive for Standard English, but more generally for more basic English proficiency in both its spoken and written form (this includes mastering syntax, semantics, morphology, etc). Mastering these aspects of language will allow for them to understand language as it is spoken and written without struggle, along with allowing them to easily produce the language and be understood by others. By becoming capable of easy understanding and comprehension, one’s life is made easier and “better”, as one can now self-advocate and gain a level of self-sovereignty—as one is now able to navigate a society that places English language mastery as nearly necessary without the need of an intermediary for translation or explanation.

In explaining the role of language in the political economy, Del Precio, Flubacher &
Duchène (2017) state:

\[\text{...we define language as a resource that, under certain political-economic conditions, can be exchanged for other symbolic or material resources (Heller, 2001, 2010). Political economy is then conceptualized as the technologies and processes governing the valuation of resources as well as their production, circulation, and consumption within a place and at a specific moment in time. (p.55)}\]

Given that students, when entering the United States, become active and aware of the political economy, which is as present in school environments as it is in any other part of society, they become aware of the role of language in making the current and larger societal system. One can argue that language and language features help position individuals within the social structure (Del Precio, Flubacher & Duchène, 2017). Having a nonexistent or very limited English mastery, then puts an individual outside of in the margins of the social structure at large, and in many ways the school environment that functions within. In this sense, English can carry with it cultural capital, in that it enables individuals to be part of the social structure and reap the benefits that come with this. For example, upon being able to understand language, one is able to communicate and take part in conversations, discussions, and be social. Building connections with other peoples then allows them to use them as social resources or knowledge, thus building on their culture capital.

Even when some level of proficiency is achieved, markers that deviate from the standard can also carry with them a correlation within the social structure (Del Precio, Flubacher & Duchène, 2017). Although understanding English language in of itself is seen as an important cultural asset, it is also important to note that because of the high socio-cultural value granted to Standard English, English learners that are striving to learn English are more than likely aiming to acquire what they view as Standard English, which is the variety taught in schools and used in many of the classroom materials. Of significant importance are grammar or English textbooks and dictionaries, which serve as example of the kind of English students are supposed to learn. Through the use of these materials, the dominance
of Standard English is passed onto students (Hanks, 2005). Through this, a social hierarchy, based on the access to power and capital, is built on “the basis of the association of different verbal style, registers, or varieties with different positions” (Hanks, 2005). This allows new coming students with limited English proficiency, or no English proficiency, to quickly learn that Standard English is the English variety most useful for access to power and capital, and therefore, all other varieties of English—whether it be limited or socially marked—are less desirable in acquisition. Additionally, one can also add to this the notion of social mobility, as one gains “better” and “more proper” English, more opportunities, many socioeconomic in nature, will become available (Valenzuela, 1999; Crawford, 2001). In this sense, English, and even more so Standard English, can carry with it access to Economic Capital in forms job opportunities.

By making the association between the English language, and the specific variety of Standard English, English Language Learners are susceptible to the idea that by learning English and improving their English, they will automatically become part of the social structure of society and have access to the cultural and economic capital that they may recognize in their English speaking peers. However, it is not as simple as it may seem. Although everything might point to the idea that the closer one may become to achieving an unmarked Standard English the closer one is to obtaining the cultural and economic capital held by those who speak the language, because culture and economic capital still remain in the hands of those in power, the resources are not proportionally given (Bourdieu, 1986). Culture capital, and the economic capital that comes from obtaining it, carries explicit and implicit codes and rules that are available to those that are already part of the Culture of Power. Part of this Culture of Power is language. Some aspects of language may be more explicit, such as obtaining mastery in Standard English, and some are more implicit, such as knowing the tones one must use to respond to a request in ways that seem appropriate or polite for the situation (Delpit, 1988). These implicit rules are difficult to obtained, however, without them the culture capital held by those in power is even less accessible. For
an English Learner that hopes to improve their access to the culture and economic capital that they see in their English speaking peers through acquisition of a variety of English, including Standard English, their efforts can seem almost futile. They may then become discouraged by to see that their efforts do not provide proportional amounts of access to the social structure of the school or greater social mobility.

