

# Listening to Graduates of a K-12 Bilingual Program: Language Ideologies and Literacy Practices of Former Bilingual Students<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study investigated the language and literacy practices of five graduates of a Spanish-English K-12 dual language immersion program through semi-structured interviews to understand the residual impact of thirteen years in a Spanish-English bilingual school program. Drawing from sociocultural theory, the interviews also sought to provide an understanding of the participants' specific social networks and uses of Spanish and cultural affinities. Transcripts of the interviews, which were 1-2 hours in length, were analyzed primarily for content related to language use, social networks, and cultural affiliations. Coding by general themes that emerged was done first, and then patterns within and across interview transcripts were identified and analyzed. The basic research question guiding this interview study was: What can be learned about the Spanish-English bilingualism and biliteracy of former students who attended a 13-year bilingual school program? Three main findings were: 1) All of the former students reported being bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish; 2) Two prominent language ideologies in the everyday uses of Spanish by the participants were identified. One language ideology may be described as a functional language ideology, where Spanish was used primarily to accomplish only specific, limited kinds of communication with others. The other language ideology was one where linguistic and cultural affinities with native Spanish speakers were a key part of the participants' orientation and use of Spanish; and 3) The issue of who may be reaping the most benefits from the K-12 dual language immersion program arose through an analysis of the interviews, especially at the secondary levels, because of the relatively small numbers of Latina/o students that completed the program. The findings are significant because they indicate some of the strengths and limitations of K-12 bilingual programs in the U.S. Given that there has been very little research in

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this area, the study provides educators and researchers with important concerns in bilingual education program implementation, as well as areas for further research.

*Keywords:* dual language immersion, language ideologies, biliteracy, Latina/o students

### Resumen

Este estudio investiga las prácticas de lenguaje y lectoescritura de cinco egresados de un programa de inmersión dual en español e inglés de pre-escolar a bachillerato. La información se obtuvo a través de encuestas semiestructuradas que permitieron comprender el impacto residual de estar inmerso 13 años en un programa escolar bilingüe (Español – Inglés). Partiendo de la teoría sociocultural, las entrevistas también proporcionaron información que permitió comprender las redes sociales de los participantes, su uso del español y sus afinidades culturales. Las transcripciones de las entrevistas, las cuales tenían una duración de una a dos horas, permitieron analizar, en primera instancia, los contenidos relacionados con el uso del lenguaje, las redes sociales y afinidades culturales. En primer lugar, se categorizó la información por temas generales y posteriormente se analizaron los patrones identificados en las entrevistas. La pregunta central de investigación, que orientó este estudio de entrevista focalizada, giró en torno a la siguiente pregunta: ¿Qué se puede aprender sobre bilingüismo (español – inglés) y competencias lecto-escritas bilingües en alumnos que asistieron 13 años a un programa escolar bilingüe? Los resultados permitieron concluir lo siguiente: 1) todos los alumnos manifestaron ser bilingües y poseer competencias lecto-escritas tanto en inglés como en español. 2) Los participantes identificaron dos enfoques lingüísticos en el uso cotidiano del español. El primer enfoque lingüístico puede ser descrito como un enfoque funcional del lenguaje, en el cual el español es utilizado principalmente para llevar a cabo un tipo limitado de comunicación con otros. El segundo enfoque se refiere a las afinidades lingüísticas y culturales con hablantes nativos del idioma español, las cuales fueron parte clave de la orientación de los participantes en el uso del español. 3) La cuestión de quién puede obtener la mayor parte de los beneficios del programa de doble inmersión lingüística se obtuvo a través del análisis de las entrevistas especialmente en niveles secundarios debido al número reducido de estudiantes latinos que culminaron el programa. Los resultados encontrados son significativos porque indican algunas fortalezas y limitaciones de los programas bilingües impartidos desde preescolar a bachillerato en los Estados Unidos. Al existir pocas investigaciones en esta área, el estudio proporciona información a docentes e investigadores sobre la implementación de programas bilingües, así como temas para futuras investigaciones.

*Palabras claves:* inmersión lingüística dual, enfoque lingüístico, lectoescritura bilingüe, estudiantes hispanos

