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# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 96

### **Constructing English Language Learners: An analysis of register processes and state effects in the schooling of multilingual migrant students**

by

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*Constructing English Language Learners: An analysis of register processes and state effects in the schooling of multilingual migrant students.*

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## **Introduction:**

Migration in recent decades has increased language diversity in America, fueling controversies about bilingual education, and revealing how deeply national identity is entangled with assumptions about language, class and race (Crawford, 2001; Huntington, 2004; Silverstein, 2003). Drawing from an analysis of policy debates about the federal legislation and education policy known as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and ethnographic studies of multilingual migrant households and schooling practices in upstate New York, I examine how metadiscourses about languages and persons circulate across differently-scaled discursive events and social spaces, including congressional hearings and academic research regarding NCLB as well as the classroom sites where individual schools enact education policy (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012) concerning students classified as ‘English Language Learners’.

I argue that the federal programs, as written, interpreted and applied construct language minority students as certain kinds of educational subjects (Menken 2008), and further, that the subject construction occurs through situated practices of statecraft that aim to manage the class, race, and linguistic inequalities characteristic of our current era. Examining ethnographic details of school policy and classroom practice, I analyze other state practices that differentiate and hierarchize ethnolinguistic groups in school, when classroom pedagogies draw on cultural models about educationally successful and unsuccessful minorities. In developing this account, I draw from literatures that treat linguistic registers as ongoing historical processes (Agha 2005; Blommaert 2010; Silverstein 2003), race as inextricably tied to class and language (Alim & Smitherman 2012; Urciuoli 1996); and state powers as ‘effects’ operating in diverse settings and sites (Fassin 2011; Foucault 1998; Trouillot 2003).

**Theoretical contexts: Register formation, the racialization of language, and state power:**

*Register formation:* A dynamic arena of investigation in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology in the last decade has been the study of power, social inequality and language in national and transnational settings (Blommaert, Collins, Heller, Rampton, Slembrouck & Verschueren 2003; Collins, Slembrouck & Baynham, eds., 2009; Jufferman & Van der Aa 2013). One line of investigation studies processes of register formation or ‘enregisterment.’ By focusing on how registers are recognized as varieties of language (stereotypically) associated with a social group and range of activities, researchers have been able to examine in detail the historical process underlying the stratification of languages, and the conflicts and contests resulting from inequalities among language varieties and their normative users and defenders (Agha 2007; Blommaert 2010; Silverstein 2004). In the analyses that follow, we will attend to two distinct processes: on the one hand, a conservative effort to stabilize the register of Standard English in its normative social domain; on the other hand, an innovative effort to widen the domains of users of innovative bilingual registers. In both cases, racialized associations between varieties of English or English and other languages are a substantive issue. These are questions that have not much occupied analysts of register, with certain exceptions (e.g., Lo and Vigouroux in this volume; Blommaert 2010). They raise the issue of what Pratt (1991: 34) has called the ‘contact zone’: “spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as slavery, colonialism, or their aftermath as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.”

*Racialization of language:* A valuable theorization and analysis of “asymmetrical relations of power... as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” is provided by Urciuoli’s (1996) study of Puerto Rican experiences of language, race and class in the contemporary United States. She argues for a distinction between ethnicizing and racializing discourses, a contrast we will employ in the case studies which follow. She also argues that

fundamentally, groups are subject to racialization to the extent that their labor is controlled, such as under colonial control. African-American slaves in the U.S. are the limiting case, that against which all other racialized and ethnicized groups have historically defined. It is instructive of the interplay of race and class that Irish immigrants to the United States were referred to as ‘black Irish’ in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, when majorities were consigned to heavy, degrading, or servile work, but not in latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when sizable numbers had acquired middle-class educations and occupations.

African Americans had a different historical trajectory from the Irish or other ‘voluntary’ immigrants (Ogbu 1979) to the U.S. Slavery was followed closely by Jim Crow segregation, dooming ostensibly ‘free’ majorities, located in the American South, to political, economic, and cultural dispossession from the 1870s until the 1960s. One result of this legacy of racial oppression has been the sharp stigma associated with their vernacular variety of English. Starting from an analysis of the undeniable facility with register- and variety-crossing shown by current President Barack Obama, Alim and Smitherman (2012) provide a cogent argument that, notwithstanding the presidential example of being ‘Articulate while Black,’ both official and everyday language ideologies demean African American speech styles.<sup>1</sup> Examining Tejano-Anglo interactions in post-desegregation-era Texas schools, and South Asian youth in Silicon Valley during the tech boom of the 1990s, Foley (2008 [1990]) and Shankar (2008) provide extended analyses of an interactional dimension that Urciuoli and Alim & Smitherman also examine: how racialized speakers manage their ‘linguistic profile’ in relation to dominant institutions, especially the school. Foley and Shankar’s studies directly connect social class to distinct ways of managing of cultural expression in school

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<sup>1</sup> Collins (1999) provides an ethnographically- and historically-framed analysis of the semiotics of the Ebonics controversy that emerged in 1996 after the Oakland (California) School District proposed using African American Vernacular English as a medium of instruction, along with Standard American English (see also Delpit & Perry, 1998, for a collection of writings).

setting. We discuss this below, when examining how stereotypes about ‘model minorities’ influence classroom environments for multilingual migrant students.

