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Using Self-Reflection to Improve Racial Literacy: One White ELL Teacher's Journey

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Abstract: White teachers often use language that continues to position racialized students and their languages as inferior, thus perpetuating racial and linguistic inequality in society. The purpose of this study was an interrogation of racial literacies within my teaching discourse as a white English Language Learner teacher. Using racial literacies as theoretical framework, this study was conducted in a St. Louis central city school district within a secondary United States Government class for English for Speakers of Other Languages students. A qualitative longitudinal self-reflective design was utilized employing two sources of data, classroom narrative data and written reflective memos. Discursive strategies of racial literacies were identified in the narrative data while reflective memos were used to contextualize the findings. These data sources were triangulated. Findings revealed, while I rejected Anti-Black Linguistic Racism with students through the teaching the history of Black English, my classroom discourse still reified linguistic hierarchies. I had positioned myself as someone becoming bilingual to situate multilingualism as an asset; however, I did not acknowledge the difference between my language learning as a white female and how my Black and Latinx students' bilingualism was racialized by others. This empirical method is an effective way teacher-scholars can reflect upon their biases embedded within their discourse and actions. Because teachers can improve their racial literacy practices, this approach provides teachers opportunities for growth as they strive towards actions that support anti-racism and linguistic justice.

Keywords: racial literacies, Racial Literacy Development Model, discursive strategies, teacher- scholar, self-reflective research

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Within the field of research about the teaching of English, teachers, researchers, and scholars continue to position bilingual students as if their languages are a barrier to the learning process rather than an asset, perpetuating deficit perceptions of multilingualism (García et al., 2021; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006). These deficit constructions are juxtaposed with the privileging of the "idealized linguistic practices of whiteness" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 151), which continues to position the monolingual language practices of white people as normative despite the majority of the world being bilingual (García, 2009). This is especially pernicious since the majority of students in the United States (US) are students of color (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). Moreover, many of these students of color are also bilingual. At the same time, teachers within the US remain overwhelmingly white, female, and monolingual so there is a great need for their engagement in deep self-reflection about how they engage with their students (Brown et al., 2017; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Song et al., 2021). In this study, I present my systematic qualitative self-reflection research method that other white teachers can use. Chávez-Moreno's (2022a) conceptualization of racial literacies as operating on a continuum and the Archeology of Self within the Racial Literacy Development Model (Sealey-Ruiz, 2022) framed this work. The purpose of this research was to examine how racial literacy was enacted within my teaching discourse.

Literature Review

The relevant literature concerning racial literacy and language ideologies, which influenced the creation of this study, and the literature about teacher self-reflective studies, which is the methodology employed in this study are discussed in this section. First, an overview of the practice of racial literacy is provided. Because this study was conducted in a classroom of Black and Latinx bilingual students, literature about language ideologies were drawn upon as a specific way racial literacy needs to be used to analyze the linguistic discrimination experienced by racialized people. Finally, how other teachers have engaged in self-reflection on their use of racial literacy is presented.

Racial Literacy

Though the term *racial literacy* was first coined by Guinier (2004), it is a practice historically tied to African Americans who were able to read "race in its psychological, interpersonal, and structural dimensions" as a means of survival (Guinier, 2004, p. 115). Though academics first applied the term within the fields of legal studies and sociology, racial literacy has largely been taken up by scholars in the field of education. Many scholars utilizing a racial literacy framework have appropriated the concept to explore how to develop racial literacy among both preservice and in-service white teachers working with minoritized and racialized students (Brown, 2022; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). Skerrett's (2011) interviews of English Language Arts (ELA) and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers significantly contributed to the concept of racial literacy by illustrating three categories of approaches teachers utilized (i.e., apprehensive/authorized, incidental/ill-informed, and sustained/strategic). Skerrett's (2011) study also demonstrated an important connection between racial literacies used between ELA and ESL teachers.

Language Ideologies

Language ideologies are the social constructs, categories and beliefs people hold around language and are one part of a broader set of racial literacy practices (Lew & Siffrinn, 2019). People's ideas about language often inform and perpetuate racism. For

example, within the United States' dominant language ideologies, it is most often believed as an objective fact that monolingualism is normative and that languages have superior standardized versions (García & Torres-Guevara, 2010; Wiley & Lukes, 1996). However, linguists have long argued that the notion of "standard language" privileges the language of dominant groups and that there is not an objective "standard" (Lippi-Green, 2012). Flores and Rosa's (2015) concept of *raciolinguistic ideologies* theorized the linguistic practices of minoritized-language speakers and racialized persons are positioned as inferior when compared to an idealized "white speaking subject" (p. 152). Therefore, despite bilingualism being the global norm, within the U.S., the bilingualism of Black and Latino people is positioned as a barrier to learning rather than an asset (García, 2009; García et al., 2021; Rosa, 2016). At the same time, white folks who become bilingual are often lauded (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2016).

Speakers of Black English experience a particular form of raciolinguistic discrimination, due to the long history of anti-Black racism within the US, which manifests in what Baker-Bell (2020) termed Anti-Black Linguistic Racism. This also co-occurs with beliefs about standardized language, which Alim and Smitherman (2012) called *White Mainstream English* (WME) to make visible the way white normativity affects whose language is considered "standard." Within the school setting, educators often push racialized bilingual children to code-switch (i.e., shift between varieties of language), equating students' academic and intellectual capability with their ability to code-switch into WME (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lee, 2017; Rosa, 2016). Another form of racialized language bias appears when teachers pressure Black students and/or students who receive ESL services to use more "academic language." Flores (2020) has asserted that academic language "is not a list of empirical linguistic practices but rather a raciolinguistic ideology that frames the home language practices of racialized communities as inherently deficient" (p. 24).