**Language and Race**

Language has an important in the formation, maintenance, and transformation of ethnic and racial identities. In describing the tenets that *raciolinguistics* tries to solidify and build perspective upon, Alim (2016) lists “...understanding of how ethnoracial identities are styled, performed, constructed through minute features of language... as well as diverse modes of interaction from embodies, face-to-face conversations to widely circulating media discourses” (Alim, 2016). In forming ethnic and racial identities, it is the “minute features” (which range from things like phonetic differences, distinctive syntax, lexicon, etc.) that create a language that deviates from what one might consider “standard” and marks an individual as part of a member of a specific community. The historical, political, or cultural reasons why these languages are created vary depending on the population and the context in which such language emerges. However, it is because of the group’s shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of these communities co-construct these languages and pass them to generations (Charity Hudley, 2017). A good example of this is African American Language (AAL), which is primarily spoken by the African American population in the United States. Created through shared historical, social, and cultural experiences, AAL and its distinguishable linguistic features is another way for the African American population to create a shared unity. Although AAL, in all or some of its form, is also spoken by other non-African American populations, it is still connected to the experiences—such as oppression, resistance, and achievements—of African Americans in the United States (Paris, 2016). Because of this, AAL is racialized, in that it is indicative of the cultural making
of the African American community. Speakers that utilize AAL are then assumed to have learned the language through participation and engagement within the African American community and culture.

Populations co-construct their own language as a way to show ethnic or cultural unity. By speaking their language, they distinguish themselves as part of that ethnic or cultural group. However, apart from the speaker, the listener plays a very important role in racializing the language and the individual that speaks it. Flores & Rosa (2015), describe this as the role of the listening subject as helping to “understand how particular racialized people’s linguistic practices can be stigmatized regardless of their whether they correspond to Standard English” (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Because of the dominance and power granted to Standard English and the people that speak it, individuals that are associated with speaking other varieties of English (or that may be viewed as having an “accent”) are racialized because of their appearance, culture and non-English language practices regardless if they are actually utilizing different linguistic resources that are not associated with Standard English. Due to the varying language ideologies that might be associated with speaking other varieties of English—such as AAL or Spanglish—the listening subjects may apply these ideologies regardless if the speakers is actually speaking what might otherwise be considered Standard English, thus the speaker’s efforts to utilize a different set of linguistic resources that are not marked in hopes to evade the often negative beliefs attached to other varieties of English are futile (Rosa, 2016). This becomes particularly troubling when considering the amount of emphasis put on English Language Learners and other learners of Standard English to speak what is considered “appropriate” in school settings. The notion that all students must learn Standard English in school and learn when it is appropriate to use it becomes much more problematic when one considers the role of the listening subject in determining whether or not the student is speaking “appropriate” English (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

The notion that language minority individuals can at times not evade being linguistically racialized is very important when considering what this means to their identity within the
social structure. Although non-English speakers may no longer be considered "foreign" by any means of the definition (being that they were born in the United States, have lived and contributed to society for many years, are deeply adjusted to the social structure of the United States' society, and may even be proficient English speakers), subtle linguistic markers can serve as to create differences in identity, and accents—particularly those of non-English languages such as Spanish, Chinese, or Arabic—can be associated with "foreignness", thus creating a racialized framework of "Americans", usually white and English monolingual, as the archetype of a legitimate member of society (Rosa, 2016; Chun, 2016; Lo, 2016). This highlights how racialization is also conducted through "subtle discursive patterns and not simply in words that are, in and of themselves, considered 'racists'" (Lo, 2016). Being capable of speaking Standard English, and being perceived by the listening subject of doing so, may seem necessary in order to be perceived as a legitimate member of the current social structure. However, because they can be racialized as "foreign" regardless if their linguistic practices resemble those of the language majority, how much their English practices resemble Standard English is less indicative of how much they are perceived as a legitimate member of society (Lo, 2016).