### Resumo

Este estudo pesquisa as práticas de linguagem e leito-escritura de cinco egressos de um programa de imersão dual em espanhol e inglês de pré-primária

a ensino médio. A informação se obteve através de enquetes semi-estruturadas que permitiram compreender o impacto residual de estar imerso 13 anos em um programa escolar bilíngue (Espanhol – Inglês). Partindo da teoria sociocultural, as entrevistas também proporcionaram informação que permitiu compreender as redes sociais dos participantes, seu uso do espanhol e suas afinidades culturais. As transcrições das entrevistas, as quais tinham uma duração de uma a duas horas, permitiram analisar, em primeira instância, os conteúdos relacionados com o uso da linguagem, as redes sociais e afinidades culturais. Em primeiro lugar, categorizou-se a informação por temas gerais e posteriormente analisaram-se os padrões identificados nas entrevistas. A pergunta central de pesquisa, que orientou este estudo de entrevista focalizada, girou em torno à seguinte pergunta: O que se pode aprender sobre bilingüismo (espanhol – inglês) e competências leito-escritas bilíngues em alunos que assistiram 13 anos a um programa escolar bilíngue? Os resultados permitiram concluir o seguinte: 1) todos os alunos manifestaram ser bilíngues e possuir competências leito-escritas tanto em inglês como em espanhol. 2) Os participantes identificaram dois enfoques linguísticos no uso cotidiano do espanhol. O primeiro enfoque linguístico pode ser descrito como um enfoque funcional da linguagem, no qual o espanhol é utilizado principalmente para levar a cabo um tipo limitado de comunicação com outros. O segundo enfoque se refere às afinidades linguísticas e culturais com falantes nativos do idioma espanhol, as quais foram parte chave da orientação dos participantes no uso do espanhol. 3) A questão de quem pode obter a maior parte dos benefícios do programa de dupla imersão linguística obteve-se através da análise das entrevistas especialmente em níveis secundários devido ao número reduzido de estudantes latinos que culminaram o programa. Os resultados encontrados são significativos porque indicam algumas fortalezas e limitações dos programas bilíngues dados desde pré-primária a ensino médio nos Estados Unidos. Ao existir poucas pesquisas nesta área, o estudo proporciona informação a docentes e pesquisadores sobre a implementação de programas bilíngues, assim como temas para futuras pesquisas.

*Palavras chaves:* imersão linguística dual, enfoque linguístico, leito-escritura bilíngue, estudantes hispânicos

The present climate in the United States for bilingual education is not a very encouraging one, with growing resentment toward immigrants (Bondy, 2011; Chomsky, 2007; Fetzer, 2000; Galindo & Vigil, 2011) the passage of anti-bilingual education laws in California, Arizona and Massachusetts, and an attempt to eradicate bilingual education in Colorado in 2002. The language ideologies represented in the debates regarding bilingual education include English-only and xenophobic perspectives (Crawford, 2008; García &

Kleifgen, 2010) that promote the dismantling of bilingual programs. Most bilingual programs that do exist are transitional bilingual education programs, where the goal is to transition students into all-English instruction as soon as possible, rather than developing students' bilingualism (Ovando, Combs & Collier, 2006). At the same time, however, dual language immersion programs (also known as two-way immersion) have been implemented in more than half of the states. Unlike transitional bilingual programs, one of the main goals of these programs is the development of students' bilingualism and biliteracy.

Although dual language immersion programs represent a small percentage of bilingual education programs in this country, they are growing rapidly in numbers, with 393 programs in 29 states and the District of Columbia. Of these, only 11 public school dual language immersion programs span grades K-12 in the U.S. (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2011). In addition, many proponents of bilingual education view dual language immersion programs as the best type of program for developing Latina/o students' bilingualism and biliteracy (Fitts, 2006; Howard & Sugarman, 2007; Lindholm-Leary 2001).

This interview study focused on identifying language and literacy practices of graduates of a Spanish-English K-12 dual language immersion program in a large, metropolitan area in Southern California. In addition, issues related to the development of cultural identities of the participants were examined, especially the ways in which language ideologies may have influenced their specific social networks, uses of Spanish and cultural affinities (González, 2001; 2005; Woolard, Schiefflin & Kroskrity, 1998).

There has been almost no research that examines the residual impact of thirteen years of bilingual schooling for graduates of such programs; in fact, I have been unable to find a single study that does so. This work provides educators with some insights into how young adult graduates of a K-12 dual language immersion program use English and Spanish in their daily lives as well as how they position themselves and others within Spanish-speaking contexts. Most importantly, this study raises significant issues for researchers in an area that has received little attention. Additional research into K-12 bilingual programs is necessary to understand the consequences of such programs for students and to address some of the concerns regarding dual language immersion and language minority students.

The article is organized as follows: First, I begin with the theoretical perspectives that have informed this study. Second, I discuss dual language immersion programs and relevant research. Next, I

discuss the study, followed by brief portraits of the participants. Then, I discuss the themes that emerged from analysis of the interviews. Finally, I provide some concluding remarks including areas for further research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical perspectives that inform this work draw from a number of disciplines, including theory and research in language and literacy development, anthropology, bilingual education, psychology, and sociolinguistics. It is informed by sociocultural theory (Gee, 2008; Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007; Moll, 1990) as well as work done in examining language ideologies (González, 2001; Valdez, 2009; Woolard & Schiefflin, 1998). This theoretical framework emphasizes a focus on the broader social, institutional, and cultural contexts of schooling, including issues of privilege and power in society. It is inspired by the work of Vygotsky and others, in attempting to understand language, thinking and literacy as socially mediated and situated within the historical and cultural contexts in which they occur. Central to this perspective is an understanding of the importance of social mediation, and its role in learning; that is, people learn through their participation in social practices, and that all human action is mediated by tools and signs, especially language (Vygotsky, 1978; Moll, 2001, 1990).