Self-Reflective Studies by Teachers

Various scholars have studied racial literacy at the micro- or classroom-level by analyzing their own teaching practices. Rogers and Mosley's (2006) study featured Mosley's self-examination of what types of racial literacies she utilized in her teaching discourse practices in addition to those of her students. Moore (2022) employed autoethnography to examine her experiences in finding freedom after experiencing attempts at silencing her for discussing race at a predominantly white institution (PWI). Finally, Bell et al. (2022) applied the method of duoethnography as a means of co-examining their racial literacy journey by delving into their pasts through letter writing. Of those who have engaged in sustained self-interrogation, Flynn et al. (2020) interrogated their attempts as teacher educators to help preservice teachers develop racial literacy. Other scholars have engaged in reflective critical writing about their racial literacy practices, including Velasco's (2022) examination of the messages and experiences of socialization that influenced his time as a math teacher.

Researchers also have focused on analyzing teachers' language ideologies, examining the self-professed beliefs regarding language of teachers through reflective writing (see Deroo & Ponzio, 2023; Lew & Siffrinn, 2019). Others have examined more directly how language ideologies have influenced teachers' classroom discussions from the researcher's perspective (see Greene, 2021; Metz, 2018). Though the teachers in these studies engaged in reflection, the researcher(s) analyzed the data, missing a crucial opportunity to engage teachers in the process of self-examination. As a self-reflective interrogation

may bring to light oppressive and unloving practices, it can serve as a catalyst for teachers to change their practices.

Generally, scholars have spent much more time analyzing how students and teachers engage in racial literacy practices rather than turning the lens back upon themselves, examining their own practices. While the teacher-scholar approach is not new (Fecho, 2001, 2003), more teacher-scholars are needed who engage in self-examination and reflection that problematize and destabilize how deficit language ideologies persist through their own actions and words at the K-12 level (Ruscio, 2013; Sun & Owens, 2021). Critical self-interrogation is necessary, especially for white, monolingual teachers working with racialized multilingual students. Researchers, especially those reflecting on their own practice, must accomplish this in nuanced ways, examining how their discourses reify and/or challenge existing systems of power i.e., racism or linguistic discrimination (Bloome et al., 2004). The goal of my research was to use a teacher-scholar's perspective, demonstrating how deconstructing language ideologies is part of a broader set of literacy practices and can be used to improve one's racial literacy.

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Theoretical Framework

In this study, racial literacy was defined as a skill to examine the ground-up use of my classroom teaching and compare my findings with a sociopolitical analysis of racism and societal inequality to understand how my actions contributed to or interrupted processes that perpetuate racial inequality (Brown, 2022; Guinier, 2004). To engage in critical self-excavation, I drew upon the Racial Literacy Development Model's (RLDM) activity of critical reflection (i.e., termed a tool) within this model's larger process called Archeology of Self (Sealey-Ruiz, 2022) that focuses on the processes of an individual's development of racial literacy (Mentor & Sealey- Ruiz, 2021). I also drew upon Chávez-Moreno's (2022a) conceptualization of racial literacies as a continuum, which is articulated below.

The RLDM emphasizes the Archeology of Self as a reflexive process through which teachers can uncover their own biases (Sealey-Ruiz, 2022, see Table 1 in Appendix A). This particular approach of self-reflection is focused upon taking action and interrupting racism as the end goal: "Self-work in racial literacy development is important. Without it, teachers cannot engage in and sustain deep conversations about race to explore how it impacts their teaching and what they need to change about their practice" (Mentor & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021, p. 20). Foundational to teachers developing their racial literacy is critical love, not just a feeling but rather for teachers to demonstrate their commitment and care for students through actions. The other four components or tools of the RLDM, interruption, historical literacy, critical reflection, critical humility, can be developed recursively and even simultaneously (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021).

As a tool for revealing one's biases, the RLDM expands opportunities for teachers to move towards more liberatory racial literacy practices. The process of critical reflection, as defined in the RLDM, (Table 1) was used in this study. Underlying the potential for movement from oppressive to more critically

loving pedagogies is Chávez-Moreno's (2022a, 2022b) conceptualization of racial literacies, which asserted racial literacies can be analyzed on a continuum rather than a binary. This interrupts the dualistic idea that people are either anti-racist or racially literate while others are racially illiterate. Chávez-Moreno (2022a) asserted using this binary conceptualization is "ultimately counterproductive because calling race-evasiveness a type of illiteracy unintentionally obscures that race-evasiveness is a way of making meaning of our world" (p. 483). Instead, she called for examining people's racial literacies on a continuum from hegemony to counter-hegemony since this approach allows for a more critical and fluid approach for interrogating one's racialized discursive strategies. Being towards the hegemony end of racial literacies means one's use of racial literacies maintain social inequalities while being towards the counterhegemonic end of racial literacies means one's use of racial literacies interrupts or deconstructs those social inequalities. Because teachers can move their racial literacy practices along the continuum, this approach provides space for opportunity for growth as teachers strive towards anti-racist and linguistic justice actions.

This study is my attempt to enter into an iterative process of self-reflection by interrogating my use of racial literacies using the RLDM process of critical reflection with an understanding of Chávez-Moreno's (2022a) hegemonic to counterhegemonic continuum. The guiding question for this study was: In what ways do I use hegemonic and counterhegemonic racial literacies in my teaching discourse?

Methodology

Design

A qualitative longitudinal self-reflective design was used (Franks, 2016). Taking oneself as the primary subject of study affords researchers a space to interrogate and learn from their actions. Bateson (1969, 1972) theorized that "true discovery occurs when researchers are able to identify patterns in their thought processes and behaviors, and why and how they function in particular ways" (Franks, 2016, p. 49). This research was conducted without Institutional Review Board approval; therefore, the narrative data used in this study were my classroom talk and self-reflections.

Research Context

In order to transparently situate this research, the sociopolitical and geographical significance of St. Louis as the city in which this study was conducted is described along with a more specific description of the school and classroom. An examination of the larger sociopolitical context is necessary because rooted and continuing devaluation of education for Black students within St. Louis has framed and influenced this research. Johnson (2020) argues:

> "St. Louis has been the crucible of American history—that much of American history has unfolded from the juncture of empire and anti-Blackness is the city of St. Louis" (p. 5).