Because of the monoglossic ideologies that surround Standard English in the United States non-Standard English speakers, especially those who speak non-English languages, are viewed as "other", or not belonging. Monoglossic language ideologies refers to the ideas regarding monolingualism in a normalized standard form as representative of what a nation should aspire (Flores & Rosa, 2015, Garcia, 2009). A linguistically homogeneous nation is viewed as strongly united (Flores, 2013). Those who deviate and are not monolingually proficient in what has been determined as the standardized language, in this case Standard English, are othered, and therefore perceived as a lesser contributor to the unity of the nation (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). Even when individuals are proficient in Standard English, if their listening subjects do not believe them to be proficient (whether it be because of their proficiency in other languages or because of other factors), they are still considered foreign
and ultimately marginalized (Lo, 2016).

This can have a great effect in how students are viewed within the context of the ESL classroom. The faculty and administration has a large role in determining the proficiency of the student and whether or not students need to be enrolled in ESL classes. If the administration and faculty, which act as listening subjects, are carrying with them these raciolinguistic ideologies, then this could act as an impediment to having the language skills properly assessed, as the teacher could deem their students unproficient even if they are utilizing the linguistic resources that one might otherwise associate with Standard English (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Additionally, if English Learners are socially ostracized by peers for their ability to speak another language, this may cause other students to not socialize with them, thus creating a very limited social environment for the English Learners to use English in authentic ways, along with ostracizing them from the general social structure of the school (Motha, 2014).

It is important to point out that other peers, classmates, and educators can play a large role in the marginalization and othering of language minority students and immigrants. Students can internalize the message that only one language, in this case the dominant language of Standard English as it used in the classroom, is indicative of power and progress. This can then cause them to try to distance themselves from being associated to other languages of “lesser” power (Lee, 2009). For English speakers, this might mean ostracizing non-English speakers and English Learners. For English Learners, this might mean thinking of rejecting their native language(s) for the purpose of being associated only with the language in power (Lee, 2009).

**Language as Deficit**

English Learners are often ideologically associated with the concept of “lacking” by those in power. The term English Learner, and many of the other terms that are commonly used such as Limited English Proficiency and English Language Learners. Limited English Proficiency
solely defines a student by their lack of English speaking ability. English Language Learners and English Learner define a student by their strive to learn a new language. However, all three terms ignore the fact that these students already have proficiency in one or several languages (García, 2008). This notion that non-English speakers, who more than likely arrive to the United States and to schools with a rich linguistic background and language practices, are deficient because of their language background is common inside and outside the school environment (Zentella, 2005; Lippi-Green, 2012). As Motha (2014) explains, this deficit way of viewing language learners, “represents an inability to speak English as the sole distinguishing characteristic of an ESOL student” (Motha, 2014:49, Valdés, 2001).

Second language acquisition is different from first language acquisition in several ways. One of the main ways in which it is different is the ability of the learners to use their previous language knowledge to aid in the acquisition of the second language. Using their knowledge and language practices, second language learners make structural generalizations about how their new language works and how to use it. This at times leads them to make generalizations that are incorrect. However, having the metalinguistic awareness, which can begin to develop in young learners and is often found in adolescents and adults, can really aid in predicting language patterns (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Utilizing this existing linguistic knowledge is highly beneficial. However, under the deficit model of language learning, the student’s native language practices are viewed as more detrimental to their language learning than they actually are. Thus, their rich language resources are ignored.

This ideology of viewing non-English language practices as a deficit for students can have very detrimental effects on a student’s educational pathway. García (2010) argues that subtractive bilingualism, which is defined as second language schooling that seeks to subtract a student’s home language or languages through second language acquisition, contradicts and eradicates the many research backed cognitive benefits that come with allowing students to utilize their home language practices along with their new language practices in ways that are dynamic and promote language growth (García, 2010). Additionally, in occasions when
the proper assessment of English proficiency is not able to occur, home practices may become the indicative for placement in ESL tracks. English Learners are often ostracized and viewed as having "second class status" (Valenzuela, 1999, Valdés, 2001). Reinforcing the notion of their language being a deficit to their academic abilities.

The difference in the way the linguistic practices of immigrant students are treated in the educational system is strikingly different from English speakers learning a second language. Language majority students usually experience additive schooling, language education that wishes to add on their linguistic practices, when learning a new language (Gardia, 2010). Thus, making it easier and capitalizing on the idea that they are building their linguistic repertoires on one another and not in constant friction. This emphasizes the notion that language ideologies about language learning are highly based on the student’s home language practices, race, culture, and class.