Language ideology is a concept used in different ways among linguistic anthropologists and others. However, despite these varied uses, "...what makes the term useful in spite of its problems, is a view of ideology rooted in or responsive to the experience of a particular social position..." (Woolard & Schiefflin, 1994, p. 58) and its association with power, its uses, and the reproduction of dominant/ subordinate relations. I use the term language ideologies to refer to "the body of an individual's ideas, attitudes and beliefs about the learning and use of language" (Valdez, 2009, p. 2), which affect their actual uses of language(s) in everyday life.

There is a small but growing number of studies that examine language ideologies within dual language immersion programs. For example, Fitts studied fifth grade students in a dual language elementary school to understand the relationship between beliefs and practices toward bilingualism and bilingual practices, as well as whether those beliefs and practices worked to either challenge or reproduce inequitable relations. She found that the school was doing well in developing students' bilingualism and challenging inequitable relations, although there were areas that needed further attention by teachers and the administration (Fitts, 2006). In another study, González and her colleagues examined

how language ideologies influenced the implementation of a whole school, dual language immersion program in an elementary school. They found that, as a result of the strong commitment of the teachers, administrators and parents, the school “provided an ideological space not only for the development of bilingualism and biliteracy but also for multidiscursive practices and readings of the world” (González, 2005, p. 173). Several other studies have also examined the influence of language ideologies in dual language immersion programs (McCollum, 1999; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Almeida, 2006; Rubinstein-Avila, 2002; Scanlan & Palmer, 2009). A common perspective from these studies is that language ideologies influence the ways in which students identify with, and position themselves, as learners and users of the two languages. That is, if for example, a student had positive associations with the minority language, they may be more inclined to appropriate and use that language within both school and out-of-school contexts.

Students’ social identities (broadly conceived) at the outset of, and during, bilingual schooling certainly influence their attitudes regarding learning and using the minority language, but these social positions are also shaped and influenced by broader societal ideologies regarding the status of the minority language, and therefore, the desirability of learning to use that language (Reyes, 2006). Of course, the processes of schooling themselves may also affect students in both positive and negative ways, and these processes, too, are informed by language ideologies in society: the attitudes, beliefs and their resultant practices toward specific languages (and the groups of people that use them) (Fitts, 2006; Scanlan & Palmer, 2009). The point here is that young people, like all of us, are influenced by the social worlds around them—and their attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding language(s) are no exception. As noted by Moll, Sáez & Dworin, (see also Gutiérrez, 2002; Halcón, 2001; Shannon, 1995) the dominant language ideologies in the U.S. towards Spanish have often been a negative influence for many Latina/o children:

It is the unfortunately the case that some children internalize the negative societal attitudes toward Spanish, toward bilingualism, and toward their ethnic groups, regardless of teachers’ efforts. There is, in fact, a long tradition in this country of degrading in schools anything that is not Anglo-Saxon, what Spring (1994) calls the “deculturalization” process of schooling (2001, p. 439).

This study was influenced by theoretical perspectives from work in both sociocultural views on languages and literacy development and language ideologies. Sociocultural theories provided the key understanding that language learning and use are always social, as well

as individual practices. In attempting to learn about the participants' uses of Spanish and English, sociocultural perspectives supported my thinking in the development of key areas to explore in the interviews, such as family background, friends and other social networks, recollections about experiences in the immersion program, etc. This emphasis on the social nature of language use assisted in analyzing statements made by Kathy, Marie, Teresa, Nina, and Chelsea about their academic experiences, personal and social activities, both currently and in the past, and especially how they appeared to situate themselves vis-à-vis Spanish-speakers. In other words, a sociocultural analysis of language and literacy use must view these practices as constituted within specific social contexts, such as homes, school, worksites, and communities and must focus on both individual's language practices and perspectives, as well as the conditions in which they occur, including the broader social and ideological issues.

Using language ideologies as a conceptual lens helped me to connect and make sense of the reported language practices, social networks, and cultural affinities of the participants. That is, their perspectives on the use of languages became more transparent through an examination of their language practices, which are never done as isolated acts; rather they represent broader "ideologies-in-action" whether these views are consciously held by the individuals or not (Gee, 2008; Woolard, Schiefflin, & Kroskrity, 1998). Making sure to learn about the different personal histories and social positions of each of the participants through specific interview questions and areas of inquiry was also influenced, in part, by some of the work that has been in language ideologies, and providing a means to glimpse the participants' ideologies about language(s) and its value in their lives.

