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English Learners' Positioning During Interactions With Monolingual English-Speaking Students

Amanda Sugimoto
Portland State University, asugimo2@pdx.edu

Kathy Carter
University of Arizona

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Amanda T. Sugimoto
Portland State University
Kathy Carter
University of Arizona

Author Note

Amanda T. Sugimoto, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Graduate
School of Education, Portland State University.
Kathy Carter, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Sociocultural Studies,
College of Education, University of Arizona.
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Amanda T.
Sugimoto, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Graduate School of Education,
Portland State University, Portland, OR 97207.
E-mail: asugimo2@pdx.edu

Abstract

Increasingly, English Learners (ELs) are being educated in mainstream classrooms alongside English fluent students. Using a positioning theory framework, this multiple case study explored how ELs reflexively positioned themselves during interactions with their peers as well as how English fluent peers interactionally positioned ELs. Drawing upon multiple data sources, (i.e., observations, interviews, and artifacts), and using cross case analysis techniques, we found that ELs' reflexive positioning was influenced by their language history and schooling context and peers' interactional positioning moves limited ELs' access to academic interactions. These findings pose important considerations regarding the academic and linguistic access of ELs in English-dominant classrooms.

Introduction

It is becoming more common for English Learners (ELs) to be educated in mainstream classrooms as the population of ELs grows in the United States (Yoon, 2008). Several factors have contributed to this emerging educational phenomenon including: (1) ELs are increasingly enrolling in schools that historically have served no or few linguistically diverse students, i.e., low-incidence schools (Capps et al., 2005; García, Arias, Murri & Serna, 2010), and (2) policy mandates, e.g., the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), have marginalized English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education programs by reducing the resources available for such programs (Harper, de Jong, & Platt, 2008). Ultimately, this shifting educational context means that ELs are increasingly spending part if not the majority of their school day in English-dominant mainstream classrooms with peers who are fluent and/or native English speakers.

It has been argued that interactions with native English speakers can benefit ELs' developing language proficiency (Saville-Troike, 1984; Strong, 1983, 1984). However, these interactions and their actual benefits are shaped by a variety of factors, including: socio-emotional factors (Pappamihiel, 2002), and inequitable academic practices (Gándara & Orfield, 2012; Iddings, 2005; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2009). For example, ELs may experience heightened levels of anxiety in the mainstream classroom that can hinder their interactions with peers (Pappamihiel, 2002). Moreover, ELs may be isolated from native English-speaking peers because of exclusionary pedagogical practices resulting in fewer opportunities to interact with their fluent English speakers (Gándara & Orfield, 2012; Iddings, 2005; Iddings, Combs & Moll, 2012). Much of this scholarship regarding the interactions between ELs and their English fluent peers has focused on high school-aged students (for an exception see Iddings, 2005). Less is known about the interactions between ELs and their English fluent peers in mainstream elementary classrooms. This is an important conversational context for scholars, teacher educators, and practicing teachers to explore because, ultimately, ELs' interactions with their peers have the potential to afford or limit their access to academic and linguistic development opportunities in the mainstream classroom.

In the state understudy, schools with a relatively large community of identified English Language Learners must adhere to a mandated 4-hour block of language instruction. In practice, this mandate often means that students are segregated from their regular mainstream classrooms and placed in a separate English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom (Combs, 2012; Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2012). In these ESL classrooms, instruction primarily focuses on the acquisition of discrete language skills in a prescriptive manner (Krashen, MacSwan, & Rolstad, 2012). In schools with fewer than twenty identified ELs, the states mandates that an Individualized Language Learner Plan should guide the education of ELs. The plan outlines language goals for students and allows schools to place ELs in mainstream classrooms for most if not all of the school day. In alignment with larger national enrollment trends, ELs are increasingly enrolling in these low-incidence schools, or schools with relatively small populations of ELs. Therefore, scholars have pointed out that there still remains a need to understand better the experiences of ELs in low these incidence schools (Pettiti, 2011).

