TALKING TO MIGRANTS LIKE CHILDREN: LINGUISTIC INDEXING OF CHILDHOOD AT A MIGRANT-FOCUSED ADULT ENGLISH LITERACY PROGRAM IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

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ABSTRACT

EZEKIEL KEMPSTER. Talking to Migrants Like Children: Linguistic Indexing of Childhood at a Migrant-Focused Adult English Literacy Program in North Carolina (Under the direction of DR. ELISE BERMAN)

This paper is an analysis of the use of features of motherese and other baby talk speech registers with adult non-native English speakers at a migrant-focused adult English literacy program in North Carolina. The ethnographic and linguistic data was gathered through attending 3-hour classes across the offered 4 levels of literacy education over a 9-week period at the Rural County Literacy Council. The data suggests that through the use of language and physical signs, the instructors, staff, and program director at the Rural County Literacy Council both directly and indirectly linguistically indexed their adult students as children. The findings are significant because, across the existing adult SLA literature, the use of motherese and baby talk registers is not being suggested as best practice for adult language instruction. Therefore, such uses of language likely function to mark these non-native English-speaking adults as lacking the same capabilities, level of understanding, and intelligence as native English-speaking adults.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

US: United States

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

L1: Language 1/ First Language

L2: Language 2/ Second Language

LTC: Long-Term Care

ESL: English as a Second Language

INS: Immigration and Naturalization Service

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As the composition and destinations of migrants have shifted over the last three decades or so, many of the communities in these "new immigrant destinations" have chosen to implement programs and services to help the growing migrant populations in their area participate and settle into their communities. Offering language and literacy programs to the non-English speaking members of these communities is one way that these growing regions have offered services to integrate this population into their communities and provide them with the necessary linguistic skills they need to access additional resources and services. Research into the changing dynamics of these communities is only just beginning to grow, and research into the impact of English literacy education programs catering to migrant adults is lacking. I had questions on the impact of linguistic ideologies typically held in the United States on the staff and students at literacy programs catering to migrant adults, so I conducted research at a program in a small, mostly rural community in North Carolina that was offering these services. Through the use of language and physical signs, the instructors, staff, and program director at the Rural County Literacy Council (psuedonym) both directly and indirectly linguistically indexed their adult students as children.

Adult second language acquisition research exists and tells us about how adults are acquiring second languages, the pedagogies that are most effective for adult SLA, how non-native speakers are spoken about, how non-native speakers are speaking to one another, etc., but the literature is lacking in research regarding how native speakers in adult SLA settings are speaking directly to non-native speakers. Notably, none of the literature on adult SLA prescribes the use of motherese as a best practice for adult language instruction. This suggests that the use of motherese by instructors has a non-pedagogical function, instead potentially functioning to

differentiate non-native English-speaking adults from native English-speaking adults, specifically in terms of capability, intelligence, and level of understanding. It suggests that there is social power in being a native English speaker that allows a person to be spoken to and treated like an adult rather than a young child. This research is significant because it not only fills the literature gap in how adults in an adult SLA instruction setting are being spoken to directly by their instructors and analyzes the linguistic and physical signs used by native English speakers with non-native English speakers in an instructional setting, but it also creates questions to be answered in further research projects about the significance of how the use of motherese with adult migrants is impacting those adults in their socialization into a new cultural environment and if this is ethnographically significant or an ethnographic anomaly.

CHAPTER 2: ADULT SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Second-language acquisition (SLA) or L2 (language 2) acquisition is the process by which people learn a second language or a language other than the first language they acquired. Generally, second-language acquisition studies are not focusing on learners who learned a second language alongside learning their first language as infants and young children, but rather those learning a second language after the period of initial language acquisition. In the literature for second-language acquisition research, the age of the learners is a major discussion point in education and psycholinguistic research, largely surrounding debates about the Critical Period Hypothesis when applied to L2 acquisition. The term 'critical period' in the context of language acquisition "refers to a period of time when learning a language is relatively easy and typically meets with a high degree of success". According to this hypothesis, once this period passes, "at or before the onset of puberty, the average learner is less likely to achieve native-like ability in the target language [or be mistaken as a native speaker due to high proficiency in the language]" (Marinova-Todd et al. 2000: 9). There are debates in second-language acquisition research about the validity of the idea "that there is a biologically based critical period for second-language acquisition that prevents older learners from achieving native-like competence" (Hakuta et al. 2003: 31). While it is generally accepted among psycholinguists that "a critical period for L1 acquisition exists," "controversy arises when the critical period claim is extended to L2 learning" (Marinova-Todd et al. 2009: 9). In other words, while the ability to initially acquire language, whether spoken or signed, has a generally agreed upon cut off point, there are debates on the validity of this claim in regards to adults learning languages beyond their first, native language.

Age has long been considered a major factor in determining a learner's success in acquiring a second language, with children being considered capable of "acquiring a new language rapidly and with little effort, whereas adults are believed to be doomed to failure,"; however, this belief that adults will never be able to master a second language as fluently as young children is due to "misinterpretation of the facts relating to speed of acquisition, misattribution of age differences in language abilities to neurobiological factors, and, most notably, a misemphasis on poor adult learners and an underemphasis on adults who master L2s to nativelike level" (Marinova-Todd et al. 2000). While it is true that older learners are less likely than young children to master an L2, "a close examination of studies relating age to language acquisition reveals that age differences reflect differences in the situation of learning rather than in capacity to learn. They do not demonstrate any constraint on the possibility that adults can become highly proficient, even native-like, speakers of L2s" (Marinova-Todd et al. 2000). Pedagogies and learning behaviors might shift, but the capacity for learning and acquiring an L2 persist.

Studies regarding the most successful pedagogical approaches to adult L2 learning suggest that teaching methods between older and younger adults differ in terms of their effectiveness, and that older adults learn best through implicit models of teaching rather than through explicit models, such as being asked to look for the underlying patterns of grammar and explain what makes something grammatically correct vs. ungrammatical (Lenet et al. 2011: 75-76). Explicit knowledge is described as "knowledge with awareness" whereas implicit knowledge is "knowledge without awareness" (Spada 2015: 75-76). Explicit L2 knowledge would be knowing that a sentence is not grammatically correct and, in some cases, being able to explain this with reference to a particular grammar rule. Implicit L2 knowledge is "unanalyzed

and intuitive," or knowing that that same sentence is ungrammatical without the ability to explain why (Spada 2015: 76). In the literature on SLA, "particularly literature influenced by a Universal Grammar-based linguistics perspective, implicit knowledge is considered to be primary because it is thought to represent a learners' true competence – the underlying internal grammar, similar to Krashen's (1981) notion of acquired knowledge" (Spada 2015: 76).

Evidence in cognitive psychology suggests that "intentional instructions to learn material, such as word pairs or paragraphs, often result in larger age-related memory deficits than do more incidental instructions," in part because the strategies adopted by older adults for memorization are less effective than those strategies adopted by younger adults (Lenet et al. 2011: 75). This could explain why teaching methods primarily with the goal of gaining explicit knowledge of grammatical structures might become less effective for older learners. In their study comparing L2 retention in older and younger adults, Lenet et al. found that "the Less Explicit feedback was more helpful to the older adults than the Explicit," especially when the adults with previous experience in learning the language were removed (Lenet et al. 2011: 81). One possibility that they suggested for this result, when considering both their data and feedback from participants in the study, was that "the Explicit feedback was distracting and encouraged older adults to try to memorize the rules contained in the feedback, and their strategies were unsuccessful, actually hurting the learning of the syntax" (Lenet et al. 2011: 81). They concluded that "older adults are as capable as college-aged learners of developing new L2 knowledge after limited exposure, especially under the right conditions," and that, contrary to the general beliefs of the teaching profession, "more grammar does not always mean faster rates of acquisition" (Lenet et al. 2011: 82).

