



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Linguistics and Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/linged

Pre-service English Language Arts teachers' development of Critical Language Awareness for teaching



Amanda J. Godley^{a,*}, Jeffrey Reaser^{b,1}, Kaylan G. Moore^c

^a Department of Instruction and Learning, The University of Pittsburgh, 5105 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, 230 S. Bouquet St., Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA

^b North Carolina State University, Box 8105, Raleigh, NC 27695-8105, USA

^c Department of Instruction and Learning, 5300 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, 230 S. Bouquet St., Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 3 May 2015

Keywords:

Teacher education
Critical Language Awareness
Pedagogical content knowledge
Literacy
Dialects
Sociolinguistics

ABSTRACT

This study examined pre-service English teachers' (PSTs') development of Critical Language Awareness for teaching through an online course focused on language variation. All of the twenty-four PSTs in our study identified as white and speakers of Standardized English. We rated the quality of the PSTs' Critical Language Awareness for teaching through their contributions to weekly online discussions. We also qualitatively analyzed the PSTs' discussions for themes and tensions in their understanding of teaching Critical Language Awareness. We found that the PSTs' understanding and appreciation for dialect diversity and code-switching was strong, and most PSTs wanted to teach more critical aspects of language variation, such as how systems of privilege are reinforced through language ideologies. However, many PSTs avoided acknowledging their own white privilege and were less skilled and comfortable teaching about power structures than dialect diversity.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Literacy educators have long called for the inclusion of *Critical Language Awareness* (Fairclough, 1992; Janks, 1999) or *Critical Language Pedagogy* (Godley & Minnici, 2008) in English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms (Alim, 2010; Delpit, 1988). Critical Language Awareness, drawing from Critical Discourse Analysis, posits that a critical examination of the power structures reflected and created through language is essential to all language and literacy education (Janks, 1999). Similarly, Critical Language Pedagogy is an instructional approach that guides students to critical examinations of the ideologies surrounding language and dialects, the power relations such ideologies uphold, and ways to change these ideologies (Godley & Minnici, 2008). Drawing from both scholarship on Critical Language Awareness and Critical Language Pedagogy, this article reports on a study of secondary ELA pre-service teachers' (PSTs') development of critical perspectives on dialect diversity and linguistic prejudice over the course of a four-week, online "mini-course" on language variation.

Educational research has demonstrated that content knowledge alone is not sufficient for preparing teachers to teach well; teachers must also develop *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) – knowledge about how to explain, frame, assess, and develop the content knowledge for diverse groups of students (Ball & Bass, 2000; Shulman, 1986). For over forty years, literacy scholars and ELA organizations have called for English teachers to be equipped with PCK about language variation

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 412 527 8363.

E-mail addresses: agodley@pitt.edu (A.J. Godley), jreaser@ncsu.edu (J. Reaser), kmg20@pitt.edu (K.G. Moore).

¹ Tel.: +1 919 515 4176.

and language ideologies (CCCC/NCTE, 1974; Delpit, 1988; Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minicci, & Carpenter, 2006), but little research has examined the critical linguistic knowledge that is most useful to ELA teachers' instructional practices and how teachers develop it. Thus the specific goal of the mini-course was to increase PSTs' critical understanding of dialect diversity, language ideologies, and linguistic prejudices *for teaching*.

Our analysis of PSTs' development of critical perspectives on language for teaching focused on changes in the content and quality of PSTs' ideas about dialect diversity throughout the mini-course, the tensions and challenges we observed in PSTs' discussions, and the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of various design elements of the mini-course.

Throughout this article, we use the terms *dialect* and *language variety* interchangeably to refer to the patterns of language used by a group with a shared regional or social affiliation. As sociolinguists have documented, all languages include multiple varieties, all of which are valid and logical, possessing distinctive grammatical, phonological, lexical, and pragmatic patterns (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007). Acknowledging that there is no politically neutral or "perfect" term to refer to the language variety privileged in mainstream educational, professional, and civic institutions, we have chosen to use the term *Standardized English* rather than *Standard English* to refer to this variety because it emphasizes that the language variety that is most privileged in the U.S. is in a constant state of being "standardized" by being continually portrayed as the language variety that is most "correct" or "proper" (Charity-Hudley & Mallinson, 2010). Finally, we use the term *vernacular dialects* to refer to dialects other than Standardized English.