This study was designed to add to current understandings about the interactions between ELs and their English fluent peers by focusing on ELs in a low-incidence

elementary school. In order to explore ELs interactions with their peers in the mainstream classroom, we have framed this study with the conceptual framework of positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990). Positioning theory is particularly suited to this study because it allowed us to explore how ELs' reflexive positioning and the interactional positioning by their peers impacted ELs' access to interactions. This access, in turn, has implications for ELs' access to academic and linguistic development opportunities. This study was designed to explore the following research questions: (1) How do ELs reflexively position themselves in regards to interactions with their English fluent peers in the mainstream classroom, and (2) How do English fluent/monolingual peers interactionally position ELs during interactions in the mainstream classroom?

Literature Review

In the school under study, ELs primarily spent their school days in a mainstream classroom surrounded by native English speaking peers. In this section, I explore relevant scholarship regarding the lived experiences of ELs in mainstream classrooms and mainstream classroom peers' interactions with ELs.

English Learners' Experiences in Mainstream Classrooms

Scholarship regarding the experiences of ELs in schools has documented their academic and social isolation (e.g., Fu, 1995; Gándara & Orfield, 2012; Iddings, 2005; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2009). For example, ELs may be placed in bifurcated school systems were they spend part of their day in the mainstream classroom and part of their day in classrooms that focus on intensive English instruction (Fu, 1995; Gándara & Orfield, 2012; Iddings, 2005; Olsen, 1997). Fu (1995) observed that in mainstream high school classrooms ELs would physically, verbally, and mentally withdraw from their native English speaking peers. In contrast, in the ESL classroom ELs became "boisterous" and engaged in conversation not only with their peers but also their ESL teachers (Fu, 1995). Adding to this study, Olsen (1997) found that high school aged ELs, spent part of their day in a separate school called the "Newcomer School" where they learned English, and the rest of the day in the regular high school where they learned academic content. This system was conceptualized as an efficient and expedient method for immigrant students to obtain a working proficiency in English while also continuing their academic growth. In practice, Olsen found that the system resulted in social and academic isolation that contributed to the ELs' uneven academic and linguistic growth when compared to their native English speaking peers. Ultimately, systemic design influences the experiences and access that ELs have in school as well as the potential interlocutors with whom they can interact.

In the mainstream classroom, ELs' isolation can be compounded by teachers' instructional strategies. For example, Bunch (2009) found that mainstream high school teachers effectively lowered the language demands of group presentations for ELs to the point that these students were positioned as passive receivers rather than active creators of language and knowledge. Additionally, Iddings' (2005) ethnographic study found that elementary-aged ELs experienced more challenges when attempting to access the mainstream classroom curriculum. Through an analysis of curricular resources and pedagogical choices Iddings found that in mainstream classrooms, native English speaking students were able to increase their linguistic competence by reading literature and connecting it to their own lives. In contrast, ELs were given a prepackaged curriculum that focused on the procedural aspects of reading, i.e., phonemes and site

words, instead of literature that could build linguistic and cultural connections for these students. Ultimately, Iddings (2005) found that the ELs in this elementary classroom formed a sub-community of practice where they were able to look to each other for academic and linguistic support and establish their competence within their group dynamic. It can be common for mainstream teachers to group ELs together in mainstream classrooms; this practice, in turn, further limits their opportunities to interact with their native English speaking peers (Iddings, 2005). In sum, mainstream classroom teachers can hold considerable influence over the educational experiences and access that ELs have to academic and linguistic development opportunities in the classroom.

Finally, the socioemotional experiences of ELs in schools can be challenging and often tumultuous as they attempt to navigate their various schooling milieus (Jiménez, 2010; Pappamihiel, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).   In the mainstream classroom, ELs may experience heightened anxiety levels because of the fact that they will need to converse with their native English speaking peers (Fu, 1995; Jiménez, 2010; Olsen, 1997; Pappamihiel, 2002). Overall, scholars have found that the social, emotional, linguistic, and academic experiences of ELs can be shaped by the context of their schools, teachers' pedagogical choices, and their interactions with peers. Much of this important scholarship has focused on the experiences of ELs in high schools, however, more needs to be known about elementary-aged ELs' experiences, particularly in low-incidence schools where they primarily interact with native English speaking teachers and peers.