The conceptual framework that has "influenced discussions of how instruction is related to implicit and explicit knowledge is the interface/non-interface contrast" (Spada 2015: 76). Depending on the position, there is argument regarding the relationship between implicit and explicit knowledge, whether explicit knowledge can become implicit knowledge, and the ways in which these knowledge systems are acquired through instructional methods. The non-interface position argues that "implicit knowledge only develops through exposure to large amounts of naturally occurring input and opportunities for meaningful interaction in much the same way that children acquire their L1, whereas explicit knowledge develops from intentional learning of language rules or patterns" (Spada 2015: 76). The claim of this position is that the knowledge systems remain separate "without the possibility of one type of knowledge converting to the other" and that explicit knowledge, not implicit, is resulting from instruction (Spada 2015: 76). The weak interface position still argues that explicit knowledge cannot become implicit knowledge, however, according to this position, "learners' explicit knowledge may help them to notice differences between their output and the instructional input, leading to changes in their implicit knowledge" and with enough practice, "learners can achieve the ability to retrieve and use this knowledge so quickly and easily that, in performance, they appear to be operating from implicit knowledge" (Spada 2015: 76). The strong interface position holds that the implicit and explicit knowledge systems are not distinct entities, and that through practice, explicit knowledge is being converted to implicit knowledge. The argument of this position is that "instructed L2 learners start out with explicit declarative knowledge of a particular language feature (that is, taught via rule presentation) and that, through subsequent practice in meaningful communication" this knowledge eventually becomes automatized for the L2 learner (Spada 2015: 76). Spada (2015) argues that when considering the results from the instructed SLA

literature that point to the benefits of instruction, some have argued "that these benefits may be due to the fact that in most of the instructed SLA studies, learners' progress has been measured with tests that tap into their explicit knowledge" (Spada 2015: 76).

Regardless, the literature on instructed SLA studies do not suggest that the use of features of motherese or other baby talk registers with adult SLA students are required or even recommended in the classroom. The suggested pedagogies do not imply or state that slowed speech, higher pitch, praise when it isn't deserved, etc. are necessary for effectively teaching adults a second language. The use of these features at the Rural County Literacy Council are not due to some suggested effectiveness in the literature or research on SLA instruction. Since the use of these features serves no research-backed pedogogical function, it is serving another function entirely.

CHAPTER 3: FUNCTION OF FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS IN BILINGUAL

EDUCATION

Family literacy is a term that describes the ways in which parents, children, and other family, and sometimes community members, use language and literacy in their homes and communities. Although in theory 'family literacy' as a term could refer to critical literacies and take many different forms, theoretically and in policy it tends to focus on normative models of literacy and whether family members are meeting them. In normative literacy models, being a 'good reader' is defined through how well a person is adhering to an instructor's behavioral expectations of what is 'appropriate' "given the curricular structure employed," such as when to sit quietly and make eye contact with the instructor during reading aloud or silence during independent reading (Souto-Manning et al. 2016). In other words, successful or unsuccessful literacy is defined by how well a person can adhere to appropriate behaviors according to both large and small scale (country and learning institution, respectively) cultural norms and expectations. Normative models aim to provide normative guidance. Through this lens, a family's literacy levels can "influence the way children [and other novice language users] use words for discourse…" and "also influence [the development of] strong language skills" which become important for how successful a person can participate in a given culture (Wasik & Van Horn 2012: 3).

Not all literacy education or family literacy programs are necessarily migrant-focused or developed with multilingual families or children in mind, however, they are used as a resource for these families, with their goal being that parents who are not native English speakers can still aid in their children's literacy and language acquisition. There are also many family literacy

programs dedicated to increasing family literacy, including children and their adult family members. The goal of family literacy education is to ensure that "all young children become literate before they reach adulthood, able to function at their full potential in society" (Wasik & Van Horn 2012: 3-4). The services provided by family literacy programs intend to "enhance the literacy skills of family members" (Wasik & Van Horn 2012: 4), operating on the understanding that children's literacy skills depend on "the family's efforts to support the language and literacy development of their children" (Wasik & Van Horn 2012: 5). An adult family member's literacy skills become crucial in the mission to ensure that their children develop adequate literacy skills to 'function at their full potential' and therefore, family literacy programs tend to not only offer services for the young children but also their parents and other adult family members (Wasik & Van Horn 2012).

In their work, 'reading specialists' or literacy educators "usually provide instruction in a range of reading and literacy areas, including alphabet knowledge and phonemic awareness, word recognition and phonics skills, fluency, word acquisition strategies, comprehension knowledge, and vocabulary development" (Grant & Wong 2003: 389). These instructors "are expected to possess knowledge of a range of techniques, strategies, and approaches, as well as resources for working to improve children's reading" (Grant & Wong: 2003: 389). Grant & Wong (2003) found that these 'reading specialists' or literacy educators appear to "receive a theoretical grounding for literacy that is associated with the monolingual, meritocracy paradigm used to define literacy" in their teacher education or other required literacy certification coursework; in other words, "the white, native-English speaker establishes the norm and sets the guidelines for literacy achievement. Course work within programs of study in reading seldom

emphasizes a second paradigm on literacy that acknowledges multilingualism and multiliteracies" (Grant & Wong 2003: 388-389).

The vast majority of resources in the literature covering alternatively family literacy programs and bilingual pedagogies overwhelmingly focus on children and adolescents in families or bilingual programs catering to children, adolescents, and younger adults (Leung et al. 1997; Grant & Wong 2003; McCarty et al. 2010; Wasik & Van Horn 2012; Flores & Rosa 2015; Souto-Manning et al. 2016; Flores & Rosa 2017; Chaparro 2019; Cekaite 2022), leaving a gap in our academic understanding of the impact of these programs and pedagogies on older adult learners. There is a clearly stated explanation for the benefits of these programs in aiding the language acquisition of children without a clear explanation for how these programs benefit the adults, especially in the case of migrants learning English for the first time. However, I would argue that, based on the above stated functions of family literacy programs, the implicit goal of these services is to provide migrants and other non-native speakers and language learners with linguistic capital. The term 'linguistic capital' refers to "'the legitimate competence' in a language as [...] established by dominant groups, which goes beyond general linguistic proficiency to cultural resources, such as discourse conventions and social norms/values" and provides the language users with necessary social capital or linguistic 'wealth' that aids them in participating in a particular culture (Bourdieu 2000: 474, see also Abrar-ul-Hassan 2021).

A person who possesses linguistic capital, or the aforementioned 'legitimate competence' in the language used by the dominant social group, has considerably greater access to social and cultural resources which are essential for economic and social survival and advancement within a particular culture. Bourdieu (1991) considers "the ability to speak a country's dominant language fluently as a social resource that may be helpful in gaining access to the country's

desirable goods and positions. This linguistic capital may be transferred into other forms of

capital like economic or social capital and thus help the 'legitimate speakers of the legitimate

language' on their path to social success" (Smits & Gündüz-Hosgör 2003: 830). In the case of

adult migrants utilizing literacy services in new immigrant destinations like those in western

North Carolina, the desire to learn and use Standard American English (SAE), the most

prestigious, gold-standard grammatical form of English used in the United States, and to utilize

these language and literacy services in the first place, is presumably brought on by the desire to

increase their linguistic capital and access more cultural resources, and likely also dismantle

significant language barriers to healthcare, social services, and economic resources. "For

individuals who cannot speak the dominant language, there is not only a 'symbolic' barrier, as in

the case of a less than perfect mastery of the official language [or use of a non-standard dialect],

but also a very 'actual' barrier, which may hamper the individual's use of the available public

resources" (Smits & Gündüz-Hosgör 2003: 831).