St. Louis has been a city central to historic and current iterations of the Black freedom struggle, from Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857) to Shelley v. Kraemer (1948) to the Ferguson Uprising of 2014 (Johnson, 2020; Morris, 2023). The centuries-long of anti-Black policies manifest today in the physicality of St. Louis's emaciated neighborhoods left exposed by white flight and depreciated by racially discriminatory real estate practices (Gordon, 2008; Johnson, 2020; Rothstein, 2017). Today, the St. Louis metropolitan area is in the top ten most segregated cities in the US (Othering and Belonging Institute, n.d.). Education too mirrors the hyper-segregated

landscape with the quality of a child's education differing greatly depending on the part of the region where they live (TEDx Talks, 2015). Black families have had to shoulder the effects of desegregation while Black schools have been defunded and ultimately closed (Duncan- Shippy, 2023; Morris et al., 2022; Morris & Paul, 2023).

While overt acts of anti-Blackness i.e., the murder of Michael Brown Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri, has garnered much attention, the daily covert forms of anti-Blackness and linguistic discrimination that "spirit-murder" Black and Brown children must also be taken into consideration (Love, 2019). Given the importance of the geography of educational opportunity in shaping discussions of race and schooling (Morris & Monroe, 2009; Tate, 2008), it is important to note the St. Louis metropolitan city and its predominantly Black public school district, which is the setting for this study, have been at the epicenter of national conversations about race and opportunity in the US since prior to the Civil War (Johnson, 2020; Morris, 2023). All this sociopolitical context framed my research in the predominantly (90%) Black central city public school where I taught ESL for over four years. I chose to conduct this research in my sheltered American Government class since the curriculum offered many opportunities for examining racial literacy within critical discussions of American history.

Sheltered instruction is a type of classroom support for English Language Learner (ELL) students where they can receive both English language and content-based support for mandatory core classes Often, the teacher and/or co-teacher are certified as both ELL and/or content specialists to provide students with appropriate linguistic scaffolding. As someone certified in both ESL and high school social studies, I served as both the content and language specialist for this class. This was, in fact, the second year I introduced the school year using a mini-unit on Critical Language Awareness (CLA), a process through which people develop criticality around language ideologies. I used this mini-unit to clarify my expectations for how students should focus their language goals, especially considering the district's push for students to learn academic language. Students also were expected to achieve higher scores on the annual English proficiency exam, which would determine whether students were eligible for continuing or graduating from ELL services. I also used the mini-unit to set the tone for my approach to multilingualism (asset-based, building on students' repertoire). In the initial year, students easily made connections between code-switching between English and their family's language(s) but not between White Mainstream English, Black English, and their family's language(s). During the year I conducted this study, I employed many of the activities and approaches from Baker-Bell's (2020) monograph. This study represented a more formal examination of how I practiced racial literacy in applying these concepts within the classroom.

The characteristics of the students in my class in which my self-examination occurred are also described here for further context. Of the eleven students in my class, all spoke at least two languages. The majority of the students were Black (82%) and Latinx (18%); however, students were first-generation immigrants or refugees and second-generation children of immigrants or refugees. Many of these second-generation students, especially the children of African immigrants, identified both with being Black and with their family's cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Students came from nations within East Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, and Central America. In all, these students possessed impressive linguistic skills, speaking ten languages amongst themselves, including English. Additionally, given that the school was predominantly African American, many of these students regularly and fluently spoke Black English

in and outside of my classroom, thus necessitating a special focus on Anti-Black Linguistic Racism in the mini-unit (Paris, 2009).

Positionality

As with all qualitative research, the positionality of the researcher is an essential aspect of understanding the research. Before engaging in this study, I already had expressed a commitment to creating an inclusive classroom that affirmed students' linguistic gifts and identities (Ladson- Billings, 1995, 2009; Paris & Alim, 2014). My approach originated in my own experience of having my belief that Black English was just "slang" disrupted during my undergraduate teacher preparation program. Readings from my master's program had also helped me begin to deconstruct how raciolinguistic and standardized language ideologies manifested in my classroom (Alim, 2010; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012). I am also multilingual having spent time learning Japanese and now Hindi because of my marriage to an Indian-American man, and these experiences also informed my commitment to affirming my students' languaging identities (Baker-Bell, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015; García et al., 2021; Phillipson, 1992). Other aspects of my positionality informing my research and teaching approach, as well as my need to engage in this study, are my identities as a white, straight, cisgender, female. Specifically, I grew up in St. Louis' western exurbs where many white people had fled from the St. Louis central city area in the mid-twentieth century (Gordon, 2008; Johnson, 2020). Michael Brown Jr.'s murder in Ferguson, Missouri, catalyzed my initial development of counterhegemonic racial literacies. This study represents a continued attempt to acquire the "capacity to decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies" within the educational system and within my classroom (Guinier, 2004, p. 100).

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Data Collection

The classroom narrative data were collected over a six-week period (August 29-October 6, 2022) and included thirteen class periods where I recorded my teaching. The recordings were an average length of 67 minutes. I transcribed the recordings and verified the transcriptions. The reflective memos, which were written in the fall of 2024, served as a tool for delving into how my language ideologies have evolved throughout my personal and professional life and were organized according to months and years to demarcate shifts in my thinking.

Data Analysis

The transcription process allowed me to gain initial familiarity with the data (Terry & Hayfield, 2021; Varpio et al., 2017). The transcripts were analyzing using ethnographic methods through a multilevel analysis of open coding, then the emerging categories of hegemonic and counterhegemonic racial literacies (Table 2 in Appendix B).

Initially, I read through each transcript line-by-line and generated codes that encapsulated the main idea or ideas being communicated. Engaging in iterative focused coding, codes were combined or collapsed. A codebook consisting of the codes, definition, key words, and line numbers of where the code appeared in each transcript was created, focusing on the strategies I used to practice racial

literacies. The second level of analysis occurred when it became apparent that codes could be organized by the two categories of hegemonic and counterhegemonic racial literacies. I grouped codes by whether they fell closer on the spectrum towards hegemonic or counterhegemonic racial literacies. I then engaged in a third-level of analysis when the reflective memos on the evolution of my languages ideologies were triangulated with the results of the narrative data analysis to establish context. This process also allowed for further examination of the formation of my language ideologies and how those ideologies became evident in my teaching.