### **Dual Language Immersion Programs**

Dual language immersion programs are viewed by many researchers and educators as the best approach for developing students' bilingualism and biliteracy, high academic achievement, and cross cultural competencies (Fitts, 2006; Howard & Sugarman, 2007; Lindholm-Leary 2001). The support for dual language immersion programs is based upon a number of research studies. For example, Lindholm-Leary (2001) has done extensive research in a two-way immersion elementary school in California as well as numerous other school sites, documenting that both the Latina/o and Anglo students have become bilingual and biliterate, with high levels of academic achievement and had positive cross cultural experiences. Other research has produced similar evidence regarding dual language immersion programs (see e.g., Fitts, 2006; Lindholm-Leary 2001).

At the same time, however, a number of researchers have raised important questions regarding two-way immersion programs, especially issues related with language, culture and power. For instance, Valdés raised several concerns regarding dual language immersion programs, with the most salient one being issues regarding language and power, including questions about whether prejudice and discrimination by members of the dominant culture can be decreased by their children's study of minority languages (Valdés, 1997; see also Scanlan & Palmer, 2009). This concern relates to the fact that dual language immersion programs attempt to provide education for two different groups of students, those who have been identified as second language learners of English and English-speaking (predominantly white) students who are learning a minority language.

Others have raised similar issues regarding dual language immersion programs, especially those related to social and economic inequities and education (Edelsky, 2006; McCollum, 1999; Palmer, 2007; Shannon, 1995; Walsh, 1995). In other words, whether dual language immersion programs contribute to the reproduction of negative social class and racial dynamics for Latina/os while simultaneously supporting the development of bilingualism and biliteracy for white, middle/upper class students. Researchers have examined these concerns at the elementary school level (Fitts, 2006; Palmer, 2007; Scanlan & Palmer, 2009). This study is unique in that it explored some of these issues among students who had completed a K-12 dual language immersion program, where almost no research has been done.

### Research Questions

Although other related areas were also examined in this project, the basic research question that guided this interview study was: What can be learned about the English-Spanish bilingualism and biliteracy of former students of a 13-year bilingual school program? There were several ancillary questions as well:

1. Are the participants bilingual and biliterate? How much Spanish do the participants use in their daily lives? For what purposes and with whom?
2. To what kinds of social networks do the participants belong and what might this reveal about their language ideologies?
3. How closely they align themselves with Spanish speaking people and cultures?

### Methods

I conducted semi-structured interviews with five former students (2 Mexican American, 1 African American, and 2 European American) to understand the residual impact of thirteen years in a Spanish-English bilingual school program. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. All of the participants were students in the same two-way immersion program from kindergarten through twelfth grade and who had graduated from the program; four of the five attended the program together and graduated from high school in 2005 and one of the participants graduated from high school in 1999.

The interviews were approximately one to two hours in length, and topics included areas such as participant's family background, friends and social networks, experiences in the dual immersion program, uses of English and Spanish in daily interactions, affiliations with Spanish-speaking communities, reasons for being in a bilingual program from K-12, occupational goals, and other areas. The interview transcripts were analyzed primarily for content related to language use, social networks, and cultural affiliations. Coding by general themes that emerged was done first, and then patterns within and across interview transcripts were identified and analyzed (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006). All of the names used are pseudonyms and were chosen by the participants. I met separately with each of the participants to conduct the interviews at a café. However, I did not have the opportunity to conduct data collection at any of the three schools that make up the K-12 dual language program, and therefore had to rely almost exclusively on the interview data for my analysis. So the issue that emerged from the interviews regarding Latina/o students and whether the program serves them well is one that requires additional research for other forms of evidence to support or refute the participants' statements.

### The K-12 Two-Way Immersion Program

The participants in this study attended an elementary, whole school dual language immersion program. The school included grades K-5 and employed a 90/10 model. The program in their middle school was a strand within the school. The criteria for selecting and accepting students from the elementary dual language program into the middle school immersion program included a recommendation by an interviewer of the student candidates and scores on a standardized test (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2011).

Language learning takes place primarily through content instruction and immersion classes use the same district-approved standards-based textbooks used by other schools in the district. Assessment is done in both English and Spanish. In middle school,

participants took the following classes in Spanish: a) Sixth Grade: Humanities; b) Seventh Grade: Literature, Social Studies, Spanish; and c) Eighth Grade: Literature, Social Studies and Spanish for Spanish-speakers. In high school, they took two classes in Spanish each semester, with choices in Humanities, Math, Spanish and Economics. More than 90% of students continue to high school from feeder middle schools (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2011).

### **The Former Students**

In the next section, I provide brief portraits of the participants to provide some background about each one, an understanding of their uses of English and Spanish, and how language ideologies may have influenced their cultural affinities with Spanish speaking people and communities. I first offer a portrait of Kathy, followed by portraits of Marie, Teresa, Nina and Chelsea.