Linguistic capital is not only a benefit for those who possess it, but a very real hindrance

to the quality of life of those who do not possess it. "People who are not able to speak a

country's dominant language have less access to written and spoken sources, cannot fulfill

official jobs, are restricted in their relationships to their own social group, and depend on others

for information that may be important for them" (Smits & Gündüz-Hosgör 2003: 831). A lack of

linguistic capital leaves people socially isolated, economically disadvantaged, and limited in

their ability to access important social, political, medical, and other information necessary for

their physical wellbeing and ability to totally participate in the culture. At my research site, for

many of the migrants utilizing the resources in the program, when asked about their goals for

attending the program, their answers ranged from being able to understand signs at the grocery store to being able to get better paying jobs.

CHAPTER 4: THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHILD-IDENTITY

The concept of childhood and what is childlike is socially constructed and can be marked or indexed through language. There are behaviors and linguistic patterns that are only used by children and the use of these behaviors or language patterns linguistically produce the speakers as children. These behaviors and linguistic patterns would be inappropriate for adults to use so children are the only ones behaving and speaking this way. This results in children being the only ones reproducing this behavior which in turn indexes this behavior or these speech patterns as childlike. What is considered childlike is culturally constructed rather than a natural category or solely linked to immaturity as a developmental stage (Berman 2014: 109). "It may be universal and biological that every child goes through a period of immaturity, but 'the ways in which the immaturity is conceived and articulated,'" are socially constructed "rather than a merely 'universal biological stage in the life course'" (Zhao 2011: 241). "Childhood is conceived as an exception from the broader society," (Zhao 2011: 244) which is why children across cultures are given varying degrees of grace to behave and speak in ways that would be deemed unacceptable for adults who have reached a culturally determined state of maturity. The idea that children are in a developmentally immature category, which is culturally perceived and determined, allows for the acceptance of behaviors that are culturally deemed immature, and for the cultural understanding of immaturity as being childlike.

If childhood or immaturity were purely developmental categories, it would not differ across cultures, but it does, suggesting that childhood and immaturity are culturally constructed as well. In the case of children of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), walking with food that they do not offer to share, refusing to give, asking/ demanding directly for things, and

criticizing and insulting each other are examples of behaviors that only children participate in (Berman 2014). The expression of these behaviors indexes immaturity or childhood. Berman (2014) argues that this immaturity is culturally appropriate for their perceived developmental stage and social status which is what makes the behavior acceptable. The use of these behaviors and language patterns marks the speakers as immature or children to other members of the culture.

CHAPTER 5: MOTHERESE AND OTHER CHILD-DIRECTED SPEECH REGISTERS

Various forms of speech in the United States, such as the motherese register, also index immaturity and childhood. The way that people use language communicates more than the literal meaning of the words being spoken. The way that a speaker uses language, including word choice, tone, body language, level of formality, etc. can differ depending on the circumstances and social or cultural context of the interaction. These situational variations in language usage are called speech registers and are selected based on the appropriateness of the language use in a given situation. This appropriateness becomes intuitive to first language speakers or people who have gained cultural competence. The choice of specific speech registers in a given context is significant because it marks the situation linguistically in a way that is culturally meaningful and, to speakers within that culture, communicates information such as the relationship, social status, and other social context factors between the speakers. The concept of 'en-registering,' "where a speaker uses a register from a culture's speech repertoire that performatively selects and authorizes certain identities with certain ontological properties for both speaker and addressee," is relevant here (Silverstein 2004 via Solomon 2011: 122).

Adults employ a specific register when speaking to their infants and young children. Western middle-class caregivers speak to their children in a register called 'motherese,' sometimes alternatively referred to as parentese or baby talk. The features of motherese include higher pitch and/or sing-song intonation attached to questions, exaggerated and slowed intonation, short sentences, positive affect, simplified speech, diminutives, repetition, and praise when it isn't deserved (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984: 281-283). "These studies indicate that caregivers make extensive accommodations to the child, assuming the perspective of the child in

the course of engaging him or her in conversational dialogue" (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984: 281).

Since the child is being treated as a conversational partner but cannot speak back, the mother or caregiver assumes both speaking roles and may either "respond on behalf of the infant to [their] own utterance" or interprets their child's unintelligible utterances or facial expressions as responses (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984: 281-282). Solomon (2011) also describes western child-directed speech registers, calling them Baby Talk (BT). When using Baby Talk (BT) "...caregivers modify their speech by increasing its pitch, exaggerating its positive affect, slowing down its tempo, and speaking in short, syntactically simple sentences. Through such modifications and an extensive use of repetition, specialized lexicon, and diminutives and kinship terms, adult speech is phonologically, lexically, and grammatically transformed into BT" (Solomon 2011: 122). Considering the concept of en-registering, or practices of "self- and other-fashioning through language," a caregiver who uses the BT register to address their infant is en-registering a kind of addressee who is, among other things, "linguistically and cognitively immature" yet "contributes meaningful and intentional vocalizations and physical movements to the social interaction" and "is able to act contingently and participate in reciprocal turn-taking" (Solomon 2011: 122).

CHAPTER 6: ELDERSPEAK, DOGGEREL, AND MOTHERESE IN ALTERNATIVE

CONTEXTS

Western speech registers similar to baby talk registers like motherese are also sometimes used with conversation partners that are not babies or young children. Some literature discusses baby talk registers as being used by caregivers to care receivers in a more general sense (Mitchell 2001: 185). Oftentimes, when baby talk is spoken to conversation partners other than infants and young children, these interlocutors are "the elderly, the intellectually disabled, lovers, foreigners, family pets, and even plants (Solomon 2011: 122). This modified use of baby talk with groups other than babies or infants is described as "secondary Baby Talk", used in languages such as American and British English, German, and Dutch, "characterized by extended functions of prototypical BT" (Solomon 2011: 122). While these conversation partners might not be infants and young children, they are potentially viewed as more helpless, vulnerable, and communicatively incompetent than neurotypical adults, hence the choice to use a speech register typically intended for babies and young children. Not only are non-babies spoken to in baby talk registers or registers with overlapping features of baby talk, but some research suggests that this can lead to negative outcomes for certain groups, such as elderly patients.

Elderspeak is a term that describes a speech register that is used to communicate with older adults, typically observed between staff and residents in long-term care (LTC) settings. Williams et al. (2009) describes elderspeak as "a measurable speech style similar to baby talk" (Williams et al. 2009: 11). It is an intergenerational communication style which "features simplistic vocabulary and grammar, shortened sentences, slowed speech, elevated pitch and volume, and inappropriately intimate terms of endearment" as well as diminutives, tag questions,

and collective (plural) pronouns "when a singular form is grammatically correct" (Williams et al. 2009: 12). Corwin (2018) writes that elderspeak, "first described as 'baby talk'," also includes "exaggerated intonation and repetition" (Corwin 2018: 724). These modifications to typical communication between adults implies that the older adult lacks the capability to understand complex sentences and vocabulary or to "act independently" (Williams et al. 2009: 12). Documented research showcases that elderspeak is "perceived as patronizing," "infantilizing," and "can precipitate communication breakdown and problem behaviors for cognitively intact elders" (Williams et al. 2009: 11-12). Research has also shown that the communication breakdown that the use of elderspeak is associated with include "lower rates of communicative competency [sic]" and that, due to the interpretation by a "majority of older adults" as "disrespectful or patronizing," it is also associated with a lack of desire to cooperate with carers' instructions and demands (Corwin 2018: 724). There are a significant number of overlapping features between elderspeak and baby talk registers such as motherese. The widespread use of elderspeak in longterm care facilities suggests that older adults, especially those who are communicatively or cognitively impaired, are being linguistically accommodated in ways that are similar to accommodations for young children.