Pedagogical content knowledge

Our study draws from research in teacher development, which suggests that PSTs' development often requires changing core beliefs about and understandings of subject matter, students, and effective pedagogical routines (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Hammerness et al., 2005). Although shaping English teachers' knowledge and beliefs about language variation is essential to improving their instruction, such efforts must be coupled with learning sociolinguistic PCK (Ball & Bass, 2000; Godley et al., 2006; Shulman, 1986; Sweetland, 2006). Sociolinguistic PCK for ELA teachers includes (but is not limited to) accurately explaining features of dialects and grammatical patterns; evaluating students' language choices; developing students' competency in Standardized Written English; and teaching about systems of power and privilege (Haviland, 2008; McIntosh, 1988) that are maintained via language ideologies. We view the last dimension of sociolinguistic PCK to be most closely connected to Critical Language Awareness; however, as we demonstrate in this article, the other dimensions of sociolinguistic PCK form an essential foundation for teaching Critical Language Awareness.

Research on teachers' sociolinguistic content knowledge

A small but informative group of studies have pointed to the need to educate K-12 teachers about dialect diversity and linguistic prejudice. Both classroom-based studies (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007) and surveys of teachers (Blake & Cutler, 2003; Cross, DeVaney, & Jones, 2001) have demonstrated that many teachers erroneously believe that Standardized English is more grammatical than vernacular dialects and form negative opinions of students, particularly minority students, when they use vernacular dialects in school. Research also suggests that many teachers, including ELA teachers, lack basic sociolinguistic content knowledge (Smitherman & Villanueva, 2000). Especially in the content area of ELA, where language is the foundation of all the reading and writing skills taught, this lack of content knowledge often leads to harmful instructional practices and deficit views of students' literacy learning potential (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairbanks, 1998; Godley et al., 2007).

In order for teachers to effectively teach about dialect diversity and meet the learning needs of students whose home language practices differ from Standardized English, teachers need to possess basic sociolinguistic knowledge. Such knowledge includes the understanding that (a) the English language has various dialects that are equally valid and grammatical, (b) language varies in different contexts and communities in systematic ways, (c) language use reflects identity, and (d) language is often the basis for judgments about people (Adger et al., 2007). In one study, Fogel and Ehri (2006) found that teachers' attitudes toward a highly stigmatized dialect, African American English (AAE), improved modestly after receiving direct instruction in the grammatical patterns of the dialect and practicing using forms of the dialect in their own writing.

Furthermore, it is important for teachers to understand and challenge their own beliefs and prejudices about vernacular dialects (Godley et al., 2006; Sweetland, 2006). Because the vast majority of new teachers in the U.S. are white and were raised in homogenous, mostly suburban areas (Boser, 2014), most new teachers have had limited exposure to dialect diversity and vernacular dialects. At the same time that the teaching force is becoming increasingly white, female, and homogeneous, the percentage of students of color in U.S. public schools is increasing (Boser, 2014); as a result, teachers' and students' linguistic backgrounds and experiences likely differ more now than at any other point in U.S. history.

The dearth of existing research on in-service and PSTs' understanding of language variation speaks to the need for further examinations of the ways teachers learn sociolinguistic content knowledge and use it to inform their literacy instruction. Most existing studies have been limited to an examination of teachers' understanding of the validity and grammaticality of vernacular dialects, not teachers' development of *critical* perspectives on dialect diversity and linguistic discrimination, as Critical Language Awareness calls for (see Ball & Muhammad, 2003 for an exception). Our study contributes to this line of

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/366059>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/366059>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)