#### **Kathy.**

Kathy was a nineteen year old, Mexican American female. She graduated from high school in 2005. At the time of the interview, she had just completed her first year of college at a research university in the area, where she was majoring in engineering. Kathy was the first in her family to attend a four-year university. In high school, she took Advanced Placement classes in Spanish, Chemistry, Calculus, Spanish Literature, and English. She began kindergarten in the dual language immersion program because her father liked the idea of Spanish being taught to his daughter and the school was very close to her home. Kathy reported that about 15 immersion students were in her high school graduating class.

Kathy's mother works as a housekeeper and her father is employed as a gardener. Her parents immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico 30 years ago. She is the youngest in her family and has two older brothers and one older sister. Several of her cousins attend the elementary school dual language immersion program.

Kathy's first language was Spanish. She speaks Spanish with her parents and other family members, but English with her brothers and sister. Kathy speaks English with many friends, but Spanish with her best friend, her roommate, and other friends. She reported that she used English during much of her day because she was attending college. She speaks Spanish on a daily basis with one of her roommates and with her mother in daily phone conversations. She writes and reads almost exclusively in English, except for Internet use in Spanish to keep up with current events in Latin America. Kathy also watches Univision daily to stay current with news about Latin America.

**Marie.**

Marie was a nineteen year old, European American (white) female. She graduated from high school in 2005. She had just completed her first year of college, where she was planning to major in Business and Spanish. In high school, Marie took Advanced Placement classes in English, Spanish, Spanish Literature, Psychology, and Statistics. Her mother enrolled her in the dual language immersion program in kindergarten because she thought it would be important for her to learn Spanish “because so many people here speak Spanish.” Marie reported that about 20 immersion students were in her high school graduating class.

Marie’s mother is an administrator for a preschool program. She is from Canada, and she was bilingual in French and English as a child. Her father is a former history teacher who now works as a manager of several stores. Marie’s mother lost her French when she moved to an English-speaking area of Canada at the age of twelve. Her father is a monolingual English speaker. Marie has one younger sister who was attending the high school dual language immersion program.

Marie’s first language was English. She speaks English with her parents and other family members. With her friends, she speaks in English. Marie speaks Spanish almost exclusively in Spanish classes.

Marie writes in Spanish for Spanish classes. She does no reading in Spanish except for assignments in her Spanish classes. With Spanish-speaking friends, Marie reported that she might speak to them in Spanish only if they first spoke to her in Spanish. She reported that she doesn’t have any friends in college that are native Spanish speakers.

**Teresa.**

Teresa was a nineteen year old, African American female. She graduated from high school in 2005. She had just completed her first year of college, where she was a Pre-Med major because she wants to become a medical examiner. In high school, she took Advanced Placement classes in English, Chemistry, Spanish and Calculus. Her father enrolled her in the two-way immersion program in kindergarten because he knew the benefits of knowing another language and culture.

Teresa’s father was from California and worked as an engineer. He learned Japanese because there were a lot of Japanese clientele where he worked. Her father died when she was twelve, and from that point on, her stepmother raised her. Her stepmother’s background is French-Armenian and she speaks French, Armenian, and English. She is a homemaker who attended college but does not have a degree. Teresa has two younger sisters and both were attending the two-way immersion program.

Teresa speaks in English with her stepmother and her sisters. She uses Spanish with friends who have taken Spanish classes in college, a non-Latina friend who lived in Spain for two years, and when she volunteers as an ESL tutor at the county penitentiary. Teresa sometimes watches the news in Spanish and she enjoys listening to music in Spanish. She doesn't read or write in Spanish except for corresponding with a friend who was in Costa Rica for the summer and to help her sister with her homework.

Until she went to college, Teresa reported that she never had any African American friends and had very few Latina/o friends. Describing her college experience she said, "That has changed. Actually, I'd say like 99 percent of my friends are black, which is a completely new experience for me." (Transcript of interview with Teresa, p. 28).

### **Nina.**

Nina was a 25 year old, European American (white) female. She graduated from high school in 1999. Nina reported that about 10 students graduated with her in the dual language immersion program. She has a bachelor's degree in Finance and worked for a stockbroker for several years. She was the first in her family to graduate from college. At the time of the interview, Nina was working in a restaurant. She would like to eventually study for an MBA in Spain. In high school, Nina took Advanced Placement classes in English, Spanish, and Spanish Literature. Her parents enrolled her in the dual language immersion program because they recognized the value and importance of knowing a second language, especially Spanish in California.

Her mother is a preschool teacher and her father works as a mechanic. Her mother is Scottish and her father is English; both have lived in the U.S. for 30 years. Nina has a brother who is one year younger than she is. English is the only language spoken at home.