Solomon (2011), whose research focuses on the negative outcomes of the Euro-American habitus of Baby Talk or 'motherese' with children with 'severe' autism in speech therapy settings, highlights how this speech register, "from a language socialization perspective," is "a common but culturally distinct practice of addressing infants, young children, and persons whose communicative abilities are perceived to be impaired" (Solomon 2011: 131, 141). While, in the western cultural context in which this form of baby talk is used, it may afford typically developing children simplification, "possibly to facilitate various aspects of infants' social

development, from acquisition of syntax to developing attachments," it does not afford the same simplification for children with severe autism (Solomon 2011: 141). While baby talk registers like 'motherese' may have a place culturally to accommodate typically developing infants and small children learning language and communication for the first time, it does not serve a practical function for communication with adult conversation partners such as immigrants, the elderly, or the developmentally disabled. It is not necessarily helpful for these conversation partners in the same way that it might be for children developing language, and is associated with being downright harmful. Instead it serves an indexical function of marking these conversation partners as being like children or sharing the same capabilities of communication and understanding as children.

CHAPTER 7: ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Since the 1990s, the southeastern United States has experienced drastic demographic changes as migrant destinations have shifted to include these areas, known sometimes as "new immigrant destinations" (Adelman & Tsao 2016). Prior to this profound shift in the composition and destinations of migrants, immigration was typically centered around more classic immigrant destinations, or "large magnets such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and a number of states like Florida and Texas," (Adelman & Tsao 2016: 337). Even more recently, the American South, beyond states like Florida and Texas, has begun to receive large numbers of arriving immigrants (Adelman & Tsao 2016: 337-338). Although there has long been a current of migrants from countries like Mexico and China throughout U.S. history, "new and larger streams of immigrants from [other] Latin American and Asian countries have entered the nation over this more recent period" (Adelman & Tsao 2016: 337). "New immigrant destinations across the South [which includes the six states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina] are receiving migrants from many countries, some of whom live in cities as others move directly to suburbs or rural areas" (Adelman & Tsao 2016: 338). With these smaller and newer immigrant destinations, one way that people try to incorporate migrants into the culture of the area is through language and literacy services.

During the late twentieth century, "North Carolina was the leading immigrant destination site. From 1980 to 2000, the size of the state's Latino population increased considerably, with the Raleigh-Durham region experiencing a 1,180 percent growth rate" (Wilkinson 2015: 149). The state's Latinx population in general skyrocketed between 1990 and 2010, increasing from 1.2 percent of the state's total population to 8.4 percent (Wilkinson 2015: 149; US Census Bureau

2000, 2010). "The demographic characteristics of Latino residents in [North Carolina] somewhat parallel those of the national Latino population (as reflected in the Census Bureau's 2010 data). Though most Latinos in North Carolina are native-born (52 percent), as compared to the national population (63 percent), the number of foreign-born Latinos in the state (48 percent) is greater than the national average" (Wilkinson 2015: 151). Throughout the 1990s, "Charlotte, North Carolina experienced a rapid and substantial influx of [largely foreign-born] Hispanic migrants" (Smith & Furuseth 2004: 216). During this period, the Hispanic population was also "the fastest growing U.S. minority group, increasing from 22.4 million to 35.3 million persons. Among U.S. regions caught up in this Latino settlement transformation, the South is experiencing the most significant impacts" (Smith & Furuseth 2004: 217).

I conducted my research in a rural town in North Carolina which has seen such demographic changes. The population of the town is less than 20,000, with the second largest demographic group being Hispanic or Latino, making up just under 20% of the town's total population, according to Census data for July 2022. A little over 10% of the total population are 'foreign-born,' a demographic indicator which includes "anyone who was not a U.S. citizen at birth [and] includes respondents who indicated they were a U.S. citizen by naturalization or not a U.S. citizen" (US Census Bureau). Since the 1990s, the entire county has seen a dramatic transformation to their demographics and workforce as, primarily Guatemalan immigrants, have poured into the area to work in the food-processing industry, particularly filling jobs at poultry plants (Fink 2003: 2). With a significant migrant population living, working, and raising families in this area, the Rural County Literacy Council (psuedonym) provides early English literacy education services to non-English speaking adults, the majority of whom are Hispanic or Latino,

as one effort to incorporate migrants into the culture of the area and provide them with necessary linguistic resources.

According to this program's own website and literature (pamphlets, etc.), they are a non-profit organization that "trains" community volunteers "to tutor adults in the community who need help with reading". The specific training that the community volunteers go through to become instructors is never specified in the program's literature nor was it specified to me. When I questioned how instructors were specifically chosen or trained for the program, I was told by the program director that the instructors were volunteers from the community and that most of them had been teachers or college professors previously, but not all of them had specific training in ESL or bilingual education. Only one of the instructors, who taught the Level 3 'Intermediate' class, explained to me that she used to teach English and ESL at the college level. The instructor for the Level 4 'Advanced' class had an office job but worked as a tutor for children on the side, however, the children that they tutored were not bilingual. While the program director told me that the instructors were given some materials that they could use to create lesson plans and the literature mentions that the organization "trains" them to tutor these adult students, no official training program nor what that would entail was explained to me. It also did not seem to me that the instructors had to be certified to teach English, nor were any certifications mentioned to me when I asked the instructors and program director what made the instructors qualified to teach adults English.

The main program that is offered by the Rural County Literacy Council, Project Flower, "helps immigrants learn to read, write, and speak English". Through Project Flower, the Literacy Council also provides a Motheread program which encourages parents to read to their children to promote literacy, emphasizing both the "why" and "how" of reading. The Literacy Council also

offers a literacy program that specifically "helps immigrants prepare for and pass the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) examination" through Project Citizenship. The entire program is primarily designed with migrant adults and families in mind and all of their programs heavily cater to this population within their broader community.

All of the instructors who taught on the days that I attended the program were retired women, in their upper middle ages. All but one of the instructors were white women, while the Level 1 'Early Beginners' instructor (pseudonym Pari) was a South Asian woman. As previously stated, not all of the instructors had a background in teaching or ESL and they were not given standardized training in adult SLA instruction prior to beginning to teach at the program. When asked during their interviews why they chose to teach at this program, each instructor gave a variation of the same answer which was that they chose to teach at the Rural County Literacy Council due to a belief that they were helping their broader community and helping the students and their families participate in and become incorporated into the community.

While I attended this program, the number of students in each class from week to week was inconsistent and could range from as few as 2 students to 15 students in a given class, as the students would come to classes depending on their availability. It is also possible that when students missed their Tuesday morning classes, they still attended their Thursday morning classes that week, which I did not attend. There were only two men who attended the classes that I attended for the entire duration of my data collection, one in the Level 1 classroom and one in the Level 3 classroom. Both of these male students were Mandarin speakers. In the Level 1 classroom, there were also 3 women who individually spoke Hmong, Mandarin, and Korean. Otherwise, all of the other students were Latina women, speaking Spanish and/or Indigenous languages, many being from Guatemala.

CHAPTER 8: METHODOLOGY

I conducted my ethnographic research at a migrant-focused literacy education program housed in a church in a western North Carolina town in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. This program holds morning and evening classes every Tuesday and Thursday, aside from bank holidays, for adult migrants learning English for the first time. They get proficiency tests which place them into one of four levels: Level 1 'Early Beginner,' Level 2 'Beginner,' Level 3 'Intermediate,' and Level 4 'Advanced'. The program's goal is to help students test out of the Level 4 'Advanced' class and be able to attend ESL classes at the local community college. There are different instructors on Tuesdays vs. Thursdays and in the mornings vs. the evenings. I went to classes every Tuesday morning from 9:30 AM-11:30 AM, often arriving early and staying after class for semi-structured formal interviews and more informal discussions about the program with the instructors, staff, and program director. My research was conducted over a period of two months, from the beginning of October 2023 until the beginning of December 2023. I totaled around 32 complete hours of fieldwork, including classroom observation time as well as interviewing before and after classes.