*State effects:* Language and education policies presuppose state-like bodies (Blommaert, 1996; Haugen, 1966; Hornberger & Vaish 2008). But studying how states operate in relation to the rest of society is not a clear-cut field of research, especially in an era in which stable, self-determining nation-states are increasingly compromised by trans-national processes such as mass labor migrations and global investment flows (Harvey 2005; Steger 2003). In an effort to understand how states are affected by such processes, anthropologists have focused on how state activities are re-spatialized within and across national borders (Gupta & Ferguson 2002) as they confront increasing social polarization within and between nations (Friedman 2004). In a useful essay on the anthropology of the state, Trouillot (2001) argues that there are theoretical and methodological implications of the combined decentralization and trans-nationalization of state activities. Theoretically, it is important to remember Gramsci’s (1971) insistence on inseparability of ‘state’ and ‘civil society,’ recognizing that “the state must be conceptualized on more than one level;” and, methodologically, the state is more open to ethnographic inquiry since “there is no necessary site for the state, institutional or geographical.” (p. 127). Trouillot focuses on the problem of governmentality (Fassin 2011; Foucault 19981), for which “there is no necessary site,” and calls for an ethnographic study of “state effects,” by which he means the decentralized practices through which political and cultural subjectivities are produced in a matrix of national and transnational inequalities, especially those of race and class.

Several effects discussed by Trouillot are relevant for the data and themes of this article. First, there is an *isolation effect*, the “production of atomized individual subjects molded and modeled for governance as part of an undifferentiated but specific ‘public’ ...” (Trouillot 2001 p. 126). Second, there is a *legibility effect*, involving processes of classification,

measurement, and mapping, all of which render individuals and populations more susceptible to governance (p. 126). Prominent among processes that produce such an effect are language standardization and monolingualism (Scott, 1998). In the following case we examine how the category English Language Learner (ELL) in *No Child Left Behind* legislation and implementation produces both isolation and legibility effects for ethnolinguistic minorities, in part through top-down register stabilization processes. Third, there is an *identification effect*, discourses and practices that re-align individuals with collectivities, thereby producing new group identities and relations among groups, whatever the complexities of individuals' lives and histories (p. 126). We will examine how differential responses in classroom lessons to efforts to extend the social domain of multilingual registers help produce identification effects.

### **NCLB and Register Stabilization: Producing Isolation and Legibility Effects:**

The signature school reform of President George W. Bush was *No Child Left Behind*, an unprecedented federal intervention into schooling and education (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). NCLB handles linguistic diversity in U.S. education by focusing on a category of students, "English Language Learners," students whose primary language is other than English and who are assessed as needing language instruction or support. English Language Learners, or ELLs, comprise one of four 'at-risk' categories, for which NCLB prescribes special monitoring requirements. Other at-risk groups include the economically disadvantaged students, students from major ethnoracial groups, and students with disabilities (NCLB Public Law No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425, 2002). ELLs are in fact a very heterogeneous category, including those with high proficiency in English and those not; the immigrant and the U.S.-born; and those living in middle class affluence or in poverty (Abedi, 2004; Menken, 2008).

The definitional erasure of heterogeneity matters because it displaces the issue of social conditions on school learning from the policy discussion. In defining language diversity among students as an education risk, NCLB and its implementation paradoxically also divert attention from some of the best-documented ‘risks’ to conventional educational success.

The diversion can be examined in two discursive events concerning NCLB. The first occurs in a congressional hearing on the legislation and its influence on ELLs, the second during an academic review of some of the same topics. In 2007 the U.S. Congress held hearings on NCLB funding re-authorization entitled “The Impact of No Child Left Behind on English Language Learners” (U.S. Congress 2007). A range of expert testimony was presented: from the Government Accounting Office specialists on how individual states define and assess ELLs; from university administrators on how best to prepare teachers to work with ELLs; and from Hispanic advocacy organizations on problems with test validity and reliability in the assessment of ELL learning. The following demographic data get mentioned only once in the long hearing and are never taken up for further questioning or commentary: That  $\frac{3}{4}$  of ELL students are Spanish-speaking, and that more than “ $\frac{2}{3}$ s” are from low-income families (U.S. Congress, 2007, p. 29).

The silence about such facts is puzzling. After three decades of ‘English Only’ campaigns in over thirty states, usually targeted at Spanish language bilingual education, that  $\frac{3}{4}$ s of ELL students are Hispanic would seem to give the category a strong social valence (Adams & Brink, 1990, section III; Crawford, 2001. As a racialized social category, Hispanic migrants are often discussed as those who many not (properly) assimilate, either to English, or to presumed mainstream American values. Huntington (2004) provides an influential reactionary statement of just such fear, infused with post-9/11 anxieties about America and its ‘civilizational others,’ touching upon both language and the working-class status of most Latino migrants. De Genova provides a Marxian analysis of the interplay of race, class, and

language domination as contributing to the labor subordination of Mexican migrants, historically and in contemporary Chicago. Urciuoli provides an historical analysis of labor subordination in the racialization of vernacular Puerto Rican language in New York City, while Zentella's (1997) "Hispanophobia" analyzes national data on racialized language fear.

After decades of research showing that family economic status is the strongest variable predicting with poor school performance (Jencks, 1972; Rothstein, 2004), that "2/3s" of ELL students live in low-income families would seem relevant to understanding their performance on literacy and math assessments. However, as noted, the economic profile of ELLs attracts no additional comment. I suggest that these issues of ethnoracial and class status did not elicit any comment from Congressional panelists or other expert witnesses because they are already known but outside the domain of the 'sayable': The official topic of expert testimony is how to reliably improve assessment of *individual students* who happen to be learning English; everything else is outside of the ELL category criteria.