The creation of this study, analysis, and conclusions was also constructed through ongoing discussions with two mentor professors. Both professors are African American scholars whose research focuses on race, identity, and schooling. Their insights and analyses served as an additional form of triangulation, which enhanced the overall project's validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Findings

The findings are organized into the two categories which group whether my discursive actions fell closer to the hegemonic or counterhegemonic ends of the racial literacies spectrum (Table 2 in Appendix B). The codes of *language ideologies*, the social constructs, categories, and beliefs people hold around language, and *whiteness*, the system that perpetuates and maintains privileges for people who are white (Haviland, 2008; Matias & Mackey, 2016), are presented within the hegemonic/counterhegemonic continuum. Each of the sections below begins with the analysis of the reflective memos followed by the racial literacies strategies identified in the data.

Language Ideologies Falling within the Hegemonic to Counterhegemonic Continuum

Counterhegemonic Strategies

Many discursive strategies used (Table 3 in Appendix C) to destabilize dominant language beliefs were identified. A lot of classroom time was spent emphasizing the legitimacy of Black English by engaging in the strategies of "de-essentializing standardized language," "positioning language as asset," and "rejecting linguicism." Many of my ELL students were speakers of Black English; therefore, at the beginning of the year, students watched a video about the history and grammar of Black English. I framed our watching with a statement that Black English was a legitimate language: "There are rules to speaking this language. So, we're gonna learn about the history of this language. And we're going to learn about some of the rules" (class discussion, September 1). The next class period this was reinforced: "We watched the video, right? People hate on Black English right? There are stereotypes about Black English. But do we know? Is it, is Black English— is Black English broken? No! It is a cultural language with rules" (class discussion, September 2).

Other actions identified as disrupting linguistic racism were through the discursive strategies "framing language as contextual" and "de-essentializing schooling language." To raise students' awareness, this question was asked: "Do you speak to your mom the same way that you speak to your little brother?" Additionally, after watching Lyiscott's (2014) Ted Talk "Three Ways to Speak English," I tried to disentangle academic excellence from WME:

> She [Lyiscott] was also using really strong vocabulary. Did you hear how specific her

> vocabulary was? And she did not separate her great vocabulary from whether she is using AAVE or Edited English, right? Because her languages aren't split. They're all part of her. So, in this classroom I want you to use big words, all right? That doesn't mean that we're using proper English. That means we're being specific (class discussion, September 2).

In the above example, there was an emerging attempt to direct students to use contextualized language, specifically language for learning arising from their holistic language repertoire. The aim was to de-essentialize WME and the language of schooling by telling students that they could bring their full selves to the learning process to achieve academic excellence.

Hegemonic Strategies

There were several places in the studied discourse where I engaged in "reifying standardized language" (Table 3 in Appendix C). The reflective memo analysis helped examine how this occurred by providing contexts for the language ideologies I held at the time. Using an awareness of students' code-switching abilities to draw upon their background knowledge and experiences when introducing the terminology for this concept, the examples I gave continued to reify linguistic hierarchies, e.g. saying code-switching can be between "languages, dialects, or registers, which means informal/formal" (class discussion, August 30). Subsequently within the same class period, languages like Geechee Gullah or Jamaican Patois were referred to as "dialects" rather than languages (class discussion, August 30). The term "dialect" can reinforce linguistic hierarchies since it can imply that both languages, which were created by the descendants of enslaved people in the Caribbean and the US, are inferior or illegitimate languages. The notion of WME as "standard" was reified by continued to reference to it as "Standard English." For example, as we discussed the "habitual be" form in Black English by using a modified version of Baker-Bell's (2020) Language A/B activity to contrast the grammar between Black English and WME, I compared that language usage to "Standard English" (Class activity, September 1). Analysis also revealed my attempts at problematizing the notion of standardized language:

> People usually say standard English for language B, or and I don't like standard English, because is there— Really… it means that it's more right, right? That's what standard means. It's more right. I don't like that. I like [the term] 'Edited English' (class discussion, September 1).

The analysis revealed the inconsistency in my problematizing of standardized language when I later explained to students that some teachers may encourage them to speak "Standard English" (class discussion, September 1). This use of "Standard English" to describe WME occurred within the same class period that I had tried to problematize it. By the next class period, I had recognized my continued use of "Standard English" and intentionally shifted to using the term "Edited English" (class discussion, September 2).

I utilized the term "Edited English" while striving to represent "standard English" as illegitimate by describing it as "quote unquote 'standard English'" (class discussion, September 2). Since I did not share this critique of the term overtly, it is highly unlikely my students understood this. Moreover, even though I eventually attempted to switch from "standard English" to "Edited English," I had already reified the notion that WME was the standard.

Whiteness Falling within the Hegemonic to Counterhegemonic Continuum

Counterhegemonic Strategies

In using racial literacy to address whiteness, I used the primary strategy of "naming whiteness" (Table 4). After asking students to react to how people in a video skit were using language, the class hesitated to name the whiteness of one of the characters. I affirmed the class in identifying her as white then continued to probe, asking them to consider how her whiteness impacted how the main character interacted with her: "But what about the white lady? Was she connecting with her? Okay, how was she connecting with the white lady? … Oh, so she—she was much calmer suddenly. Okay. Is that just because the lady's white?" (class discussion, August 30). In another discussion, how white people appropriate Black English in order to seem cool without any cultural context or respect was discussed: "To be honest, the only people I've heard use it is white people who were probably trying to be cool, so they're using Black English to try to be cool. But don't really understand all the rules or the culture behind it" (class discussion, September 1).