These notions that regard non-English language practices form English Learners as deficit can create tension for a student’s self-identity and their relationship with their home linguistic practices. Morren Lopez (2011) highlights how students can internalize language ideologies from a very early age, realizing how languages are viewed in a hierarchical framework even when this ideology is not presented as so in the classroom (Morren Lopez, 2001). In her case study, first grade students in a Spanish immersion class show evidence of viewing English as the language of power and prestige, even when both English and Spanish are utilized ubiquitously in the classroom. This highlights how students are very aware of the hierarchical language structure that they see in society at large and how they are able to internalize into their language practices (Morren Lopez, 2001). Additionally, notions of self-blame for their linguistic practices that go against the assumed Standard English monolingual practices are sometimes seen (Lee, 2009). Navajo and Pueblo young adults that attended public school interviewed by Lee (2009) describe feelings of inadequacy for not speaking their native language, which they were never formally taught and did not use in school. Although their linguistic practices were highly shaped by the societal standards, they place the blame on
Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of how the authors and the subjects of each of the ethnographies are understanding language, I utilized a form of thematic analysis in order to find patterns within the works. I utilized the work of Fu and Olsen as my sources of data. When reading the two ethnographies, I read closely for instances in which the author or the subjects of the work talked about language. I marked these down and wrote any thoughts that I had regarding the ideological language beliefs that I felt were present in that bit of information. I then took these instances, reviewed, and then classified them under several themes (Merriam, 2009), which after revisions narrowed down to three main themes: Language as Capital, Language as Race, and Language as Deficit. I chose these three themes as they seemed broad enough to include many instances, but specific enough to answer and suffice of my analysis. Additionally, they seemed the most appropriate for analyzing the specific works of these authors. Although both Fu and Olsen used specific lenses when talking about their word—Fu focused largely on the Savang’s family everyday relationship with literacy, while Olsen had a large emphasis on race—I attempted to add a new analytic lens that focused on language ideology and its implications in the experiences of English Learners. Although there were instances in which the authors already do this, they do not do it to an extent that makes it the focus of their ethnographic analysis.

Initially, I considered looking at only one language ideology per work. I had decided to do this because the works tell the story of very different communities. Additionally, the authors do a very different job in describing their subject’s lives and stories. However, given that the all three language ideologies are present in each work in slightly different ways because of their context, I decided to utilize all three language ideologies in both ethnographies. The two works are different, especially in that one dedicate their entire work to only a small
number of subjects (really taking the time to develop their experiences in and outside the school) while one takes a more holistic approach looking at a whole school and its social structure as its framework. This is a key difference in how the work is presented and played a large role in deciding to keep both works separate in the analysis.

**Practice and Policy**

In both ethnographies, evidence of language ideologies embedded in policy and practice were common. In Fu (1995), Some of the ways in which the Savang siblings talk about themselves and the way some teachers talk about the siblings show that they view their non-English language practices as a deficit to their capabilities. Tran, who was very successful in school when he lived in Laos, describes some of his frustration with his school achievements, “In Laos, we memorized everything... But here I know I am dumb. My trouble is my English. I just couldn’t learn it well. I don’t know why” (p.42). By looking at this we see Tran believes that English is key to his academic struggles. The fact that he considers his English abilities as his “trouble” and believes that in the United States he is “dumb” implies he sees his frustration as a reflection of his intellect. With a similar message, one of this teachers describes Tran in the following way:

He told me he was very smart back in Laos, a student leader there. But here he can’t do anything well. His English is very poor. I have a hard time understanding him. He is frustrated and seems impatient with himself. He wants to see good results immediately. Since he can’t do it, he is very frustrated... He talks fast, he writes fast, and it’s hard to understand him and his writing. I think this is his way of covering his problems, by talking a lot and shuffling pages all the time. He just can’t settle down (p.43).

In this quote the teacher seems to communicate many of the things Tran seems to be doing wrong without offering any kind of solution or pointing out any positives. Here Fu highlights
the frustration that is felt by Tran, but does offer much insight as to what exactly is the underlying assumption behind Tran’s teachers comments. Cham, is also described in this way by his teacher. Fu describes a meeting between Cham’s English teacher and the director of the ESL program:

...she could not stop complaining about Cham’s poor abilities... In the end, she claimed that Cham’s English skills were too limited for him to learn to read or write in her class (p.136).