This definitional tunnel vision is also found in academic policy debates. In a review of research and policy concerning ELLs and "assessment and accountability," Abedi (2004) discusses problematic areas facing NCLB, given the testing and reporting requirements it imposes on schools. One problem area was "Inconsistency in LEP [ELL] classification across and within states," which refers to ongoing heterogeneity among the populations classified as ELL students. Abedi describes various ways in which state-by-state classification procedures result in diversity within the category, including the miscategorization of students whose first language is English as ELLs, and, the use of language proficiency criteria that results in the constant movement more-proficient ELLs out of the category population. Both practices create problems of comparability and challenges for reaching Average Yearly Progress targets.

In his analysis of ELL diversity, Abedi discusses a large-scale study (Abedi et al., 2003) showing that among the factors contributing to student heterogeneity was ‘family background,’ operationalized as parent education level, a proxy for social class. He then reports the following research finding: “... mean reading scores for some *LEP [ELL] students with higher levels of parent education* were higher than the mean for *non-LEP [ELL] students with lower levels of parent education*” (Abedi, 2004, p. 5; emphasis added). In other words, family background had a stronger influence on school performance than ELL status *per se*. As with the Congressional hearing, the influence of social class on student performance is noted but does not otherwise enter the discussion of ELLs and NCLB problems with “assessment and accountability.” This omission or inattention in the Congressional hearing and in the academic policy analysis is all the more striking because of both past research, noted above, as well as recent studies showing the strong influence of socioeconomic conditions on school performance.

This may be seen in two recent studies, one focused on ELLs and another on child poverty and in nation-wide assessments of educational progress. Fry (2008) focuses on an interpretive conundrum regarding “The Role of Schools in the English Language Learner Achievement Gap.” It is well-documented that ELL students perform worse on literacy and math assessments compared to non-ELL students.<sup>2</sup> There is a question of causation, however, because ELL students are concentrated in schools where, on average, *everyone* performs worse on standardized assessments. Discussing a number of dimensions along which language minority status and social marginalization are confounded in US education (urban vs. suburban location; size of schools; percentage of students in poverty), Fry discusses the basic interpretive confusion: determining whether there is an ‘English Language Learner

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<sup>2</sup> The achievement gap is significant: In all the states with major ELL populations (which together account for 70% of 4 million students receiving ELL services), ELL students score significantly below “white students”, and they are less likely to score at or above a state’s “proficient” level. For example, “in Florida 45% of ELL third-graders scored at or above proficiency level on the math assessment, compared with 78% of white third-graders.” (Fry 2008, p. iii).

Achievement Gap’ or instead what we might call a ‘Poor and Minority Kids in City Schools Achievement Gap.’

Henwood (2011) provides an analysis of variation in state performance rankings, based on the 2010 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) results. Focusing on the variables that correlate with states’ general education performance, Henwood (2011) argues that the most powerful statistical predictor of a state’s education ranking is student poverty, operationally defined as student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches:

“almost 60% of the states’ positions in the rankings can be explained statistically by the share of the student population on free or subsidized lunches...” [Regarding students whose primary language is other than English] “... the share of students with limited English proficiency ... yields only a modest correlation coefficient ( $r = .17$ )... and adding it to the [school] lunch model adds nothing to its explanatory power.” (Henwood, 2011, pp. 3, 5)

There is thus good evidence, from long-term surveys (Jencks 1972; Rothstein 2004) as well as recent analyses of comparative and national data sets, that class inequalities are strongly implicated in ELL performance on standardized assessments. We may note along with Henwood, that ELL status, by itself, does not have such a strong statistical effect. This is likely because ELL status does not occur ‘in isolation,’ as Fry’s report shows, and as the Congressional testimony also suggested. However, because socioeconomic inequalities are not part of category definition or assessment criteria for ELLs, they seem to remain outside official discussion or academic policy review.

In order to better understand this discursive erasure of social conditions, it is useful to examine the register processes at work in NCLB legislation and implements. NCLB removed a decades-long policy of federal funding for Bilingual Education (Woodward 2009), and gave near-exclusive priority to Standard English as the only register of language suitable for public

education in the U.S. In Agha's (2005, p. 47) terms, it represents a political effort at register stabilization, in particular, an effort to stabilize the register of monolingual Standard English. Declared in federal law, implemented throughout the states, and monitored by intense and pervasive testing policies, NCLB attempts to stabilize traits of *repertoire* ('only' Standard English, no other social dialects of English or other languages), *indexical qualities* (indicating the stereotypical 'educated' and 'successful' versus the 'uneducated', 'ignorant' 'low-skilled or blue collar' social personae) and *social domain* (proclaiming universality of domain 'for all children,' while drawing sharp, test-defined lines between those with and those without the register).<sup>3</sup> Like the explosive Ebonics controversy, but without the public drama of ritual humiliation – as both white and African American elites castigated the Oakland School Board's proposal to use African American Vernacular English as a medium of instruction along with Standard English (Collins 1999; Perry & Delpit 1998) – NCLB also denies that any language or register of language than Standard English can serve for American public education.