Additionally, strategy of "naming whiteness" was used not just to refer to an individual as a white person but also the larger societal structure, which privileges white people over people of Color. In one instance, I described how linguistic discrimination targets Black folks, "But the problem is a lot of times. It's Black people who get asked to use standard English, right? But do I— Do People tell me? Oh, no, you need to use AAVE. Do I have to code-switch? right? So is that fair? Is it equal?" (class discussion, September 2). By referring to myself as a stand in for white people more general, I discussed how society does not expect white people to understand Black English; whereas, minoritized people are expected to learn and use WME. This was the only instance where I addressed this form of linguistic discrimination. An example of addressing my positionality as a white languaging person occurred when the class suggested that my spending time in Jamaica could lead to me developing a Jamaican accent. I was unprepared for this conversational turn and rejected this possibility as cultural appropriation: "I mean. Then there's also the level of the fact that I'm white, and then that can be seen as cultural appropriation. Right?" (class discussion, September 1). Notably, I did not follow up with a coherent articulation of why this type of cultural appropriation would be harmful other than couching my refusal by saying, "Maybe I don't know. But again, my husband's family might think I'm mocking them. So I try to be just respectful. That's a good point" (class discussion, September 1).

Hegemonic Strategies

The primary strategy I used, where I failed to recognize and interrupt white normativity, was "positioning self as multilingual." Within my reflective memos, it is telling that the majority of the memos discuss the language of other people, rather than my own. With my students, I asked them to create a representation of their language repertoires as part of my strategy for framing multilingualism as an asset (Figure 1 in Appendix E). Students took an outline of a person, listed the languages they spoke (i.e., Black English), and then discussed the contexts and communities where they use those languages (activity from Zhang-Wu, 2022). In introducing the activity, I showed the students my own model of my language repertoire (Figure 1), framing myself as a multilingual person who engaged in the same type of linguistic strategies as my students (Table 4 in Appendix D): "We do it all the time, all of us. Everyone here code switches. Last night—I'm gonna show you all—I have a great example of me code switching from last night" (class discussion, September 1). In grouping myself as a speaker of

multiple languages alongside my students, I equated my experience with language learning with theirs despite the fact that the context and motivations for our language learning are shaped by our differing identities and life circumstances.

For many of my students, being bilingual is a matter of having access to social mobility in a society which mostly privileges English over all others. In order to access many paths to education and employment, students must have competency in English. I do not have the same societal pressure in learning Hindi, which I did acknowledge to my students, "So I'm learning Hindi. But my husband's family speaks English. so why am I learning Hindi?" (classroom discussion, September 2) I informed the students that my motivation was largely learn more about my husband's culture and to show respect to family members, but speaking Hindi was not a requirement.

Discussion

The process of examining my use of counterhegemonic and hegemonic racial literacies in teaching discourse was revealing both in the moment, to a small extent, but largely more beneficial after engaging in the systematic analysis. The analysis revealed my utilization of racial literacy drew upon my pre-existing knowledge of language discrimination and issues of power. There is some evidence that I recursively adjusted my discourse from using hegemonic racial literacies toward counterhegemonic racial literacies. Reflecting in real time, I recognized my failure to fully problematize the notion of a standard language through my continued use of the term "standard English." Despite trying to reveal and possibly provide a space for students to reshape linguistic hierarchies, my use of language was simply a reification of standard language ideologies. Recognizing this, in the next class period, I adopted the term "Edited English" to move away from the use of the term "standard English." However, given that this term is more academic and my lack of explanation of the term as a critique of standard language ideologies, I have concluded that even this small shift likely did little to interrupt the hierarchy I had already subconsciously affirmed earlier. Moreover, the analysis revealed that within the same class, I continued to use the term "standard English." Doing so reified the notion that WME was the standard and demonstrated how beholden I was to dominant language ideologies.

As a teacher who expressed a commitment to interrupting inequality within her classroom space, especially around racial and linguistic discrimination, much of the hegemonic discursive strategies I engaged in focused on affirming multilingualism and discussions of linguistic discrimination came from my knowledge and training around language. Thus, like many other white teachers, I possessed good intentions and felt while teaching that I was using racial literacies that supported interrupting inequalities. Only upon examining the data systematically was I confronted by my actual use of racial literacies which were further towards the hegemonic end of the continuum through ineffective and even uncritical discourse in three major areas: code-switching, whiteness and bilingualism, and whiteness and cultural appropriation.

The Insufficiency of Code-switching

In reflecting upon my teaching with the benefit of hindsight, my reliance on the concept of "code-switching," with its emphasis on binary shifts, also underpinned my continued reification of a binary between standardized English and Black English and was insufficient to challenge dominant language ideologies. Using the term "code-switching" resulted in my continuing to affirm

the idea that students had to change their manner of speaking to sound more "academic." By so doing, I represented Black English as lacking academic or formal properties, associating White Mainstream English only with academic success. Even the concept of "academic language" is a recent evolution of this dichotomy that purports that "academic language is a list of empirical linguistic practices that functions in a qualitatively different way than non-academic language" (Flores, 2020, p. 24). Because of raciolinguistic ideologies, racialized bilinguals are perceived as lacking this academic language. Yet what is really meant is students are not emulating WME. The district I worked in pushed for students' to achieve standard language ideologies including academic language in order to demonstrate high levels of English proficiency, which I attempted to address in my classroom discourse (Flores, 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015). However, this analysis convinced me the insufficiency of code-switching as a concept was not despite the pervasiveness of these raciolinguistic ideologies but because of them. What would have happened if I had instead relied on the concept of translanguaging (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014) as a way to interrupt this type of binary? By emphasizing translanguaging over code-switching, since translanguaging holds a more fluid and unified notion of languaging rather than the separated notion of code-switching, the notion that students cannot use so-called academic *and* Black English simultaneously could have been successfully disrupted and with it, other forms of linguistic hierarchies (Otheguy et al., 2015). Conducting this study propelled me to revise my understanding of students' language practices from a binary lens to the more fluid and holistic lens contained within a translanguaging framework.