She regularly enjoys reading novels in English. In high school and college, she read a number of novels in Spanish by Latin American authors but no longer reads books in Spanish. Nina reported that she speaks Spanish every day. She speaks Spanish with her co-workers at the restaurant and with her friends. She occasionally reads a newspaper in Spanish and websites on the Internet. She always speaks Spanish with two of her closest friends, and wrote to one of them in Spanish for six months when he was out of the country. Nina rarely writes in Spanish in her daily life. She "loves movies in Spanish" and sees them often. She listens to music in Spanish on a regular basis and also enjoys dancing to music in Spanish.

**Chelsea.**

Chelsea was a nineteen year old, Mexican American female. She graduated from high school in 2005. At the time of the interview, she was working for her family's plumbing company and planning to attend the local community college in the fall. In high school, she took Advanced Placement classes in Spanish, Spanish Literature, and English Literature, and two classes in Economics. She began kindergarten in the dual language immersion program because her parents wanted her to know standard Spanish well. Chelsea reported that there were about 20 immersion students were in her high school graduating class.

Chelsea's mother works in the office of the family-owned plumbing company and her father is one of several plumbers. Her father immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico 30 years ago and her mother (who she described as "white") is from California. She has one older sister and a younger sister and brother. Her older sister graduated from the immersion program and her younger sister was attending it.

Chelsea grew up as a Spanish-English bilingual. Her father is bilingual and her mother knows some Spanish. She speaks Spanish with her father and other family members on his side, but English with her mother and siblings. Chelsea speaks English with most of her friends, but she speaks Spanish with some of them. She writes and reads in English, but sometimes translates from Spanish at work to write invoices.

**Findings**

There were three major themes that were identified in this study: 1) All of the former students reported being bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish; 2) The participant's attitudes and beliefs regarding the value of knowing Spanish were implicated through the analysis and it seems that their specific social histories and cultural identities may account for the variation in their language ideologies. In other words, each of the participant's social positions appeared to be connected to how they used Spanish, with whom, and for what purposes. 3) The issue of who may be reaping the most benefits from the dual language immersion program (the Latina/o students or the white, European American students) arose especially at the secondary levels and raised questions for further study.

**Bilingualism and Biliteracy**

From the analysis of the interviews, it appears that all of the participants were both bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish. To varying degrees, all of them reported using Spanish in their daily lives. While there certainly seems to be a diverse range in terms of the

purposes, types, frequency, and social networks in which Spanish is used among the participants discussed here, all of them are bilingual. Although most of them did not report a great deal of writing or reading in Spanish on a daily basis, they all reported being capable of doing so. Therefore, it appears that all of them are biliterate, in addition to being bilingual. The finding that the five former students of the immersion program are bilingual and biliterate is a significant one, given the anti-bilingual education law and the English-only ideological climate that exists in California.

### **Language Ideologies, Social Networks and Spanish Language Use**

The language ideologies that influenced the participants were evident in their descriptions of their social networks and uses of English and Spanish. It is not surprising to note that there were some significant differences among the participants in the kinds of social networks that each was involved with as well as in their uses of Spanish. Some of these differences may be explained by the different ways that language ideologies helped to shape their social positions, social networks, and language use.

Through an analysis of the interviews, I identified two prominent language ideologies in the everyday uses of Spanish by the participants. It is important to point out that these language ideologies are not simply about one's social position vis-à-vis language; they are also intertwined with the dynamics of social class, as well as issues related to racial/ethnic, social and cultural identities (Gee, 2008; Woolard, Schiefflin & Kroskrity, 1998).

The first language ideology may be described as a functional language ideology, where Spanish was used primarily to accomplish only specific kinds of communication with others. An example of this comes from Marie, who reported that she used Spanish almost exclusively with non-native Spanish speakers in her college Spanish classes:

Not here. Like, when I'm in class and you're doing a debate or something like that but not usually outside of class. Just because everyone's first language is English and it's just easier to speak English, I guess. (Transcript of interview with Marie, page 12)

The other language ideology was one where linguistic and cultural affinities with native Spanish speakers were a key part of the participants' orientation. One illustration of this language ideology comes from Nina, whose social networks included diverse Spanish speakers and where she reported speaking Spanish daily in a variety of social contexts.

The participants that appeared to be most influenced by a functional language ideology were Teresa and Marie. Both of them used Spanish in somewhat limited ways in their everyday social interactions. For the most part, their use of Spanish was limited to speaking with others who were in college Spanish classes with them and were non-native speakers of Spanish. Although Teresa spoke Spanish as a volunteer tutor in the ESL program for four hours per week, it appeared to be one of the few times that she interacted with native Spanish speakers on a regular basis. This functional language ideology is also reflected in their social networks. Teresa and Marie did not report involvement with native Spanish speakers as part of their social networks (with the exception of the ESL tutoring mentioned above). At the same time, Teresa reported occasionally watching the news in Spanish and listening to music in Spanish. She also corresponded with a friend who was in Costa Rica for the summer and helped her sister with her homework in Spanish. Marie, on the other hand, did not report using Spanish much in her daily life except with classmates in her Spanish classes. So while both were influenced by a functional language ideology, there were certainly some important differences in their regular uses of Spanish.