My data consists of detailed fieldnotes for all 9 weeks of classes, photographs of each of the classrooms, 8 audio class recordings, evenly spread between the Level 1 'Early Beginner,' Level 3 'Intermediate,' and Level 4 'Advanced' classes, and audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with the three instructors for those classes and the program director. These interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants being interviewed. I came with a set of 10-15 pre-planned questions, but due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, I was open to shifting the conversation and questions based on what the participant brought up in their

interview, which allowed for a more conversational feeling for the participants and gave me the opportunity to learn about things I would not have otherwise known to ask about. Each interview was between 30-45 minutes long.

My analysis is primarily focusing on data collected during classroom observations, relying on detailed fieldnotes and photographs as well as class audio recordings that were taken. While I interviewed three instructors and the program director, these interviews were regarding a previous research question and therefore, I will not be focusing on them in my analysis. The fieldnotes and photographs taken during classroom observations have been organized based on relevance to the research question. For further qualitative data analysis of the language used in the classroom, I utilized grounded theory for two cycle coding, using Microsoft Excel. For the first cycle, I used open coding looking for general themes across the classroom recordings, mainly marking general instances of features similar to the 'Motherese' speech register or use of language that typically indexes childhood. For the second cycle of coding, I took established codes from the first cycle and related them to each other, sorting them into patterns and groups. This is when I organized the language and interactions in the recordings into categories of specific features of the 'Motherese' speech register and direct and indirect indexing of childhood through language.

CHAPTER 9: DATA ANALYSIS

The literacy program indexes their adult students as children through a number of physical and verbal signs, including classroom set up, games and activities, and direct and indirect linguistic forms.

9.1 Classroom Organization

The literacy program is housed in a church, with permanent classrooms set up in the building alongside the church's offices and small group meeting rooms. These offices and small group meeting rooms are in a section of the building that is separate from the chapel where church services are held. Within this section of the building, half is made up of offices and small group meeting rooms utilized by the church and their congregation and the other half is made up of classrooms, office space, and storage closets utilized by the literacy council. Since they have been allocated a space that is used for their purposes alone and not used by the church for any other purposes, they have been able to decorate their rooms, offices, and hallways for the purpose of their program. They do not have to take out their decorations and materials when classes are over and the church does not use their classrooms for church events or storage, nor does the church decorate their classrooms. The program's nursery classrooms are down a hallway separate from the majority of the adult literacy classrooms and well past the areas where materials for the adult literacy students are displayed. This means that the setup of their classrooms can be analyzed as being intentionally decorated and organized for the purpose of adult literacy instruction without other explanations for child-like signs in these classrooms. The decor of the classrooms differ from typical adult learning environments such as college classrooms, feeling much more reminiscent of classrooms ranging from early elementary school

for the Level 1 'Early Beginners' classroom to, at most, a high school classroom for the Level 4 'Advanced' classroom.

The Level 1 'Early Beginners' classroom has many signs that index childhood such as bright colors, a rainbow rug, pictures, and games. The Level 1 'Early Beginners' class is intended for students who are learning their very first vocabulary words in English and, in some cases, the English alphabet for the first time (usually because they speak Mandarin, Hmong, etc.). In this classroom, the students sit around a table rather than at desks and the table is set down on a very colorful oval rug that is reminiscent of sitting on rainbow rugs in elementary school classrooms while teachers read to the class (Figure 1). The wall and door are painted eye-catching colors, bright purple and bright green respectively. There are black shelves stacked with games and learning activities which are primarily repurposed children's learning tools. These learning tools are further described in the next section covering the program's activities and games. There are posters on the walls that show the alphabet, the days of the week, the months of the year, and different fruits. In Figure 2, it shows that index cards are placed on certain months of the poster showing the months of the year in English. During one classroom activity, students drew on these index cards and the instructor placed them on the corresponding month of their birthdays; the students illustrated cakes and wrote the month and day of their birthday using the provided colored pencils and crayons. There is a small, rolling white board easel in the classroom, situated in front of the main long table that students sit at, where the instructor sometimes writes out numbers and vocabulary words or draws pictures for the students. All of these signs, activities, and learning materials are typically used with children and in children's classrooms, thus indexing the learners as children.

Figure 1: Level 1 'Early Beginners' Classroom

Figure 2: Level 1 'Early Beginners' Classroom Posters

All of the classrooms for literacy levels higher than 'Early Beginner' sit at long desks arranged in rows to face the front of the classroom. The Level 3 'Intermediate' classroom (Figure 3) has these rows of long desks which face a large whiteboard at the front of the room where the instructor stands and leads her lessons. There is also a large monitor in the right front corner of the classroom where the instructor sometimes uses Google translations to aid in lessons, along with worksheets and Spanish-English picture dictionaries. While considerably less colorful than the Level 1 classroom, this classroom has blue painted walls and some colorful posters on the walls, as well as colorful posters in the hallway outside of the classroom (Figures 4 and 5). These posters in the hallway use pictures, illustrations, and English words to show numbers and the weather. The numbers poster shows numbers one through ten in their written and numeric forms as well as using a visualization of each amount through having pictures of one butterfly to

represent "one", two apples to represent "two", and so on. The weather poster (Figure 5) depicts different illustrated children playing and standing in different types of weather. At the front of the classroom, emoticons of different emotions, colorful maps, and black and white vocabulary lists decorate the walls. While this classroom has more black and white functional decorations and vocabulary lists decorating the room, it still utilizes posters and materials that are intended for children's classrooms.
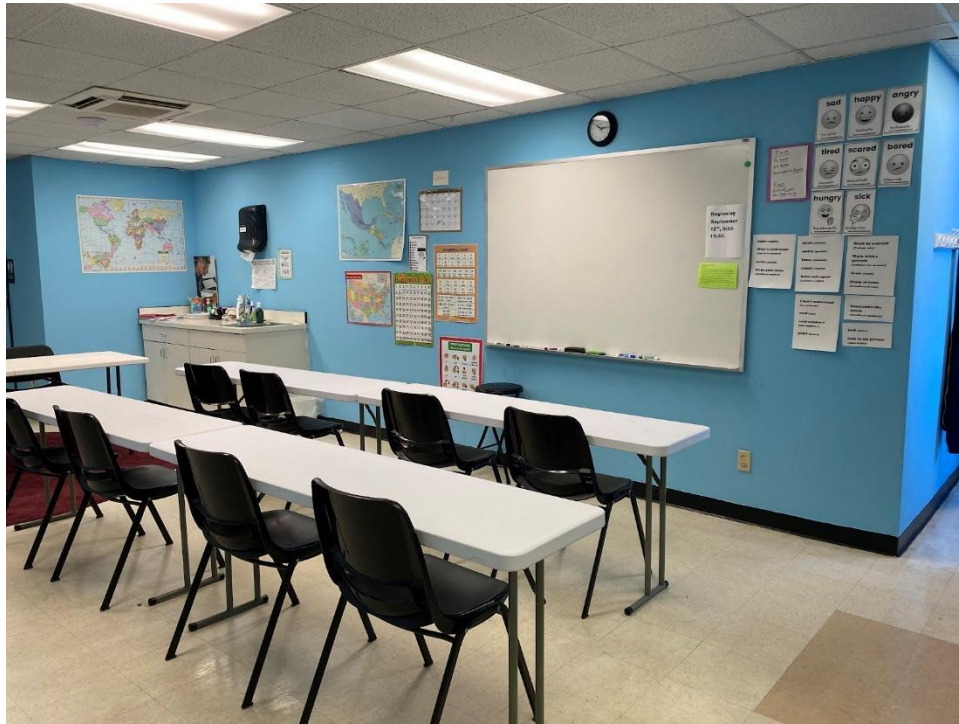