I suggest that we conceptualize the categorization of English Language Learners and the deployment of the category in NCLB-mandated assessment practices in terms of two related state effects. The first is what Trouillot (2001) calls an "isolation effect." NCLB categories and assessment requirements define students as individuals, aggregate them in normalized achievement distributions, and obscure the connections of any cultural or historical relationship among students defined as 'ELLs.' As Trouillot phrases it, they "produc[e] atomized individual subjects molded and modeled for governance as part of an undifferentiated but specific 'public...'" (Trouillot 2001, p. 126). In this case, the specific 'public' is that of the educationally 'at-risk.' These four categories have a social composition that resonates with collective historical struggles shaping American education – the

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<sup>3</sup> See Agha 2005, p. 47-50 for detailed discussion of these processes.

immigrant, the national minority, the poor, and ‘those with disabilities’ (Nasaw 1979) – but now the identities are re-distributed as traits of individuals.<sup>4</sup>

A second effect involves special surveillance or monitoring. For ELLs, as for all ‘at risk’ categories, there are specially-mandated Annual Yearly Progress assessments (Adebi 2004). These are typically damaging to schools that, as Fry’s report suggests, have concentrations of poor, racialized, language minority students (see also Ravitch 2010, for careful discussion of national and New York City data). These assessment mandates are combined with another consequence of register stabilization: sharpened definition of the non-normative student, the so-called ELLs. Together they contribute to a *legibility effect*, involving processes of classification, measurement, and mapping, all of which render individuals and populations more susceptible to governance (Trouillot, 2001, p. 126). Recall that the NCLB legislation and implementation both stabilizes monoglot Standard English as the only register of education, in part through ending dedicated federal funding for bilingual education, and also establishes a new category of English Language Learners, who are the target of intensified annual assessments.

We have discussed the creation and use of an educational category of risk, the English Language Learners, through national level legislation and implementation. I have argued that through the erasure of social criteria associated with category members combined with the heightened monitoring of category members, we see the operation of isolation and legibility ‘state effects.’ Such effects are diverse in their sites of operation but systematic as techniques of state power, the power to define and regulate subjects. They help constitute social

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<sup>4</sup> As McDermott et al. (2009) have recently argued, in an essay on class, race and risk in American schooling, “Risk is everywhere responded to by individuals but rarely addressed collectively.” (p. 106) going on to say “American schools run on risk and competition. It is the first fact for children going to school in a market designed for the few to lord over the many and a culture that makes desires and achievements dependent on the deficits and deficiencies of others (Henry, 1963; Varenne & McDermott, 1998).” (p. 109) and then warning “A *too-easy focus on race, class, and L[earning] D[isability] as traits obscures the invisible demands of the political economy* from those who are operating on it, worrying about it, talking about it, strategizing it, and manipulating it from within partial positions and perspectives. (p. 109; emphasis added).”

domination through linguistic regulation. In Hymes (1996[1975], p. 84) phrasing, they construct “cultural hegemony through language.” Both state effects are embedded in efforts by the federal state, through education policy, to stabilize the Standard English register.

### **Differential Treatment of Korean and Mexican Migrant Students in ESL Classrooms: Social Domains of Register and ‘Identification Effects’:**

Let us now turn to two studies of individual schools and classrooms, which remind us that the linguistic terrain of education is negotiated, both in local and trans-local settings. They provide ethnographic evidence of another register process: efforts by migrant children to expand the social domains of non-English registers and, relevantly, of uneven responses by schools to these efforts. I argue that these differential responses result, in turn, from the interaction of language differences and cultural models of minority students and that they provide evidence, in localized language practices, of a third ‘state effect’.

The immediate facts to concern us are these. In a study of elementary school Korean students in a suburban school in Upstate New York, Hong (2006) describes how the teacher of the ESL classroom she studied responded to the children’s primary language in various ways. Although the school policy was ‘English Only,’ and the ESL classroom a tool for implementing that policy, the teacher in this school, which we will call Farmer Elementary, allowed special times when the students could speak Korean amongst themselves; she brought Korean books and pictures into the classroom; she incorporated numerous references to Korean cultural practices into her teaching; and she endeavored herself to learn some Korean words and phrases. In brief, she licensed the use of Korean among students for certain school times and places. In response, we find the children using their Korean collaboratively to take part in classroom lessons, showing metapragmatics insights in both languages.

**(1) Using English and Korean in ESL at Farmer**

- 1 T: (reading the book) “Aekyung went to school for the rest of the week and tried to ignore the teasing of the other children. On Sunday, Aekyung’s Aunt Kim came to visit. She had just returned from Korea with many presents for the family, a fancy dress for Aekyung. “How’s everything in Korea?” asked Father.”
- 2 T: What’s this called? (pointing to the picture in the book, which includes a girl wearing a Korean traditional costume.)
- 3 Dan: Uh...
- 4 Mina: *Hanbok*
- 5 Kim: *Hanbok*
- 6 T: *Hanbok*, remember that we had that in the play last year?
- 7 Mina: How... how do you... know... in English? Like... that English?
- 8 T: How do I know that?
- 9 Mina: Yeah.
- 10 T: Because you taught me when you brought to me that dress, you taught me it was called *Hanbok*.
- 11 Mina: No... (speaking in Korean and walking to her sister, Hana, who is sitting across the table and whispering in Korean to her)
- 12 Hana: How do you know, like, how to say *Hanbok* in English?
- 13 T: I think it’s the same word, same word. There’s no English word unless you want to say *Hanbok* fancy dress.
- 14 Mina: Oh. That’s the same thing?
- 15 T: I think that means fancy dress.