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Being White and Bilingual

Another area where this analysis revealed the impact of my use of hegemonic racial literacies was in my failure to acknowledge my privilege as a white person who is becoming bilingual. Over the years I have processed my position as a white teacher of students of Color through reading books and both attending and facilitating Witnessing Whiteness cohorts, a local antiracist affinity group where participants reflect their white privilege and build antiracist literacies. Thus, acknowledging my whiteness and discussing systemic racism and white supremacy with my students was not uncomfortable, yet this criticality did not extend to the intersections between my racial and linguistic positionalities. Because of my uncritical framing of myself as being multilingual just like the students in my class, I did not acknowledge the way that raciolinguistic ideologies cause our experiences as languaging people to be divergent due to the racialization and linguistic discrimination my students experienced. When I created my own language repertoire as a model for students to use in completing the language repertoire activity (Figure 1 in Appendix E), I attempted to use counterhegemonic racial literacies to problematize notions of fluency or what it means to speak a language and affirm students' holistic languaging abilities and learning identities. However, in reflecting about my modeling of this activity, I assert the framing of my languaging abilities

problematically did not account for how being white impacts how society responds to me as a languaging person. By equating my experiences with theirs, I ignored the way my whiteness allows my language to be perceived by the "white listening subject" in positive ways while my students, despite having objectively larger, more fluid, and fluent multilingual repertoires, are positioned as having inferior English skills (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 152).

My privilege as a white person who does not often experience linguistic discrimination as a speaker of other languages is evident throughout the discourse, as I asked students to consider why I am learning Hindi when most members of my spouse's family speak English. In engaging in language exchange with people on language applications to practice Hindi, it became impossible to ignore the global inequalities. For me, learning Hindi is a choice, unlike ELL students' need to use English as a means of upward mobility. Yet, even with this knowledge, I did not explicitly problematize my position as a white bilingual person and learning of other languages but instead uncritically grouped myself along with the students. I did attempt to share my reasons for learning Hindi, which indirectly explained how my language learning is optional. Statements like "everyone here code-switches" and "all of us do it" hegemonically demonstrate a failure to critically consider my racial positionality. Rather than relying on my own discourse to lead the conversation, framing multilingualism as an asset through my own experience, I could have invited students to lead the discussion by sharing their experiences, focusing on their own agency and abilities as multilingual people as well as how others in society perceive their languaging practices. My usage of hegemonic racial literacies even amidst my ideals of linguistic justice begs the question—Is it possible for white teachers to escape reifying raciolinguistic and monolingual ideologies while teaching linguistically and racially minoritized students?

Lack of Criticality around Cultural Appropriation

Another area where this analysis revealed an opportunity for me to consider my use of hegemonic racial literacies was in my discomfort with acknowledging and explaining the hypothetical situation of my taking on either a Jamaican or Indian accent as cultural appropriation. In the classroom interaction, I was clearly taken aback by the suggestions and did not articulate deeply or clearly why this form of linguistic appropriation was wrong. Though I utilized the term "cultural appropriation," I did not define it. Therefore, if students did not know what cultural appropriation was, my attempt at counterhegemonically reading the situation was weak and ineffective. In reflecting on my experiences growing up, I recalled how my nearly all-white church youth group routinely used phrases from Black English to appropriate a veneer of coolness, but due to the pervasive whiteness of my social circles, media, and my understanding of Black English vocabulary as "slang," I did not consciously connect our actions as linguistic appropriation. My second attempt at discussing linguistic appropriation centered my outsider status with my husband's family, thus appropriating their accent could be viewed as a mockery, to provide another explanation for why this practice is inappropriate but notably I did not address how linguistic appropriation ties into larger structures of inequality. I could have discussed differences in how people are racialized based on their language and how today colonial histories continue to impact whose languages are valued. Consequently, while I had much of the right "knowledge" about linguistic discrimination, I failed to consider how my own positionality impacted how I entered and facilitated these critical conversations, signifying further need

to build my Critical Language Awareness. Before I used my bilingualism as a model or point of connect with students, I should have delved more deeply into understanding my own identity and social positioning as a white person who is becoming bilingual.

Significance

Through this self-study of my teaching practices as an ELL teacher teaching bilingual Black and Latinx students in a public high school-level U.S. Government class, I add to previous assertions that resisting and attempts to dismantle hegemonic language ideologies must incorporate intersectional analyses including race, language, gender, and geography. As both a white woman and former English Language Learner (ELL) teacher, I assert it is imperative for white teacher-scholars to problematize and destabilize how deficit language ideologies persist at the micro-level of their classrooms. An important aspects of confronting racial and linguistic discrimination must include even more explicit Critical Language Awareness (CLA) consciousness-raising for both the teacher and the students (Alim, 2010; Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Deroo & Ponzio, 2023). This research process revealed to me how my own positionality was implicated in my teaching discourse, revealing where I needed to continue to engage in personal work and where I needed to center the perspectives and needs of the students more effectively.

Secondly, this self-study is significant in its reliance upon analysis of my teaching discourse as a means to examine my teaching practices. I did not utilize all of the tools of Racial Literacy Development Model (Sealey-Ruiz, 2022) throughout this process; I relied primarily on the component of Critical Reflection. Unlike other attempts at the Archeology of Self process which have drawn upon self-reflection, relying heavily on reflexive writing and the memories of the researcher (Bell et al., 2022; Canagarajah, 2012; Moore, 2022; Thomas, 2018; Velasco, 2022), I relied primarily on examining my racial literacies using recordings of my own teaching. Thus, analyzing my teaching discourse in this way allowed me to engage in critical reflection of who I was in the moment of teaching, not just who I aspire to be. Given the embedded nature of white supremacy in the profession of education, many white teachers prioritize their own comfort (Murray & Brooks-Immel, 2019). One way of maintaining white comfort and normativity is for white teachers to "willfully protect their innocence" (Applebaum, 2021, p. 433). By relying on transcripts instead of memory, I was forced to come face-to-face with the gap between my professed ideals and enacted practices in order to excavate my biases. Many of these findings revealed ways my teaching failed my students, which required that I embrace the Critical Humility aspect of RLDM. Though it is disappointing and difficult to name one's failures, one cannot move forward or prevent harm to students without doing so.