Figure 3: Level 3 'Intermediate' Classroom

Figure 4: Posters Outside Level 3 'Intermediate' Classroom
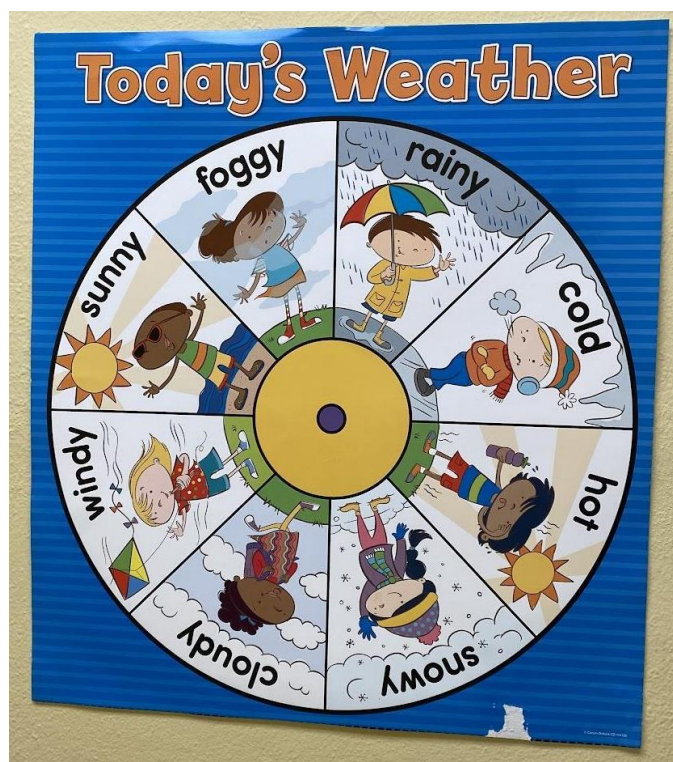

Figure 5: Weather Poster Outside Level 3 'Intermediate' Classroom

The Level 4 'Advanced' classroom has fewer signs indexing childhood than the previous classrooms, however it is not without them. This classroom has the wordiest decorations with the fewest pictures, aside from two maps in the back of the classroom; this makes sense for an upper-level classroom where presumably the students know and recognize a larger number of English words without picture associations. The use of pictures or not in these classrooms can be simultaneously functional and indexical. The shift in the use of color, however, seems to be indexical rather than functional, with the exception of when the students are being taught color. The lower-level classrooms have much more colorful paint on the walls, colorful posters full of pictures, and a rainbow rug in the case of the Level 1 classroom. Even in the Level 4 classroom, the pictureless vocabulary lists are printed on multicolored paper rather than white or choosing a single color. The desks in this classroom are also arranged in rows facing a white board at the front of the room (Figure 6). On either side of the white board in the front of the room are colorful, yet nearly pictureless, posters (Figure 7). To the left of the white board is a single poster that shows how to stretch a sentence from a simple sentence to a more complex sentence and, while there is a photo on this poster, the photo does not hint at what the words on this poster are nor what they mean. To the right of the white board are multiple printed lists of different parts of speech for English grammar. They have been printed out on different colored paper, but they also do not contain pictures which hint at the meaning of the words printed. While this classroom contains fewer signs that index childhood than the Level 1 classroom, it is notable that the classroom with the fewest signs indexing childhood is the classroom intended for students whose English vocabulary allows them to engage in conversations in the English language, write full sentences, and read paragraphs. The classroom decor gradually matures with the English proficiency level of the students in these classrooms, despite the fact that the students in all of

these classrooms regardless of English proficiency are adults. This suggests that the students with the lowest English proficiency in the program are being indexed as more childlike than the students with higher levels of English proficiency.

Figure 6: Level 4 'Advanced' Classroom

Figure 7: Level 4 'Advanced' Classroom Whiteboard

9.2 Activities and Games

Similarly to the classroom organization, the number of child-like activities and games are more numerous in the lower-level classrooms, but learning tools intended for children and teenagers are utilized throughout the program regardless of literacy level. The lower levels all do coloring activities to some degree, with the Level 1 classroom utilizing coloring as a learning tool most frequently. As the students get tested into higher levels of the program, with a higher level of English proficiency, the number of activities and games decrease, however, there are also program-wide activities like read-alouds that seem to be better suited for children than adults in the way that they are organized and carried out.

Coloring activities in the Level 1 classroom were a frequent occurrence, with adult students using colored pencils, crayons, and markers to draw and color in pictures and

worksheets that did not always seem to directly relate to learning English or seem to have a function for teaching adults. When the students were learning their colors in English, the use of colored pencils and markers had a function because they could use the colors to visually represent the English words that they were learning. However, more often than not, the coloring activities were non-obligatory for use in a classroom. The week that the students were learning vocabulary related to describing their families, they were asked to start class by drawing a picture of their family, but these drawings were not referenced later on in class when students were asked to fill out a worksheet describing the members of their family using the learned vocabulary words. The instructor did not talk to the students about the English vocabulary for each member of their family as they drew them. The purpose of having the students draw stick figure portraits of their family members using crayons and colored pencils did not seem to directly relate to English literacy instruction as they were writing the vocabulary words on an entirely separate worksheet rather than on the drawings themselves. While this type of activity might be used in a way that directly relates to English literacy, the way in which it was used in this classroom resulted in the activity functioning as a way to index the students as being less mature and more like children.

Shown in Figures 8 and 9 are some of the games that are used with the students during instruction. The games that are used as teaching tools are mostly spelling or sight word games including the English sight word bingo (Figure 9) which is marketed for ages "5 and up" and an English and Spanish spelling game (Figure 8) that is marketed for ages "5-10". While the sight word bingo does not technically have a cut-off age for use, its starting age of 5 years old suggests that it is intended for younger children and maybe their parents or teachers to play to help teach them these early sight words; the level of difficulty of these sight words and of the game that is

used for teaching them is appropriate and marketed for young children starting at the age of 5.

The English and Spanish spelling game is marketed for children only, specifically children under

the age of 10. Both games were marketed with young children in mind, yet both games are used

as teaching tools in the classroom for adults. While it is true that the adults in this classroom

might be learning English words that a child learning English as their first language might be

learning to read at the age of 5, there are many adult teaching tools that exist for teaching adults

learning English as a second language that are not simultaneously games and materials marketed
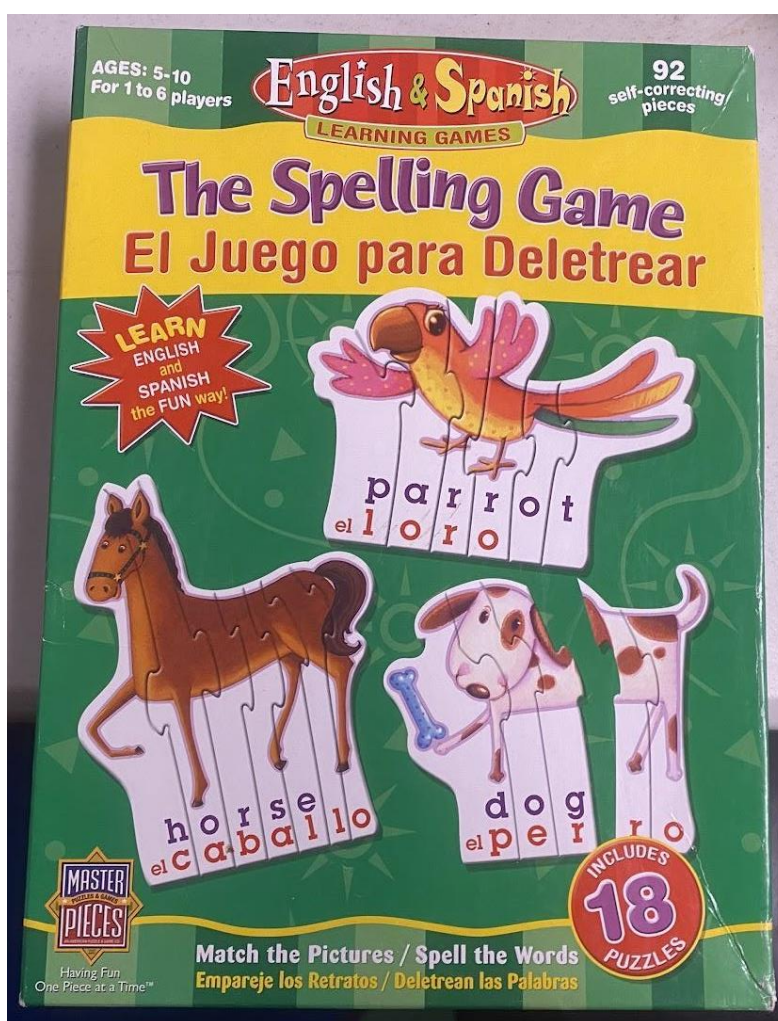
with young children in mind.

