

Chapter 12

Implications of Multilingual Students' Stories for Promoting Linguistic Justice in Higher Education: Insights From Oral History Interviews

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores multilingual students' experiences and addresses ways that institutions of higher learning can best celebrate and support multilingual learners. Challenging the long-standing deficit model, many researchers have used raciolinguistic and translanguaging concepts to reframe multilingualism as an asset. The author draws on these frameworks in contextualizing her oral history research collecting multilingual students' stories. This year-long study conducted in 2022-23 was funded by an internal grant at a private U.S. university in the Rocky Mountain region. Eleven multilingual students with diverse native languages and countries of origin were interviewed about their perceptions of their native languages as heritage languages, their academic experiences, and other aspects of their lived experiences. After documenting and analyzing these stories, the author offers suggestions for what institutions of higher learning can do to best institute linguistic justice on their increasingly multilingual campuses.

INTRODUCTION

Especially given the steadily growing multilingual student population in Anglophone countries and the call for linguistic justice among educators, it is crucial to foster awareness of the lived experiences of multilingual students and to gather their perceptions of how well their universities are serving their needs. To collect, preserve, and disseminate multilingual students' stories, the author conducted qualitative research at a private U.S. university in the Rocky Mountain region. The university's multilingual popula-

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tion includes over 800 international students from 80 countries and a growing number of first-generation students (first in their families to attend college) representing over 15% of the overall student population. While the university prides itself in its increasing diversity, it should be noted that it is still a predominantly white institution where most students have been schooled in Standard American English. It is therefore imperative to establish the importance of a multilingual perspective for the university's future.

In a project funded by an internal grant, the author and Juli Parrish, the university's writing center director, recruited interviewees among international students and students of immigrant heritage identifying as speakers of native languages other than English. The author then conducted interviews which became the basis for a series of spotlight articles and podcasts published through the writing center. Sharing these students' stories brings awareness to their lived experiences and shows other members of the university community the benefits of a multilingual campus.

The study was guided by the following central research questions:

1. How do students' native languages connect to their sense of identity and heritage?
2. In what ways do students perceive multilingualism as an advantage for their academic or professional lives?
3. What characterizes multilingual students' lived experiences of educational institutions, and what specific challenges have they faced?
4. How and to what extent do multilingual students feel supported at their current university, and what suggestions do they have for further fostering linguistic justice and/or better support systems?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The imposition of monolingual norms at institutions of higher learning has come under increasing criticism by scholars from fields such as composition and rhetoric, education, sociolinguistics, and critical race and ethnic studies.

Over the past several decades, researchers of raciolinguistics have increasingly recognized that it is a form of racial discrimination to insist on Standard English in educational settings. This commitment to SE is driven by the belief that it is the most proper, sophisticated, and clear way to speak and write, despite linguistic evidence to the contrary (Greenfield, 2011). The privileging of an idealized variety of English denies access to people of color and conceals the inherent racism of viewing multilingual students through a deficit model that devalues the many advantages that linguistic difference can bring to academic environments (Alim, 2016; Howell et.al., 2020; Veronelli, 2015). Placing the burden on minoritized students to acquire the language varieties that are dominant at a given university and larger community, this deficit model may manifest itself in the attitudes and practices of professors, writing center consultants, administrators, or even students' peers. Multilingual speakers and writers with complex linguistic practices may be viewed reductively by those who perceive their language use through raciolinguistic binaries (Rosa, 2018; Sanchez, 2016). For instance, those who inhabit borderlands between the U.S. and Latin America and have self-constructed hybrid identities may be stereotyped as native Spanish speakers who are considered deficient in their role as language learners; this ignores the complexity of their nuanced language practices (Rosa & Florez, 2017). Racialized students whose language is not considered articulate can become dissociated from their communities and culturally rooted practices (Baker-Bell, 2000; Cushman, 2017; Lee & Alvarez, 2020).

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