The three other participants, Kathy, Nina, and Chelsea, reported linguistic and cultural affinities with Spanish speakers and Spanish-speaking communities through their uses of Spanish. Kathy used Spanish with her parents and other family members, her friends and her roommate. In doing so, she maintained Spanish as an important aspect of her cultural identity. Nina used Spanish with her co-workers and friends and often participated in cultural activities that were in Spanish. She apparently had developed affinities with Spanish-speakers and these were part of her daily life. Chelsea reported speaking Spanish with her father, other family members, and with some of her friends, as well as using Spanish at work. Thus, all three of them interacted regularly with their Spanish-speaking social networks.

The ways that language ideologies have influenced the English and Spanish use by graduates of K-12 dual language immersion programs is an important area that warrants serious consideration among bilingual educators and researchers. We need to become more knowledgeable about the consequences of such programs to grasp their impact on the young people who have spent thirteen years as bilingual students. This study provided some insights into the language uses and ideologies of the graduates of one K-12 program. Perhaps, however, the more important contribution is that it highlighted a topic that has received very little attention, despite its significance. Further research by bilingual researchers into language ideologies and the residue of thirteen years of

bilingual schooling is needed for us to better understand the influence that dual language immersion programs have on former students.

### **Who Is the Program Really Serving?**

A key question that emerged from this interview study was: who is the program really serving? It is one that others have raised regarding dual language immersion programs at the elementary school level (see e. g., Edelsky, 2006; McCollum, 1999; Palmer, 2007; Rubinstein-Avila, 2002; Valdés, 1997; Walsh, 1995). Although the K-12 dual language immersion program apparently was successful in meeting the goals of developing students' bilingualism and biliteracy, the issue of who benefits most from the program and most importantly who does not, surfaced from the analysis of the interviews. At the center of this concern are the Spanish speaking, Latina/o students because it appears that they may benefit least from the program.

In the interviews, several participants made comments regarding Latina/o students and low academic achievement, not continuing with the program beyond elementary school, not being in the college track in high school, dropping out of school, and how few graduated from the high school immersion program. Consider the following as just a few examples.

When asked whether there were many students of color with her in Advanced Placement classes, Kathy responded, "I think because it had been--I had been in those classes for so long--where I had gotten to it in middle school, where I was the only Latina or there was another Latino and that's it." Kathy reported that she had two different groups of friends in high school:

I had my Latino friends and most of them weren't doing very good in school, some of them were doing drugs, would skip school, just—not doing so good. And those were the people I'd hang out with during lunch. Those were the people I'd go to the movies with. And then I had my friends in class, the kids who were at the same level as me, who—at least in high school, I was taking Calculus with. And my other friends were taking Algebra 2 or Algebra 1. So it was very different, like it was two different worlds. (Transcript of interview with Kathy, p.14)

In the following excerpt, Nina offers her reasoning as to why there were very few Latina/o students in the two-way immersion program in high school:

And not a lot of the kids that I was in [elementary school] with continued in the program in high school. Because once you get to high school, the program becomes AP—becomes advanced placement Spanish. And not a lot of those kids were in it. I mean, I remember being in

AP Spanish with three kids that I had gone to elementary school with. Because it puts you on a college-bound track. And the kids that I went to [elementary school] with did not go to college. (Transcript of interview with Nina, p. 7)

Chelsea reported that there were not many Latina/os in the two-way immersion program beyond elementary school: “No, more of them were English speakers...And then as it went on, it was more of the English speakers that stayed in it than the Spanish speakers.” (Transcript of interview with Chelsea, p.13).

If these observations, and others like them, are accurate, then it suggests that few of the Latina/o students continue with the immersion program beyond elementary school and that many may not be in the college track in high school. It also raises additional questions, such as whether there is a higher percentage of college-bound Latina/os coming out of K-12 bilingual programs than non-bilingual programs, as well as other significant issues that require further research, but a full discussion of them is beyond the scope of this article.

The question of who do the programs really serve is at the heart of concerns raised by educators and researchers who promote high quality education for Latina/o students. Valdés (1997), for example, has noted that, “For minority children, the acquisition of English is expected. For mainstream children, the acquisition of a non-English language is enthusiastically applauded. Children are aware of these differences” (p. 417; see also Edelsky, 2006; Palmer, 2009). It seems that while dual language immersion programs have been successful in producing bilingual and biliterate graduates, most of them are white European Americans. So addressing the issue of few Latina/o students continuing with a program is one that needs to be taken seriously if such programs are to be equally beneficial for Latina/o students. This is not to suggest that educators involved with such programs are unaware of or unconcerned with this issue. However, unless these programs recruit and retain more Latina/o students at the middle and high school levels, they are likely to continue to best serve students and parents of privilege and power in the community.