Thirdly, it is significant that the focus of this study was the reflexivity of a teacher- scholar. Research studies that have interrogated in-service teacher's biases through their teacher discourse have often been analyzed and written from the perspectives of the researcher alone, leaving out the powerful potential for transformative reflection on what teachers say and do in practice rather than just intention (Chávez-Moreno, 2022b; Metz, 2018). This work is significant in demonstrating the possibility of teacher-scholars or partnerships between researchers and educators to analyze how their classroom discourse reveals their biases. Educators should be fully involved as teacher-scholars with university researchers, engaging in data collection, analysis, reflection, as well as the sharing of the study's findings. An area for future research could include teacher-scholars engaging in follow-up

studies after conducting their initial assessment of their use of racial literacies to see how the insights gained might recursively inform and transform how they modify their teaching practices. Teacher-scholars should explore other methods, especially methods in addition to and other than reflective writing or autoethnography, can be useful for them to engage in self-interrogation of their racial literacy practices while teaching. Finally, studies need to evaluate how these types of tools can be applied for systemic change. Studies could explore how teacher educator programs can appropriate systematic tools for self-reflection as part of the curriculum for pre-service teachers, making growth in racial literacy a required professional skill for future educators.

Limitations

The number of class sessions analyzed limited the amount of data analyzed and the possibility of identifying changes over more time. Since a limited number of classes at the beginning of the school year were included, a more in-depth study may be helpful in providing a larger picture of how teachers use racial literacy to critique raciolinguistic ideologies over time. Additionally, because Institutional Review Board data was not sought, I was limited to analyzing my teaching discourse only rather than including the perspectives of students. Future researchers must center students' voices and experiences within the classes to examine how students respond to teachers' use of racial literacies. Another important area for future research is whether there are discrepancies between teacher and student perspectives on the effectiveness of a teacher's racial literacy practices.

Conclusion

While I personally expressed a commitment towards affirming students' linguistic identities, analysis of my teaching discourse revealed a more complicated story. I utilized strategies which fell towards either end of the racial literacies continuum in discussing both language ideologies and whiteness. Chávez-Moreno's (2022a) understanding of racial literacies as being on a continuum of hegemony to counterhegemony means one can slide along the continuum toward more liberatory and counterhegemonic racial literacies once one identifies how their racial literacies continue to uphold systems of power. Although I was aware and intentional in my use of many of the counterhegemonic racial literacy discursive moves, without engaging in this systematic study, I would not have been able to become aware of the hegemonic racial literacies I used. With this knowledge, more liberatory approaches can be sought.

Both Matias (2016) and Bauer (2021) discuss the way white teachers, especially white women, utilize the language of "love" in describing their interactions with students even while acting in ways that harm students. The findings demonstrate a challenge to white teachers' philosophical rhetoric, revealing how deeply standardized and monolingual language ideologies persist in educational contexts. Knowing this, I hope my study can offer an example for other teacher-scholars and partnerships between researchers and in-service teachers to follow as they closely examine their practices. Engaging in this type of qualitative self-reflection and analysis requires vulnerability, humility, and the ability to acknowledge where one's strategies have failed students. Black and Latinx students deserve nothing less than an education where they are valued and treated as persons with full dignity and potential. If white teachers truly want to enact the love ethic called for by bell hooks (1994), they must heed her words that doing so "requires conscious practice, a willingness to unite the way we think with the way we act" (p. 77).

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Appendix A

Table 1: *Components of the Racial Literacy Development Model (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021)*

Component	Definition
Archeology of Self	Process of examining oneself deeply to move towards change
Interruption	Interruption of systems of oppression like racism
Historical Literacy	An understanding of the impact of history upon the present
Critical Reflection	The ability to reflect upon how our identities and actions impact students
Critical Humility	The ability to admit when your actions or perspectives are harmful
Critical Love	Commitment of love expressed through action

Note. These are the components of the Racial Literacy Development Model, which are not hierarchical but can be entered at different points, sometimes simultaneously, in a recursive process.

Appendix B

Table 2: *Categories and Codes with Definitions*

Category and Definition	Code	Definition	Discursive Strategies
Hegemonic Racial Literacies The use of discursive strategies that reify systems of oppression	Language Ideologies	The social constructs, categories, and beliefs people hold around language (Lew & Siffrinn, 2019)	Reifying standardized language Positioning as multilingual
	Whiteness	The system which perpetuates and maintains privileges for people who are white (Haviland, 2008; Matias & Mackey, 2016)	Utilizing 'white gaze' Not explaining cultural appropriation
Counter-hegemonic Racial Literacies The use of discursive strategies which challenge systems of oppression	Language Ideologies	The social constructs, categories, and beliefs people hold around language	De-essentializing schooling language De-essentializing standardized language Positioning language as asset Rejecting linguist discrimination Framing language as contextual
	Whiteness	The system which perpetuates and maintains privileges for people who are white	Naming whiteness Critiquing origin myth

Note. I conceptualize racial literacy as a skill in which people engage a sociopolitical analysis of racism and societal inequality to inform their discursive practices and actions within micro-spaces like classrooms.

Appendix C

Table 3.