(January 7, 2005; from Hong 2006:90-91)

Several things are notable about this excerpt. First, the teacher reads to the ESL students a story about Korea. In addition, when she asks them for the name for a dress, and they reply in Korean, she then incorporates the Korean word, *Hanbok*, into her subsequent questions (in turn 6). When one of the students, Ming, grows frustrated with her questioning of the teacher (because of an apparent misunderstanding<sup>5</sup>) she turns to her sister, Hana, (in turn 11) and ask her in Korean to interpret question to the teacher. Hana does this and the teacher supplies an answer (in turns 12 and 13). As Hong comments about this exchange, the students are not only reading about Korea, and discussing Korean words, they use their primary language to arrange interpreting tasks among themselves, in the service of lesson discussion.

From Hong's study of the children's use of Korean, English and other languages at home and with peers, we find that code-switching was common. The children spoke Korean, other East Asian languages (Vietnamese or Japanese), and occasionally English with their parents (Hong, p. 60), while with siblings and playmates they alternated between participant-sensitive choices of English and Korean. When the migrant children in the study played with Korean-American children, they noted differences in Korean or English abilities among their American-born peers (Hong, p. 64): "... Hana [...] described one of her classmates that she played with and talked in English as a Korean 'who does not speak Korean very well.'" Conversely, the children would also adapt to newly arriving peers who did not speak much English. Kim, a boy profiled in the study, spoke Korean with his parents and English with his older brother (p. 111). But when a new friend arrived on the scene who spoke little English, Kim and the new friend negotiated code choice; the friend preferred Korean, Kim English, but they learned to adjust to each other's linguistic resource in the contexts of specific play activities (p 155). We should note that the parents as well as the children saw maintaining Korean while learning English as an important goal.

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<sup>5</sup> Ming wants to know the English term; the teacher thinks Ming is asking *how* the teacher knows the Korean word.

I suggest that we have here evidence of Korean and English as register choices in a multilingual repertoire of registers (Blommaert, 2010; Silverstein, 2003) that occurs in domestic and peer settings. In addition, when the students use and are licensed to use Korean in certain schools settings, including but not limited to their talk during ESL lesson, they are extending the social domain of register. That is, they are extending the register of multilingual Korean and English from domestic settings and peer-organized activities into educational settings. In so doing, they are expanding the domain of intended, anticipated, or future users of the repertoire register. From Hong's description, it appears that peer organized activities may be the hinge for this effort. They are what are common to out-of-school play groups, 'recess' and 'snack' time within school, and at least one aspect of the licensing of Korean in classroom lessons: Hana and Ming jointly drawing on Korean and English to organize their interaction with the teacher.

This situation of relative linguistic accommodation differed considerably from that discovered by myself and a research assistant when we studied how Spanish-speaking migrant children fared in the same region (Collins, 2012; Collins & La Santa, 2006). One of our sites was a suburban school similar to that studied by Hong – both schools served predominantly middle-class families, were high achieving schools, and had English-only curricula. In the elementary school we studied, which I will call Sanderson Elementary, several teachers whose classrooms we observed said that they spoke Spanish. But the Sanderson teachers were also quick to point out that they felt Spanish should not be used with their immigrant Mexican students, and that they strove to keep Spanish out of school activities, because they viewed the use of Spanish as a potential obstacle to the students' learning of English. As one of them put it, Spanish was a source of 'language problems' in school learning (see Collins, 2012, for further data and discussion).

In the ESL classroom lessons we observed, there was no accommodation to the children's primary language. This is illustrated in the two excerpts below. In (2) a student, MV, asks the teacher about a picture/word vocabulary-building activity in which they identify words and circle animals. As we see, all communication is English: MV asks "This is elephant?"; the teacher acknowledges the question and sends MV back to finish the sheet.

### **(2) Receiving instructions in English in ESL at Sanderson**

(MV approaches teacher, T)

T: Sure can, bring it over here (to MV)

MV: This is elephant?

T: Uh, no... FINISH and then come and see me

MV: Ok.

During this same lesson our project research assistant (AL), a fluent bilingual, had been working with one student on a similar vocabulary activity. She would pose her questions in English, but allow the student to reply with answers or questions in Spanish or English. At one point MV and a new girl approach Amarylis (AL) and MV introduces the new girl, as shown in (3):

### **(3) Introductions in Spanish at Sanderson**

1 MV: Ella es mi prima (She is my cousin.)

2 AL: Si? Como se llama? (Yes? What is her name?)

3 MV: Ella? (Her?)

4 AL: Uh huh

5 MV: LAURA [lawra]... Pero se dice “Laura” [lorə] en ingles.

6 (LAURA [lawra]...but you say “Laura” [lorə] in English)

In example (3) we can see that the Sanderson students – like the Farmer students – have metapragmatic as well as metalinguistic knowledge in their primary languages, which they use in organizing interaction during classwork. MV introduces her new classmate and comments on the differences in Spanish and English pronunciation of the name Laura ([lawra] vs. [lorə]). The exchange resembles example (1), depicting Korean used at Farmer, in that when the use of a primary language as well as English was interactionally-enabled by speaker demographics, the children would use both languages. Spanish was never a licensed part of the classroom at Sanderson. The predominant pattern at Sanderson was as shown example (2), with interaction restricted to English<sup>6</sup>.

As with the Korean children that Hong studied, the Spanish-speaking migrant children used English, Spanish, and other languages in domestic and non-school social settings. Depending on the family, they spoke Triqui, an indigenous Mexican language, Spanish, or English in interactions with their parents, and Spanish or English with siblings and playmates. Similarly, like the middle class Korean parents, the working class Mexican parents saw value to their children learning English and Spanish. As one father put it to me, in a view echoed by other Triqui parents, the children needed English *para leer y escribir y hablar con sus amigos* (‘in order to read and write and talk with their friends [in school]’). But Spanish was also necessary so that their children could interact with new migrants, who had come into the region for over two decades and among whom, whatever their first languages, Spanish functioned as a lingua franca.