Just like Tran, the teachers highlight the student’s English proficiency as the cause of their academic issues. In these instances Fu, highlights the frustrations she sometimes felt when she was part of these meetings, but she does not point out the underlying deficit notion the teacher has about Cham (Zentella, 2005; Lippi-Green, 2012).

This notion that the students’ non-English linguistic practices are a problem for their English learning is reinforced with the following comment from an ESL teacher at Madison High:

I’m really not sure our resources would be best put into bilingual teachers anyway. After all, what they need is English as soon as possible. I think we’re holding them back if we put them in classes where they can fall back on using their home language (p.101).

These examples show a highly deficit way of thinking of non-English linguistic practices (Zentella, 2005; Lippi-Green, 2012). Olsen indirectly highlights this as an underlying notion, presumably asking a prompting question to gauge what were teachers opinions on bilingual education and, underlyingly, their students home language practices. However, she does not reflect directly on the language ideologies that are present. For the three teachers cited, it is a lack English proficiency that causes frustration and is an impediment for the student’s learning. Cham’s teacher claims that because he does not speak English, he could not learn to read or write in her class, essentially saying that he could only learn reading and
writing (a skill that is present in any language) if he just spoke English. An example of erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2000), the teacher erases any literacy that Cham might have outside of reading and writing or in another language. For the teachers, the students home language does not contribute, and is actually detrimental to the students English acquisitions, a large misconception to the research regarding a second language acquisition after the critical period (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

None of these ever question whether their pedagogy could be adjusted to fit the needs of students, nor that there are other reasons why they might be struggling with the material. The students and their linguistic practices are solely blamed for the student’s struggle for learning a new language, a common notion in subtractive education (Zentella, 2005; Garcia, 2010). When asked about the possibility of bilingual education, it does not seem like the Madison High ESL teacher believes this could be anyhow beneficial. As is typical of language deficit ideologies and subtractive schooling (Garcia, 2010). When thinking of the effects this way of thinking can have on the students, one can interpret Tran’s belief that he is “dumb” in America as him internalizing the kinds of things he feels when doing the classwork or hears when teachers talk about or to him. This self-blame is causing Tram to think that the root of his issues are his linguistic practices and his inability to learn Standard English (Lee, 2009), never allowing him to shift the focus to how the social structure of the school or the language ideologies of his educators may also be affecting how is able to learn the new language.

This deficit way of thinking about students is also reflected in the terminology and English programs utilized at Madison High. The school utilizes the term Limited English Proficient (LEP) to refer to the students that are learning English at Madison High (p.32). Similar to the non-official term utilized by the students, ESLers (p.65), these terms reduce the identity of the students to their lack of English proficiency and fail to recognize the rich linguistic backgrounds that these students already posses (Motha, 2014). They are subtractive in nature, as their native linguistic practices are not seen as relevant. The only defining feature
is the student’s need to learn English (Garcia, 2010).

This notion that fails to recognize the linguistic practices that English Learners already possess is also visible in the curriculum utilized by the school. Olsen described the ESL program this way:

Although the courses designed for LEP students are a vast improvement... the institutional arrangements at Madison High still provide insufficient English Language development and still prevent access to a full academic core curriculum. The result is that Madison is a world in which those who are not English speaking are precluded from learning the English that they know full well is necessary for acceptance and success in U.S. society...most newcomers attempt to abandon their mother tongues while still on the school site (p.92).

This description fits very well into the idea of subtractive schooling of non-English speakers (Garcia, 2010). Olsen goes on to describe that Madison High utilizes sheltered classes, or content classes with only English Learners. These classes are known to be “easier” than the mainstream classes, or thought about as the “lowest” of the classes (p.102). Although Olsen clearly criticizes how detrimental this is for students, she does not look deeply as to how this is a case of subtractive schooling. The tracking she describes isolates, stigmatizes, and fails to give English Learners content material that is at par with their English speaking peers (Valenzuela, 1999). This kind of tracking is not unusual for English Learners and can have a very cyclical effect where students are never able to integrate into the social structure of the school, are not given the opportunity to learn and utilize English in authentic social contexts with English speakers, and continue to fall behind in the content material, thus increasing their stay in the LEP track and decreasing their chances of educational success (Valenzuela, 1999; Valdés, 2001).
Social Repercussions