Interactions between English Learners and Peers

ELs can benefit academically, socially, and linguistically when they interact with fluent and/or native English speakers. As ELs develop their oral English proficiency, they are more likely to befriend and interact with fluent and native English speaking students. This increased interaction, in turn, promotes their English acquisition as they are engaged in more opportunities to use English (Chesterfield, Chesterfield, Hayes-Latimer, Chavez, 1983; Saville-Troike, 1984; Strong, 1983, 1984). How these interactions can be orchestrated and supported effectively has been debated in the literature. Some argue that scaffolded interactions between peers help ELs connect every day, conversational language to academic discourse (Gibbons, 2002; Walqui, 2006). While others claim that less structured peer discussion groups during literature circles and book clubs naturally lend themselves to language development opportunities (Watts-Taffe, Truscott, 2000). Still others have argued that interactions need to be highly structured peer tutoring opportunities where English speaking students tutor ELs (Dwyer, 1998; Greenwood, Arreaga-Mayer, Utley, Gavin & Terry, 2001).

However, interactions between ELs and their English fluent peers are not free of challenges. Some of these challenges can be related to Krashen's affective filter (1983), in which Krashen hypothesized that affective variables can impact individual's success when attempting to learn a second language. Specifically, motivation, confidence, and anxiety can positively lower or negatively raise an individual's affective filter, thereby promoting or impeding language practice. ELs in mainstream classrooms may experience heightened affective filters that could impede their English language practice or, at the very least, curtail the frequency of interactions between the ELs and their English fluent peers. Additionally, the use of peer tutors has been found to be problematic when one individual is an EL and the other is a fluent English speaker

because the students may not know how to best support each other's learning given their varying levels of English proficiencies (Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998; Harper & de Jong, 2004). Given that there are benefits and challenges to interactions between ELs and their native English speaking peers in mainstream classrooms, we decided to explore how native English speaking peers interact with EL and particularly how they position ELs during interactions.

Conceptual Framework: Positioning theory

Positioning theory focuses on individuals' cognitive processes that support their actions and choices during social interactions, as well as how individuals create meaning during said interactions (Davies & Harré, 1990, 1999; Harré, 1998; Harré & Langenhove, 1991, 1999; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). Positioning is a "discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 37). In other words, individuals discursively position themselves and others during interactions based on their larger, ongoing storylines. In turn, these positioning acts can contribute to "normative constraints" that individual's draw upon during interactions to afford or hinder future social interactions (Harré, et al., 2009).

During the discursive process, interlocutors can *interactionally position* others in that "what one person says positions another" (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 37). Additionally, interlocutors may *reflexively position* themselves in relation to whom they are speaking, the interactional positioning moves of others, and larger contextual storylines (Davies & Harré, 1999). Interactional and reflexive positioning can then contribute to an individual's identity construction and reconstruction in varying contexts. Specifically, Davies & Harré (1999) theorized that "an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and re-constituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate" (p. 35). In other words, the process of (re)constructing the self happens within dialogic relationships that can afford or constrain ways of being within specific contexts (Lineham & McCarthy, 2000).

This study was designed to explore the local positioning of ELs in a low-incidence elementary school. Specifically, we explored how ELs' reflexive positioning shaped their beliefs and actions related to their interactional rights with their classroom peers. Additionally, we explored how peers interactionally positioned ELs, and how peers' words and actions with ELs limited or afforded the rights and speech acts available to ELs in varying school contexts.

Methods

To describe the methodological details of our study, we provide an overview of the larger study and the participants in this specific study, followed by details about data sources and analytical techniques.

Study Context

This case study is drawn from a larger study that explored the experiences of ELs in a low incidence school. In the state, policy mandates require that ELs in low-incidence schools spend the majority of their school day in mainstream classrooms with pullout ESL services. The elementary school understudy, Cordova Elementary (pseudonym), was a Title I school with 847 total students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

Of these 847 students, 17 students were identified as ELs and received pullout ESL instruction for half an hour a day, four times a week.