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<sup>6</sup> It was consistent in the half dozen ESL lessons we observed.

At the time of our study, the Valdez children discussed in these examples were fluent in Spanish and Triqui and acquiring English. Their informal language socialization involved using multiple languages to negotiate the social world (Zentella 2005). Ana the research assistant and I had worked in the Valdez home, providing language tutoring to the adults as well as the children. During these activities, José, the 12-year old brother of Sandra and Mariana would usually be present. At various times, he would translate between Triqui and Spanish; for example, when his mother, who spoke only Triqui, wanted to tell Ana or myself something. His translating responded to a given situation: We spoke Spanish, she spoke Triqui, and he mediated by alternating the two languages.

On many occasions, José joined whatever reading or other language lessons we were conducting with his sisters Sandra and Mariana. Sometimes when the girls had trouble recalling the name of a picture or item listed in one of our bilingual Spanish/English books, he would provide help, suggesting the answers to his sisters in Spanish or Triqui, their primary language. An example is shown in (4). Sandra has been naming items in a picture book, and when Sandra hesitates, appearing not to recognize a word, José provides *sotto voce* assistance:

**(4) *José helping during at-home English and reading lesson***

1 SV: The...

2 José: ((chubia??))

3 SV: The ((butterfly??)).

4 AL: Tu le estás diciendo en Triqui.

(you are telling her in Trique)

5 José: Le estoy diciendo la word como mariposa.

(I am telling her the word for mariposa [butterfly])

- 6 AL: En Triqui?  
(In Trique?)
- 7 José: Si.  
(Yes)
- 8 AL: Como se dice?  
(How do you say it?)
- 9 José: En Triqui? .. Chubia, chubia.  
(In Triqui?.. ‘chubia’, ‘chubia’)
- 10 AL: OK

The context is that Sandra is engaged in a lesson with Amarylis and José is sitting in. But with the whispered voice and the shift from to Triqui in line 2, José engages in what Goffman (1981) called a change of ‘footing.’ That is, he creates a change in context which is also a change in participation configuration: from a lesson conducted in Spanish and English, involving Sandra and Ana, it becomes a fleeting exercise in prompting, involving different participants, José and his sister, a momentary back-stage activity between siblings, inserted, as it were, into the larger genre of tutoring. In line 4, Amarylis notes the shift in languages and questions José about the exchange, and in line 5 he explains his strategy: to provide a Triqui word for the item in the English text, that is, provide multilingual prompts to help a Triqui- and Spanish-speaking sibling identify the English lexeme ‘butterfly.’

The children also used Spanish in school, when other known Spanish speakers were available, whether bilingual teaching aides, visiting research assistants, or siblings and peers in the classroom or playground. I suggest that – as with the Korean students at Farmer – we have initial evidence of Spanish and English as register choices in an emerging repertoire of registers. When the students use both Spanish and English in school settings, including but

not limited to their talk during ESL lesson, they are attempting to extend the social domain of a bilingual repertoire register in their upstate New York settings.

For some reason, however, the *greater* ethnolinguistic difference of Korean students at Farmer – where the teachers, including the ESL teacher, did not know Korean – was viewed as a resource to be used in learning English, while the *lesser* ethnolinguistic difference of Mexican students at Sanderson – where some teachers did know Spanish – was viewed as a hindrance to that same learning. The question is why this difference in practical judgment (Bourdieu, 1998) occurred. Urciuoli's (1996) *Exposing Prejudice* contains a discussion of language, race and class that can help us develop this issue. In her analysis, Urciuoli focuses upon *racializing* and *ethnicizing* discourses – ways of characterizing groups of people, tied to stereotypic projections of their families and communities, the kinds of language they use, and the likelihood of their acquiring an 'unmarked' or normative American cultural identity, a symbolic ideal *in which language use and social class are central features*. In her account, racializing and ethnicizing discourses are ways of handling difference, of symbolically marking those who are not White, Middle Class, Standard English speakers, but doing so in a gradient fashion.

Ethnicizing discourses represent difference as safe, contained to the proper social domains, and somehow providing the basis for class mobility. In such a discourse model, Koreans might speak other languages, but they can be trusted learn English; they come from presumptively stable families and law-abiding communities; perhaps most crucially, they are presumed to be upwardly mobile: they will become middle class (Lee, 1996; Park, 1996). Racializing discourses represent difference as dangerous, occurring outside the proper social domains, and incorrigibly working-class or poor. In such a discourse model, Mexicans not only speak another language, it is feared they will not learn or will refuse to learn English; they do not come from stable families and neighborhoods but from sprawling barrios. They

are *not* presumed to be upwardly mobile, for they are predominantly working-class, as they have been for many generations of labor migration (De Genova, 2005).

As Hong's description of the school/home relation attests, the middle-class Korean migrant students in ESL at Farmer were viewed as model minorities. The Farmer staff and ESL program valued the children's home language and culture: "... students' heritage language and culture are considered as valuable resources to facilitate students' acquisition of English as well as to connect home and school throughout the school year" (Hong, p. 60). The ESL teacher encouraged the students' parents to volunteer in the children's classroom, and the ESL program organized several 'multicultural celebrations', to acknowledge the achievements of the Korean students in learning (Hong, p. 61). In brief, their language difference was seen as a resource for learning and thus was licensed in some school settings.