### **Limitations**

The study is limited in several ways. First, it is based on interviews with a small number of graduates of a dual language immersion program, and thus the data is based on self-reports of the participants. Second, there were no observations done of classrooms or interviews with teachers, parents, and others involved with the program, which

would enable triangulation of the data collected. Third, although the interviews were 1-2 hours in length, they represent participant responses on one occasion, with no follow-up by the researcher on specific comments made by the participants. Finally, I did not collect data from students who attended the elementary school dual language immersion program but did not continue with the program into middle school. This may have provided insights into the reasons why many of the Latina/o students did not choose to stay in the program, and explained why there were relatively few Latina/o high school graduates in the two-way immersion program. Despite these limitations, the study is one of the very few to focus on graduates of a K-12 program and it raises issues for bilingual educators that need to be addressed if K-12 dual language immersion programs are to realize their full potential, especially for Latina/o and other language minority students.

### **Conclusion**

This article discussed the reported language and literacy practices of five young adults who had spent 13 years attending a Spanish-English dual language immersion program. It also examined some of the ways in which language ideologies may have influenced the participant's specific social networks, uses of Spanish, and cultural affinities. This research will serve as the basis for a longitudinal, qualitative research project that explores the areas for further research identified below.

This was a small study with only five participants, and the data collection was limited to interviews. However, in addition to being what may be the first study to investigate language and literacy practices of young adults who experienced thirteen years of bilingual schooling, there are several contributions that it makes to our knowledge about the impact of K-12 bilingual schooling. First, as discussed above, the former students reported being bilingual and biliterate in Spanish and English. Although their use of texts in both languages has changed over time, it seems that this particular bilingual program may have been successful in achieving its goal of bilingualism and biliteracy, at least with these five young adults. While this may appear to be quite a modest finding, it does offer empirical support for the possibility of students engaging in a prolonged commitment with a Spanish-English bilingual program through which they may appropriate academic Spanish and English. This is no small achievement, given the strength and ubiquity of the hegemony of English in U.S. society (Dworin, 2003; Halcón 2001; Shannon, 1995). It is an affirmative testimony to the efforts, knowledge, and determination of the teachers, staff, and administrators at the three schools that make up the immersion program. This is

especially the case when we consider that California eliminated almost all bilingual education programs with the passage and implementation of Proposition 223 in 1998, and that the state Education Code explicitly forbids the use of any language other than English in public elementary schools (California Education Code, Section 305-306). Therefore, the finding that all of the former students of the immersion program reported being bilingual and biliterate is a significant one, and demonstrates the potential of K-12 bilingual schooling.

The findings regarding the language ideologies of the participants are also significant because they indicate that the influences of schooling such as the K-12 bilingual program may be only a small part of a larger set of social and cultural dynamics that inform language practices of former bilinguals students such as those in the study. In other words, we might expect that after 13 years of attending Spanish-English bilingual schooling, graduates of programs of this type would likely be using their bilingualism (and especially their abilities in Spanish) on a regular, everyday basis in multiple domains of their lives. However, this appears not to necessarily be the case, at least amongst the five participants. Although certainly more research is needed to provide a more in-depth understanding of the impact of K-12 bilingual programs, this study demonstrates how complex, fluid, and situated language use can be for young adult bilinguals from the same three schools.

The finding regarding the small number of Latina/o students is important, too, and raises important questions regarding the dual language immersion programs that others have posited (see Edelsky, 2006; McCollum, 1999; Palmer, 2007; Valdés, 1997). As mentioned above, this is more of an issue that emerged from the interviews and was not one of the initial research questions of the study, and one that requires inquiry within the three schools. Yet, if we are to give any credence to the statements of the five participants, it is an important area that raises concerns about equity and bilingual schooling for Latina/o students.

### **Areas for Further Research**

The study identified several important areas for further research. One is the issue of the small number of Latina/o students that continued in the program beyond elementary school. It is likely that there are multiple reasons that few Latina/os stayed in the program and more research can inform educators regarding this key concern. Related to this is the question of who is best served by these programs, the Latina/o students or the white, European American students? This issue is thoroughly impacted by the dynamics of race, class, culture and

language in U.S. society and schools. Further study of the exercise of power and privilege by middle/upper class white students and their families in two way immersion programs is necessary to address the critique raised by Valdés and others (Edelsky, 2006; McCollum, 1999; Palmer, 2007; Rubinstein-Avila, 2002; Valdés, 1997). Finally, ethnographic research that focuses on the perspectives and experiences of the Latina/o students in the K-12 immersion program is needed. Such research would afford insights into many of the issues raised by critics of such programs and also provide the means to improve dual language immersion programs for all of their students.

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