Fu and Olsen make it very clear throughout their works that immigrant students and English Learners are socially isolated and excluded within the social structure of their schools. Aside from their family, the Saving siblings do not seem to have many friends. Similarly, the siblings bring up their language as a barrier to having friends. Tran describes some of his frustration in interacting with his classmates, part of it is a language barrier, however he describes a bit more as well, “Sometimes I wish I could be just like them [his American peers]. They know everything in this country. They know how to interact with teachers and other students” (p.39). In a similar way, Sy—the youngest—expresses similar thoughts as Tran:

I want to have American friends, but I don’t know how. I can’t talk like them because of my English. They talk about others behind their back all the time, I can’t do that. They fool around, I don’t want to be like them (p.63).

Both Tran and Sy mention their English as being part of the issue behind making friends. However, there is more to it than just language. Although it definitely plays a role, knowing what to say and how to say it are just as important. English holds a level of cultural capital for both siblings, as they believe that learning the social context of when and how the language is used is very important (Bourdieu, 1986). Apart from language, there are certain codes or rules that they do not seem to know (Delpit, 1988), but that allow their English speaking peers to know “how to interact with teachers and other students”. In these instances, Fu points to a cultural dissonance and the siblings perceptions of their English as a cause for isolation (p.63), however, she does not reflect on how social capital and their peers also play a large part.

Giving the opposite perspective, Olsen describes how some of the U.S. born students describe their immigrant and English Learning peers:

Many of them complain that “those foreigners only speak to themselves” or “they just want to hang out with others that speak their own language (p.52).
Adding to the actions taken by U.S. born students, an immigrant student from Mexico, who has been at Madison for three years describes her experience as she tried to be integrated into the social structure:

Why do the native born laugh at the immigrant students? Mostly I find that immigrant students feel badly about things that the native born students laugh at—like the way the immigrant dress, the way they play sports, their language, which are [sic] concerned to me (p.50).

These two examples highlight how English Learners are viewed as excluded as legitimate members of the social structure by U.S. born students because of their linguistic practices and inability to quickly imitate the social behaviors of U.S. born students. As race is the focus of Olsen’s analysis, she directly and indirectly points out the highly difficult racialized environment in which immigrant students at Madison High as a part of in these instances. However, she does not directly address the way language also works as a tool for racialization. The idea of immigrant students as “foreigners” is a prominent message in Madison High. Under analysis, it seems a like a politically correct term that serves to “other” the students that do not speak English and exclude students that, just like them, should be legitimate members of the school community. A form of iconization (Irvine & Gal, 2001), the notion of making immigrant students “foreign” describes and linguistically racialized framework regarding what a legitimate member of the society looks and sounds like (Lo, 2016). Linguistic practices are used as an excuse to exclude the English Learners from the social structure, regardless of how much the students might want and may be putting effort into their inclusion (Lo, 2016), like we see the Saving siblings doing. These two instances seem to share an idea that immigrant students are isolated in part because of their lack of cultural capital, some of which stems from their linguistic practices that differ from that of the U.S.-born students (Bourdieu, 1986). However, it seems that alongside language, social cues and norms, such as how to act and dress, play a large role. These point to more implicit codes and rules that are expected but not explicitly stated (Delpit, 1988). In both
cases, the blame is put on the immigrant student. It does not seem that U.S.-born students make an effort to be inclusive of various linguistic practices for they laugh and ridicule their immigrant peers, a very explicit and hurtful way to community social exclusion.

As a way to aid their social exclusion, students attempt to assimilate to the language and culture of their U.S. born or English speaking peers. At Madison, this process of “Americanization” is even referred to by the students as “taking off your turban”, in honor of a student that supposedly took off his turban because he could not take the pressure of being racialized as a foreigner (p.38-39). This is a particularly interesting example of terminology, as it directly points of a loss of a cultural marker that is often associated with a minority religion in the United States that faces harsh discrimination. The notion of “taking off one’s turban”, is then viewed as a practical representation of cultural and religious assimilation for the sake of social inclusion. In addition to this, however, Olsen makes it very clear that the racialization that immigrants students go through does not give them a chance to be integrated fully into the social structure in the same as their U.S.-born peers, as no matter what they do, because of the race and language practices, they will never be be truly “American”.