The working-class Mexican migrant students in ESL at Sanderson were, however, seen as non-model or racialized minorities. The principal warmly endorsed the ethos of hard work and family cohesion that she and her staff perceived as traits of the Mexican migrant families, but she and staff also said that because of 'language,' the parents were not able to help their students with schoolwork. In the course of our classroom visits and teacher interviews, we heard the discourse of 'language problems' from the principal, several regular classroom teachers, and a reading specialist. It was never fully clear to what extent such problems with those of cross-language difficulty and to what extent other categories of language pathology were suspected. Two of the migrant children described as having such problems, were themselves first language speakers of English.<sup>7</sup> The ESL teacher acknowledged her sympathy for the students, being herself an immigrant, feeling that their efforts to learn English while also coping with regular schoolwork did not receive much empathy or support in school. But she did not seem empowered or able to view the students' "heritage language and culture [...]"

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<sup>7</sup> This is a common issue of linguistic misclassification (Abedi 2004; Menken 2008).

as valuable resources to facilitate students' acquisition of English ...” (Hong 2006, p. 60). Instead, their language difference was seen as an obstacle to school learning and was not licensed for use in any school setting. The one apparent exception proves the rule: as I discuss more fully elsewhere (Collins 2011, 2012), teaching aides in Sanderson who happened to be Spanish-English bilinguals were inclined to draw upon the children's knowledge of Spanish in working through math or literacy activities. The one time I commented on this with the main classroom teacher, however, she firmly stated her disapproval of the practice. Contrasting the Korean children at Farmer and the Mexican children at Sanderson, the efforts of one group to extend the social domain of their multilingual register meet qualified success; with the other, their efforts are resolutely opposed by those in authority.

In thinking through this issue, of how stereotypes about 'model' and non-model minorities find purchase in particular ESL classrooms, we need to consider the possibility of class-differentiated interactional processes to consider. We do know that the Korean students came from educated middle class families and that Farmer Elementary took every effort to communicate with the families, including providing translated, Korean versions of school announcements intended for parents. We do not know whether the Korean students were careful in using Korean only in situations licensed by school personnel, though we do have Hong's report the students were seen as 'good students.' As she says the boy Kim discussed above, "Kim's social life in school is much aligned with those cultural values emphasized at home. For instance, he was recognized as a polite and kind student, showing respect to teachers and peers in school (Hong 2006 p. 118)." We also had ethnographic evidence, based on our larger study Mexican migrants into upstate New York, that middle class families tended to more sharply differentiate between home and school as domains for Spanish versus English, while working-class Mexican migrants we interviewed saw 'learning English' as a

primary purpose of schooling, but otherwise report more overlap of the two or more languages, as they and their children moved between Triqui, Spanish, and English speaking interlocutors and activities (see Collins & La Santa 2007).

This apparent class-disposition in carefulness or openness to displaying multilingual repertoires is reported in the other studies on ethnic and ethnolinguistic minorities and schooling (Scollon 1981 is an early report). In Shankar's (2008) study of South Asian migrants in the Silicon Valley, she describes how more affluent upper middle class research participants avoided using their home languages in school settings, except during special occasions like "Multicultural Day." Her working class research participants, conversely, used their home languages openly at school, mixing English with Urdu or other languages, in a public bilingual peer practice they saw as a badge of ethnic identity. Shankar reports that they were noticed doing so by school personnel, who negatively viewed such practices, seeing use of languages other than English as evidence of poor students who had 'problems with English.' Such students were often those who had difficulties maintaining the 'model minority stereotype', though Shankar attributes such difficulty more to a range of class-associated conditions<sup>8</sup> than to individual intelligence or motivation. Shankar's findings agree with Foley's (2008 [1990]) much earlier study of class, racial, and communicative relations in a South Texas high school. Foley argues for class-specific, interactional dispositions that cut across ethnic lines: middle class students, whether 'Anglo' or 'Tejano,' were more careful in their violation of school norms, or other social mores; working-class students, on the other hand, are more likely to be overt, or less careful, in the flouting of rules.<sup>9</sup> Their behavior attracted negative, racialized stereotyping about 'problem students,' as it did in Shankar's

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<sup>8</sup> These include the lack of English in the home; parents' ignorance of the consequences of school decisions; and the presence of a 'grey collar', technical job market, that lessened the need for superlative academic distinction. Her point was that 'model minority' was a class-specific ideal applied stereotypically to all South Asian students.

<sup>9</sup> In Foley's account, capitalist culture is fundamentally "communicative action" (Habermas 1987), and class culture(s) are "situated speech performances" (Foley 1990, pp. 178–81, 192–94) enacted and learned in many places, including the classroom. They crosscut and inform the presentation and reproduction of ethnic identities.

study. In brief, much remains to be investigated about the precise communicative triggers of positive or negative stereotyping.

We do, however, have ethnographic evidence suggesting that class differences in multilingual communicative practices exist, and that they interact with school expectations in ways that can trigger cultural models that frame working-class and middle-class language minority students differently. We have evidence of a link between class statuses and the racialization practices applied to linguistic minorities. I suggest that the recurrent, everyday implementation of the model minority cultural stereotype in classroom lessons and other in-school interactions comprises a third state effect. It is what Trouillot calls an “identification effect”: processes that align atomized individuals into collectivities, in the case at hand, into a hierarchy of ethnicized versus racialized ethnolinguistic minorities, with more- and less-acceptable multilingual repertoires. Such alignment suggest identification, in the cultural-political landscape of NCLB, identification as those language minorities who nonetheless excel at school, and those who are ‘at risk’ for failure.