Figure 8: English and Spanish Spelling Game

Figure 9: Basic Sight Words Bingo Game

In the Level 2 'Beginner' classroom, while teaching vocabulary related to produce and grocery shopping, the instructor brought in a snack for the students. The snack was peanut butter spread over an apple slice with raisins on top. The instructor called the snack 'frogs on a lily pad,' which is similar to the 'ants on a log' snack, usually given to children. The instructor used red delicious and granny smith apples for the 'lily pads' and had the students review the color and type of apple as well as the terms 'apples', 'raisins', and 'peanut butter'. While this snack's purpose for English literacy instruction seemed to be more clear than some of the coloring activities done in the Level 1 classroom, as it was more directly connected to the association between vocabulary words and their real life counterparts, it is still a snack that is often served to children in the United States. While this gave the students a physical representation of some of the vocabulary that they were learning, the name of the snack was non-obligatory for adult literacy education. It simultaneously teaches English vocabulary and indexes childhood.

On Halloween, the entire program was invited to take part in some activities including trick or treating and a read aloud. Classes ended a half hour early for these activities and while the daycare children were invited to take part in these activities, not all of the students have children or have children that are brought with them to the program while they are in classes. The students themselves were encouraged to take part in the trick or treating alongside some of the students' young children. The read aloud activities that are held by the program sometimes include the children of the students, like on Halloween, but there are other times when the students themselves are being read a children's book aloud without children being in the room. The idea behind these read aloud activities is that they are showing the students books that they can read aloud to their own children and the books that are used for these activities are sometimes handed out to the students to bring home, connected to the literacy council's Motheread program, a service they offer to reinforce to mothers in the program that reading to their children outside of the program is imperative to their children's literacy development, and to try and encourage parents to read to their children in English to increase both the childrens' and parents' English literacy skills. While it makes sense to use these activities to encourage students who are parents to read aloud to their children, the read-aloud activities that happen during regular class time like the one on Halloween are not limited to students who have children, but all students. In addition, having a member of staff stand at the front of a room full of mostly adults, reading a children's story in a high pitched voice, using an exaggerated positive affect and doing different character voices, all features of the motherese speech register, seems to simultaneously serve the function of indexing childhood and at the very least is non-obligatory in serving the goals of adult English literacy.

9.3 Language: Direct Indexing of Childhood

On the first day of my fieldwork in the Level 3 'Intermediate' classroom, I was introduced to the students by the program director who explained my purpose for being there, describing me as a graduate student and briefly explaining that I was at the program to do a project. The program director finished off her introduction by saying "She is a very smart young woman," referring to me, to which the instructor of the class responded, in a cheery, raised-pitch voice, "*These* are very smart girls too," indicating her students who were all adult women. While I, a person at least a decade younger than the majority of the students in the class, was referred to as a 'young woman,' the students of the class were referred to as 'girls,' a word that is used to describe female children rather than female adults. As my fieldwork continued at this site, I realized that referring to the students, the majority of whom were adult women, a handful of whom were adult men, as 'girls' instead of 'women' and 'kids' instead of 'students' was a very common occurrence. The students were sometimes referred to as 'students,' in conversations with me about the program, however, they were almost never referred to as 'women' except in the context of there being more 'women' that attended the program than men. When the students were spoken to as a group, they were called often 'girls,' such as in Transcript 1. The term 'kids' was only ever used to refer to the students by the staff in conversations with one another, such as in Transcript 2. This was not just limited to the Level 3 'Intermediate' classroom, but occurred in every classroom, and was done by the program director, instructors, and office staff alike.

The term 'girl' or 'girls' is literally defined in English as referring to "a female child from birth to adulthood" (Merriam-Webster). While it can sometimes be used for adult women, the context tends to be a close, familiar, informal relationship, where the person using the term and the person the term is being directed at know each other well enough for informal, familiar speech to be appropriate. Another context in which this term tends to be used for women over the

age of majority, is when a much older adult is referring to a younger woman, typically still close to the age of majority. In the context of the literacy program, using terms like 'girls' to refer to adult women in an informal, familiar way would not be contextually appropriate. The context in which this term is being used paired with the common use of the term 'kids' to refer to the students indexes them as actual kids as opposed to close friends. This is not necessarily a conscious thing being done on their part, but by not using terms that are appropriately or commonly used for adults, the program is effectively linguistically marking these adult students as considerably younger, or less capable or mature, than they are.

In one particular instance, on my first day of fieldwork at the beginning of October, the instructor for the Level 3 'Intermediate' class, Amanda, told her students that she would be bringing candy for them on Halloween, using high-pitch paired with positive intonation and affect.

Transcript 1[1]

1. **A:** If you all were not aware,

2.   ^Halloween^ will be on a Tuesday

3.   this year.

4.   We will have class.

5.   I'll have to bring

6.   some good candy for ^Halloween^!

7.   You girls deserve a ^treat^

8.   for doing such good work.

---

[1] Transcription Conventions I Am Using:
@ → laugh
^x^ → raised pitch/ intonation

9.   I'll get us some ^chocolate^.

10. **S:** Uh…

11.   Diabetes.

12. **A:** You have diabetes?

13. **S:** [nods]

14. **A:** I can bring some

15.   fun little crackers for you.

Throughout this transcript, Amanda is using an exaggerated positive affect, with her already raised intonation increasing in pitch on words such as "Halloween" in lines 2 and 6, "treat" in line 7, and "chocolate" in line 9. In line 7, she refers to the five Spanish-speaking adult women, ranging in age from their late-20s to mid-to-late-30s, as "You girls". In addition to this direct indexing of childhood in line 7, in line 15, she indirectly indexes childhood when using a diminutive – "fun *little* crackers" – which is a feature of the motherese speech register. Lines 10-13 showcase an example of repeating or paraphrasing utterances with a questioning intonation, which is another feature of motherese, utilized by caregivers trying to interpret children's utterances as they begin to babble.

In another instance, prior to the start of the Tuesday morning classes on October 31, one of the office staff, Tammy, was speaking with the instructor of the Level 4 'Advanced' class, Ellen, and explained that there would be a Halloween related activity happening around 11:00 that day:

Transcript 2

1. **T:** I just wanted to let you know

2.   that around a half hour before the end of

3.   classes today,

4.   like at 11,

5.   we're going to have a fun little surprise

6.   for Halloween!

7.   There's going to be

8.   like some

9.   candy for the little ones to 'trick or treat'

10.   and I'm going to read a story to everyone.

11.   If you don't have anything planned

12.   you can bring your kids.

13. **E:** Well, that's good @

14.   because I didn't really have a lot

15.   planned for class today.