In describing this feeling of never truly being able to feel and be recognized as an “American”, an Afghan immigrant student from Madison High says that being American is impossible unless you are either white or black. She goes on to describe:

The rest are not real Americans. But the immigrants most of us wish to be Americans and try. And they become more and more like Americans. And they want to hang out with the kids who are more American. But you can never really get there. We can speak English; we can wear the clothes. But we aren’t the right religion; we just aren’t the same. You can never really get there (p.43).

The student describes how even if they change their linguistic practices and imitate the socially accepted appearance, they will still be racialized as foreigners because they not white nor black and because of their religion. It is important to note that the student seems
to pin point the role of the U.S. students as the defining racializing subject and gatekeeper to the social structure of the school. Similar to the argument posed by Flores & Rosa (2015), the immigrant students and English Learners are racialized even when they speak what would otherwise be considered Standard English and have act in accordance to the culture of power (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Delpit, 1988). Because of the role of the listening subject in determining whether someone is or is not speaking Standard English, the efforts, as pointed out by the student, are futile as they will never be considered “American” by their U.S.-born peers because of their appearance and various other cultural and ethnic factors (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This goes in sharp contrast to the underlying hopes that Tran, Sy, and the student who “took off his turban” spoke about and acted as a result of their social exclusion. The Afghan Madison student cited is very aware that inclusion as a legitimate member in the larger social structure of the school is determined by their peers and not by the immigrant student’s or English Learners’s actual efforts to assimilate.

**English as Social Mobility**

An interesting notion that was very present in Fu’s work was English as a tool for social mobility. This is not a very surprising idea as in the title Fu mentions “The American Dream”. Throughout the introduction, The Savang parents make it very clear that they want their children to have a good life in America and that they can only do this through education (p.30). However, Fu makes it clear that school for the Savang siblings is very difficult, for a variety of reasons. The Saving siblings (Tran age 19, Paw age 16, Cham age 17, and Sy age 14), are overworked, socially isolated, and struggling to maintain good grades at school. Although these issues are cause by many reasons, throughout the book the siblings refer to their English as the main reasons why they are struggling in school and in their home life. For the Savang siblings, their inability to speak “good English” is keeping them from doing well in school, having a fulfilling social life, and planning their future.
All of the Savang siblings express the desire to go to college and be successful in school. The school that they attend tracks students according to their academic achievement. All of the Savang siblings, with the exception of Paw, are tracked in the lowest achieving group. Paw works very hard to complete all her homework and do the cooking for the whole family every night. When talking about her daily life she says, “The most exciting thing for me is to get good grades. I want A’s in everything” (p.49). Fu then describes her a bit further, “Everyday she memorizes the words in the vocabulary book, few of which she has every heard. She believes that memorizing those words will help her speak better English” (p.49). Although it is not explicitly said by Paw or Fu, it seems that Paw believes that memorizing vocabulary words, something that is not part of her daily homework, will improve her English, therefore, her grades in an almost transactional way. In other words, more vocabulary will equal “better” English. However, it is later described how even with this intense vocabulary development, Paw still struggles to pass languages and literacy tests (p.52).

The siblings are very sure that in order to succeed in the United States they need to go to college. Although they seem to view a college education as a guaranteed way to having better jobs and overall quality of life, they are very wary of the ways in which their English abilities can interfere with these goals. Fu states that Tran used to believe that speaking English would give him everything, but now thinks a bit differently:

I want everything to be in control. But now everything is fifty percent uncertain, actually nothing is certain. I don’t know what I can do or what I want to be. It all depends on my English. If my English is good, I can make plans, but know I don’t know (p.43).

Although Tran might have lost some optimism, he is still very sure that he has a problem and that his “bad” English is the cause. When thinking about her future, Paw describes similar feelings to Tran stating:

I don’t know whether I can get into college because of my English. I’ll have to
take the TOEFL...and I am worried about that test. I am not sure I can do it well in order to get into college (p.50).