Lest connecting locally-circulating cultural stereotypes to state processes seems far-fetched, we should bear in mind that the model minority stereotype arose in response to the demands of the 1960s Civil Rights movements (Lee, 1996; Shankar, 2008). These movements articulated collective demands for redress from state and national governments throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Based on (especially) working-class African American, Latino and Native American grievances, they advanced arguments about historical oppression and unequal treatment in labor markets, schools, and other sectors of society. Against this historical background, in the context of national political reaction against

dissenting ethnoracial groups, Asian immigrants were represented as an alternative, that is, as a largely middle-class and upwardly mobile ‘model’ minority (Lee, 1996).<sup>10</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the preceding, I have discussed the ‘construction of English Language Learners’ through processes that manage populations and articulate their differences, constructing social subjects in relation to differences that are obscured as well as rendered legible, producing isolated individual subjects as well as identifying new collectivities that are ranked in ethnoracial hierarchies. In this analysis, it has been important to examine metadiscourses about languages and persons and how these circulate across social space-time. The concept of register has been important for investigating how associations of language use and social types are made or unmade and how those linkages acquire legitimacy and social consequence or are rejected and ridiculed. When Standard English is reinforced as the only register for education, those speaking other languages, whatever the robustness of their multilingual repertoires, are deemed “at risk.” Were there a different construal of language and society, in which polyglot individuals and groups were deemed normal, then those persons and groups with “only English” might be deemed educationally ‘at risk.’

In the cases we have examined, concepts of register formation have provided tools for analyzing how institutions articulate languages in relation to their speakers, and how speakers, in the plurilingual variety of their circumstances, initiate multilingual register repertoires, attempting to claim institutional sites as well as domestic life for their varied

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<sup>10</sup> How such models circulate and with what effects requires ethnographic study. Their critique, as scholars such as Lee (1996) and Shankar (2008) show us, requires analysis of class and how it is present in students’ presentation of self and language and in school personnel’s responses thereto. It requires also analysis of historical developments and ruptures, during which sudden re-articulations of race, class and language become evident (Shankar, Chapter 8 & Postscript).

voices. In the case studies, I have argued that both the top-down federal policies and the bottom-up efforts to create multilingual registers both generate state effects.

Trouillot's conception of state effects draws on a vision of the state as central to maintaining or contesting capitalist hegemony but not centered in any particular institutional or geographical sites. His conception of hegemony agrees with Hymes' insistence that

“[L]anguage has been a central medium of cultural hegemony in the United States. Class stratification and cultural assumptions about language converge in school to reproduce the social order. A latent function of the educational system is to instill linguistic insecurity, to discriminate linguistically, to channel children in ways that have an integral linguistic component, while appearing open and fair to all.” (Hymes, 1996 [1975]: 84).

Unlike Hymes, who wrote of a pre-1970s period, Trouillot is grappling with the state as part of a global system and theorizing different, decentralized and ‘globalized’ mechanisms of hegemony. He is nonetheless concerned, as was Hymes, with how the state/society relation regulated inequalities of class and race. Trouillot's vision of the state as ‘de-centered’ encourages us to investigate the ‘effects’ emerging from both formal governmental policy the interaction of everyday multilingual language practices and cultural stereotypes about ‘model minorities.’ These stereotypes can be understood as contained in what Hymes termed ‘cultural assumptions about language.’

The children's efforts described above can also be seen as part of what Silverstein (2003) has analyzed as “reenergized linguistic minorities.” Such minorities, often using digital technologies that allow everyday transnational communication and culture consumption, are a challenge to the contemporary United States' effort to regulate its populations. The multilingual and multi-dialectical practices generated by such linguistic minorities, both global and local in their linguistic resources and relevant audiences (Alim & Smitherman

2012; Blommaert 2010; Shankar 2008) are in such diasporic groups are met with “jittery efforts at repression” by a “would-be assimilationist nation-state like the United States” (Silverstein (2003, p 548). Silverstein understands the 1990s rejection ‘Ebonics’ as a register for public education as akin to the ‘English Only’ rejection of contemporary plurilingualism (p. 248).

The rejection of nonstandard social dialects and ‘foreign languages’ reminds us that language, race, and class are tightly connected in society as well as schools. Nonstandard social dialects are the vernacular registers of multi-racial working-class majorities. ‘Foreign’ languages are often experienced as the speech of migrants, and as Sassen’s (1997) historical comparative study of migration reminds us, migrants typically come to do the heavy, dangerous, or servile work of a society. *No Child Left Behind* is rhetorically about equality of opportunity – “No child left behind” in the mythical pursuit of the American Dream of prosperity and security through education. In practice, or perhaps more precisely, in effect, while appearing “fair and open to all,” NCLB is about organizing and deploying testing regimes that render overt the different educational outcomes of students and schools: Those having or lacking economic resources; those coming from or serving the racially privileged or disprivileged. The challenge is to connect the dynamics of class with those of racialization practices, and both with valuing and devaluing of languages in schools and in society more broadly (Urciuoli 1996; Alim & Smitherman 2012; Rampton, Harris, Blommaert & Collins 2008). My argument is that the study of enregisterment (Agha, 2007) provides insight into the differently scaled processes through which language hierarchies are stabilized and challenged, and the study of state effects provides a valuable window on contemporary governmentality. In parallel they can help us investigate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century how “[c]lass stratification and cultural assumptions about language converge in school to reproduce the social order,” a process in which “language is a central medium.”

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