Language Ideologies Discursive Strategies with Definitions

Strategy (n)	Definition	Quotes
		Counterhegemonic Strategies
Framing language as contextual (n=121)	Teacher emphasizes language use is contextual by person spoken to, purposes, and scenarios. Sometimes is explaining which types of language to use for assignments.	● "Do you speak to your mom the same way that you speak to your little brother?" ● "So in this classroom I want you to use big words, all right? That doesn't mean that we're using proper English. That means we're being specific."
De-essentializing standardized language (n=95)	Teacher notes the similarities and differences between languages, legitimizes Black English to students, problematizes notion of standard language and what it means to speak a language	● Black English is <u>not improper</u> English and you know why? He's right. There are <u>rules to speaking this language.</u> […] So we're gonna learn about the history of this language. And we're going to learn about some of the rules." ● "White people really discriminate against Black English, right? They have stereotypes about it. "Oh, it's not intelligent. It's ghetto." But we know it's an actual <u>language,</u> right?"
Positioning language as asset (n=77)	Teacher positions students or other multilingual learners (other than the teacher) as competent languaging people in skills, draws upon students' funds of knowledge, multilingual positioned as positive	● "So maybe you don't speak Arabic, but you can read it. Right, you don't have to be fluent in any of these languages. Maybe you only speak a language, but you can't read it. Fine. That's legit. Maybe you can't write it or maybe you only hear it and understand. I want all of that on here, because those are all skills."
Rejecting linguicism (n=47)	Teacher acknowledges societally constructed hierarchies of language and rejects them.	● "So some people are like, well, people are going to be racist. So you have to change the way you talk. Some people disagree with that and they say you know what the problem is not my language. The problem is other people, right?" ● "This is not bad English. This is not broken English. [Jamaican Patois] is a Creole with rules. And if you all don't know the rules, right? people are gonna be like, 'Well, you sound silly.'"
De-essentializing schooling language (n=14)	I tried to decouple the language of learning from being associated with only WME by encouraging students to extend their discourse and utilize specific or advanced vocabulary words.	● "And she did not separate her great vocabulary from whether she is using AAVE or Edited English"
		Hegemonic Strategies
Reifying standardized language (n=14)	Teacher, despite explicitly denying hierarchy of language, continues to position "Edited" English as "standard English" while other languages like Caribbean English are referred to as a dialect rather than a language in places.	● "Code switching is when people switch between languages, dialects, or registers, which means informal formal, right?" ● "Okay. So it can also be between the same language and different dialects in that language." ● "So Black English has a way to communicate something that standard English doesn't have. And it doesn't really translate well into standard English. So if you're leaving it out, you're missing something." ● "If teacher ever tells you that you are not speaking proper English, is that true? No. No, because they don't understand your language right? If somebody understands that language, they're not gonna— now, some people may try to encourage you to speak standard English, so that you're able to. But nobody should put, put you down because of the way that you speak."

Appendix D

Table 4.

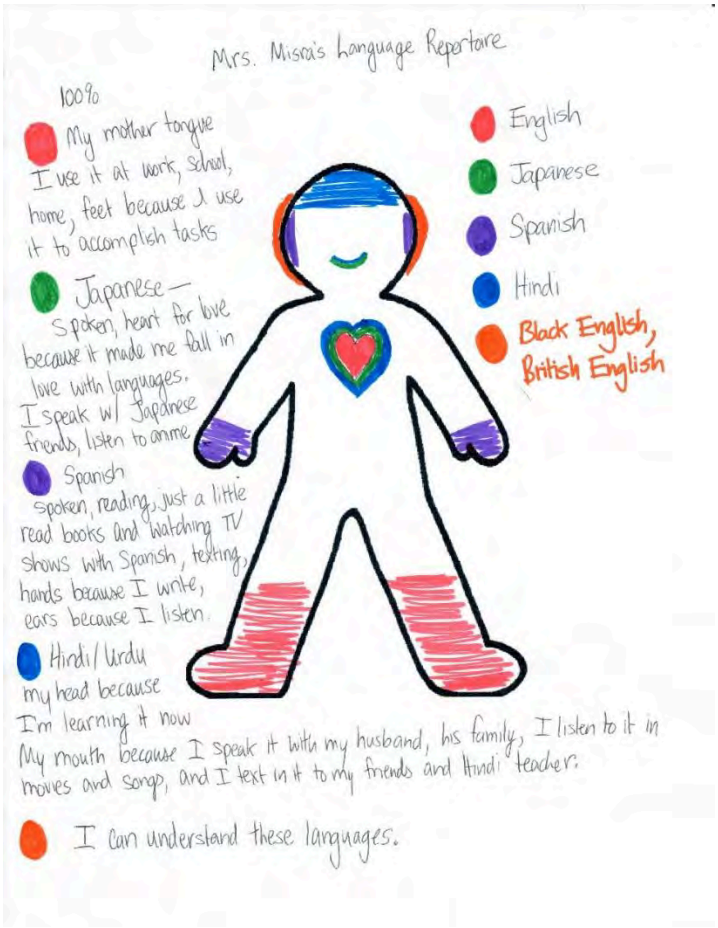
Whiteness Discursive Strategies with Definitions

Strategy (n)	Definition	Quotes
		Counterhegemonic Strategies
Naming whiteness (n=21)	My challenge to the dominance of whiteness included me affirming students' critique of white people or whiteness and intentionally naming whiteness or white people.	● "Well. (breath intake). I mean. Then there's also the level of the fact that I'm white, and then that can be seen as cultural appropriation" ● "Ahh… To be honest, the only people I've heard use it is white people who were probably trying to be cool, so they're using Black English to try to be cool. But doooon't really understand all the rules or the culture behind it. So it's more cultural appropriation." ● "But The problem is a lot of times. It's Black people who get asked to use standard English, right? But do I— Do People tell me? Oh, no, you need to use AAVE. Do I have to code-switch? right? So is that fair? Is it equal?"
		Hegemonic Strategies
Positioning self as multilingual (n=29)	I position myself as a part of a community of code-switchers both in terms of English register and in my learning and use of other world languages other than English. However, there is little critical engagement with the fact that as a white woman, I am not minoritized or racialized like my students.	● "We do it all the time, all of us. Everyone here code switches. Last night I'm gonna show you all. I have a great example of me code switching from last night" ● "All of us do it." ● "So, for example, I put English, Japanese, and Hindi in the heart part. English, because it's my first language, Hindi, because it's my husband's language and Japanese, because it's the language that made me love learning languages. So do you see how I put the different languages in different parts?" ● "Reason two. So I'm learning Hindi. But my husband's family speaks English. so why am I learning Hindi?"

Appendix E

Figure 1.

My Language Repertoire Model



Note. To frame multilingualism as an asset within the classroom, students were required to create language repertoires. This figure is my own language repertoire that students used as a model for the assignment.