Tammy's intonation and pitch are not exaggerated or raised while speaking to Ellen in the same way that it typically raised while she spoke to students. Still, Tammy is using diminutive language throughout, such as in line 5 when she refers to a "fun little surprise". Diminutive language is a feature of the motherese speech register. While not speaking to the students, Tammy is still constructing the surprise that is intended for the students in a diminutive way, which produces the surprise as a surprise appropriate for children. In line 8, Tammy's use of the phrase "the little ones" is actually referring to the children of the students who attend the program rather than the students themselves; in addition to the 4 levels of adult literacy classes, there are 2 levels of daycare offered during class time so that parents do not have to choose between learning English and having someone look after their children. But in line 11, when

Tammy says "you can bring your kids," she is referring to adult students in the Level 4 'Advanced' class that Ellen teaches, not young children attending daycare. Note that Tammy distinguishes between the two types of 'kids' at the program by referring to the actual children as "the little ones" and the adult students as Ellen's "kids". Regardless of age, the non-English speaking population being provided services by the program are referred to using words that describe young people and children. The use of phrases such as 'kids' and 'girls' to refer to adult women has the effect of directly linguistically indexing these adult women as child-like or infantilized.

9.4 Indirect Indexing of Childhood

The cheery, higher-pitched voices used by instructors with their students was very common as well. Similar to child-directed speech registers like motherese, the staff speak to the students with raised pitch, sing-songy voices, and ask a lot of questions, including ones that they are not expecting any answer to. While greeting the students as they arrive, the staff's pitch immediately raises and they excitedly ask the students how they are and questions related to the weather, what they are wearing, etc. The majority of students, especially those who are in the lower two levels of classes, simply smile and nod along while the staff speak to them, unable to answer the questions being asked of them without the language and vocabulary required to do so. In one such instance, in mid-November, Tammy was speaking to a student coming into the building who could do little more than smile and nod at her. The student was a Guatemalan woman who looked to be in her mid-to-late 30s:

Transcript 3

1. **T:** ^It's very cold outside today

2.   isn't it?^

3.   ^Did you have to wear a jacket?^

4. **S:** [smiles]

5. **T:** ^Is that your jacket?^

It is not necessarily the words that were spoken which made this interaction notable, but the raised-pitch sing-songy intonation and positive affect in Tammy's voice as well as the repetition of words and questions that she asked without necessarily expecting a verbal response from the student she was speaking to. She is repeating the word "jacket" to the student (lines 3 and 5), a common practice in western child-directed speech registers such as BT and motherese. She is also using short sentences and simplified speech. These are all features of the motherese speech register.

Raised pitch was the most commonly utilized feature of the motherese speech register by the instructors and staff at the Rural County Literacy Council when addressing students, in the sense that it was utilized to varying degrees in each of the classrooms as well as by the office staff and program director. For example, while the instructor for the Level 4 classroom did not use exaggerated positive affect with her students, she did use raised pitch when teaching new vocabulary. In addition to raised pitch, features of motherese that were used most commonly and broadly across the levels of the program when addressing students were repetition, slowed intonation, short sentences, and simplified speech. This was especially prevalent in the Level 1 'Early Beginners' classroom. The instructor, Pari, commonly repeats words and phrases back to the students. As the instructor for the Level 1 'Early Beginners' class, Pari often begins classes with short conversations with each student while allowing the students to settle into their seats and grab their worksheets. The conversations usually consist of Pari asking the student questions and the student responding with short, often single-syllable responses. Many of the students in

this class speak very minimal English, so the sentences tend to be very simple and the

conversations tend to stick to a single topic, like in the example in Transcript 4. In this transcript,

Pari is speaking to a Hmong student in her late 20s.

Transcript 4

1. **P:** How are you today?

2. **S:** Good

3. **P:** ^You're doing good today?^

4.   That's ^good^.

5.   Did you have a good weekend?

6. **S:** Yes.

7. **P:** Very ^good^.

8.   It is very good

9.   to hear that.

In this short interaction, Pari repeats back the word "good" to the student five different times.

She is speaking slowly and exaggerating her enunciations, using simple phrases that include the

word that the student has said to her. She also raises her pitch a few times while repeating the

word "good" back to the student, like in lines 3, 4, and 7.

Early psycholinguists believed that the repetition and slowed and/ or simplified speech of

motherese served a function in helping children learn to speak. However, the absence of such

patterns in some cultures have disproved this theory (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984). However, the

average person who is not up-to-date on their language acquisition and socialization research

would not necessarily know that the features of motherese do not necessarily serve a function in

first or even second language acquisition. Pari's repetition and slowed, simplified, and

enunciated speech is likely thought by her to be useful in order for the student to keep up with

what she is saying and have a better chance of understanding it, and to solidify the use of the

word "good" in the student's vocabulary, but she is simultaneously utilizing features of

motherese.

In the Level 3 'Intermediate' class, the instructor, Amanda, often had students start new

worksheets by reading off the new vocabulary words from a list. In these instances, Amanda

often offered 'praise when it isn't deserved' to the students. In the example in transcript 5, a male

Mandarin-speaking student in his 50s-60s was being asked to read a column of vocabulary

words:

Transcript 5

1. **S:** Cook-ed

2.   Cook

3. **A: ^**Almost!**^**

4.   Those are actually

5.   two different words.

6.   It's

7.   Cook*t*

8.   and cook*ing*.

9.   Try again.

10. **S:** Cook-ed

11.   Cook.

12. **A:** ^Great job [student's name]^!

13.   I put those words in

14.   to trick you guys!

15.   You were ^very brave^

16.   for being the one to read that list.

Amanda utilizes raised pitch throughout the transcript, in lines 3, 12, and 15, but she is also giving the student 'praise when it isn't deserved'. The student made the same pronunciation mistake after being corrected, but was still told he had done a great job, with raised pitch, because he was "very brave" and had tried again after making his first mistake. While positive reinforcement is most likely beneficial to the students as they learn to pronounce new English words, this is simultaneously a feature of motherese, where children are praised for their attempts at communicating even if they are not communicating intelligibly or 'correctly'. As previously referenced, not all mothers or cultures speak to their children in this same way (by using motherese). Motherese is specifically a western speech register. Samoan parents avoid interpreting unintelligible utterances and giving praise when it isn't deserved because Samoan children are expected to make themselves understood, rather than the burden being on the parents to understand the children (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984). For this reason, the functionality of the use of any of the features of motherese in language acquisition and literacy education is questionable, because at the very least, these features are not crucial for all children of all cultures to be able to learn to speak and communicate in their first language. While it might or might not still serve a function in literacy education, it simultaneously serves the function of indexing childhood through the use of features of child-directed speech.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

While many of the teaching tools, games and activities, and even the use of language in this program might serve some function in literacy education, its functionality or lack of functionality in language acquisition and literacy education is irrelevant to its simultaneous function of indexing the adult students as children, which differentiates non-native English-speaking adults from native English-speaking adults. Many of these methods of teaching, such as games marked with children's ages, numerous visual aids, and colors are signs typically seen in children's classrooms rather than college classrooms or other adult learning environments. Whether or not these teaching methods and visual aids would be functional in adult education, we do not typically continue their use in higher levels of education. Similarly to how childhood and immaturity are decided because children do certain behaviors and adults do not, marking the behaviors as childlike or immature, adult classrooms may typically refrain from the use of certain instructional practices that are primarily used in children's classrooms because they are deemed as childish. While these adult students are being taught English through the use of these signs, the signs themselves serve the additional function of marking the adult students as being like children in terms of capability, understanding, and even intelligence.

The lack of fluent proficiency in the English language is likely a contributing factor to the subconscious decision to use features of the motherese speech register in conversation with the adult migrants attending this literacy program. The implications of this are that, like dogs or the elderly, migrants are being spoken to as if they have the same capabilities and level of understanding as small children because of their ability, or lack thereof, to effectively communicate in English. While this may not mean they are viewed as being exactly like children or as children, they are being socially categorized as something other than adults, much like the

elderly in long term care settings are socially categorized as something other than adults. Further, the literature on pedagogies for adult SLA do not prescribe the use of motherese or other child-directed speech registers when instructing adult students on a second language. Future research should address whether this program is an outlier and what linguistic ideologies might be contributing to this phenomenon.

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