Paw has aspirations to be a nurse, but believes her English is making her goals less achievable. Although he is younger, Cham expresses similar ambiguity about his future because of his English, “I don’t know what subjects will help me in the future. Maybe English, if I can speak it well, and know more English, I can get a good job” (p.56). All three siblings describe their job uncertainty as cause by their inability to speak “good” English. It seems that to them, that “good” English, which seems to be Standard English or the kind they read in their text books (p.40), is the only way to have a successful life or enroll in college. For Paw, Tran, and Cham, being accepted into college will mean the ability to get a job that they enjoy and will sustain them economically (as Paw wants to be a nurse and Tran an airplane mechanic). In all these instances, Fu highlights the concerns of the students, but does not evaluate very deeply what other problems are also causing the Savang siblings to rely so heavily on solely their proficiency in English.

For the Savang siblings, English, and the opportunities that come from speaking English “well”, seem to carry a large economic capital as it seems almost transactional in the economic benefits that it can bring (Del Precio, Flabucher & Duchène, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999) for the students and their family. As Valenzuela (1999) points out, this is a common idea with English Learners, and to some extent it is very true, as speaking English and speaking Standard English will equal better job opportunities (Valenzuela, 1999). However, acquisition of economic capital, especially to the level that the Savang siblings aspire, is not as simple as it seems and simply emulating those in the Culture of Power will not yield proportional amounts of capital as expected (Delpit, 1988, Bourdieu, 1986). This is evident as Paw’s hard work trying to memorize vocabulary has not been enough to allow her to leave the ESL track in school (p.52). Learning a new language is very complex, and their educational context is not giving them the many tools that would make English and many other skills easier for them to master. Believing that the only reason or solution to their
economic and educational struggles is English ignores the many institutional and societal barriers that is making the “American Dream” difficult to achieve.

Conclusion

The immigrant population in the United States is rapidly growing and changing. As this population changes, so do our public schools. Racial, cultural, and language diversity are ever more present all over the United States. As the students that we serve in our public schools change, so should our educational policies, practices, and critical lenses by which we analyze our current educational needs. As it is often seen, the educational problems that are described in works such as Fu’s and Olsen’s are still very present more than a decade later.

It would not be irrational to say that the problems described in Fu’s and Olsen’s English Learner ethnographies have been present in the United States for many generations in different forms. English education has deep and dark roots in United States’ colonization and imperialism. Many of the issues we see today, such as those related to language ideologies, have their roots in this period of expansion. As we stride to make changes in our educational policies and practices, we must ensure that we break with the systems of oppression that have been put in place for non-English speakers for many generations.

Works such a Fu’s and Olsen’s have been very important in providing educators, parents, and policymakers with an insight into the difficulties faced by immigrant students and non-English speakers in our public school system. They provide a humanizing voice and name for a population that is often silent. However, as we read works such these, we must remain critical of the many things the subjects say and do, whether it is directly stated or not. Because of how deep our notions about language run within the social makeup of our society and educational system, making an effort to understand how students and educators think and talk about language is necessary. For as we saw in Fu and Olsen’s works, the results of these language ideologies—such social isolation, internalized negative self-blame, forced
assimilation, and inadequate educational content—can be incredibly damaging to a student’s experience within the school environment and society at large. These are constantly and aggressively communicated through a school’s lack of inclusion, subtractive practices, and language utilized to talk to and speak about languages and their speakers.

Language is an essential part of our social structure. Inside the educational environment, language still plays as big of a role. When we think of language education, specifically English language education, we need to remain critical about how the language ideologies that have shaped the way we talk and think about the linguistic practices of students, especially of those that have been historically marginalized due to their language, culture, and religion. Whether they are or not directly addressed, as we see in Fu and Olsen’s works, we must learn to understand how they become part of the many layers of English education and in order to begin thinking of how we can disrupt their effects on the students that we serve.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to all my friends who were extremely warm and encouraging while writing this. Additionally, thank you to my two advisors Elaine Allard and Jamie Thomas for the guidance through the writing process.
References


Lee, T. S. (2009). Language, identity, and power: Navajo and Pueblo young adults’ per-
Ethnographies Revisited: English Learners and Language Ideologies