Participants

        We worked with the school's ESL teacher to identify potential EL participants. We purposefully sampled (Creswell, 2009) EL participants based on their English proficiency level as assessed by the previous year's English proficiency assessment. The assessment used four proficiency levels: pre-emergent, emergent, intermediate, and proficient. Specifically, we asked to include EL participants at the pre-emergent, emergent, and intermediate levels of assessed English proficiency. This purposeful sampling helped us to explore how English proficiency may have contributed to the ELs' reflexive and interactional positioning. Given the relatively small population of identified ELs in the school and sampling criteria above, the ESL teacher recommended three fourth graders for our study, including: (1) Anja, a native Russian speaker who was assessed as having an intermediate English proficiency, (2) Cesar, a native Spanish speaker who was assessed as having an emergent English proficiency, and (3) Alejandra, a native English and Spanish speaker who was assessed as having a pre-emergent English proficiency (see Table 1 for full list of participants).

Table 1.

English Learner Participants.

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Home Language	Assessed English Proficiency	Time at Cordova Elementary
Anja	Russia	Russian	Intermediate	4 years
Cesar	Mexico	Spanish	Emergent	1 year
Alejandra	United States	English (dominant) and Spanish (limited)	Pre-emergent	3 months

Data Sources

        In keeping with a case study methodology, we engaged in prolonged contact with our participants through various data collection tools; e.g., observations, interviews, and artifact collection (Stake, 2006, 2013; Yin 2013). Observations were conducted by the first author over four months and focused on the construction of detailed fieldnotes that included the approximate duration of the interaction, the interlocutors (both active and observers), the nature of the interaction, and any verbal or nonverbal positioning moves. The design of the fieldnotes allowed us to quantify the frequency of different types of interactions (e.g., social or academic), the frequency that the EL participants interacted with specific interlocutors, and the approximate duration of the ELs' interactions. However, the counts of interactions were not absolute. For example, my placement in the room may have resulted in missed interactions, and my efforts to record interactions may have coincided with other interactions thereby resulting in missed interactions. Rather than being absolute counts, this quantification provides an approximation of each participant's daily interactions. The primary purpose of these fieldnotes was to document

in detail who ELs interacted with and what interactional and reflexive positioning acts took place during these interactions. At the end of each day's fieldnotes, the first author wrote research memos synthesizing her observations for the day, both within and across contexts (Glesne, 2011). These memos were then used in our ongoing, iterative analysis to track larger themes within case participants and between case participants related to their positioning. Additionally, these initial memos were used to "member check" our data and emerging interpretations with our participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2014), in an effort to increase the dependability of our interpretations. Curricular artifacts and school handouts were also collected in order to triangulate observational findings.

As observations progressed, the first author began having impromptu conversations with participants throughout the day. These impromptu conversations were not recorded as they were often initiated by the participants themselves or were part of a larger informal conversation between the participant and the first author. However, I did write down the content, location, and any follow-up questions I may have formed during the conversation at the end of the day's fieldnotes as a means of maintaining a record of these conversations for later analysis. These conversations often allowed us to explore participants' sense making of their social networks.

EL participants were formally interviewed two times. The first interview (introductory interview) explored the participants' conceptions about language, their school, and their social networks. The second interview (positioning interview) explored participants' reflexive positioning and the interactional positioning moves of peers. During this second interview, we asked the ELs to create a visual sociogram for their mainstream classroom using index cards individually labeled with the names of their classmates. ELs organized the names to reflect whom they felt they interacted with, whom they went to for linguistic or academic help, and with whom they did not interact. We used these visual sociograms to explore the ELs' meaning making of their social networks and potential interlocutors and how they reflexively positioned themselves in relation to individuals in their social network. These interviews were designed to access the ELs' beliefs about language, language learning, social networks, and schooling as well as how these beliefs and their daily experiences contributed to ELs' reflexive positioning when they described their school-based interactions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was iterative and multi-phased. While all the data collected was designed to explore ELs' interactions and positioning in the mainstream classroom, data collected through fieldnotes and artifacts was methodologically different than data collected through interviews. Specifically, fieldnotes were "detailed, concrete descriptions" of what the researcher observed in the field, and artifacts were used to support and contextualize these concrete descriptions. Interviews were the "site of mutual knowledge construction" regarding the topic under study (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Therefore, we initially coded formal interviews and records of impromptu conversations separately from our fieldnotes and artifact data.

During the first phase of data analysis, interviews and fieldnotes were coded with related but separate codebooks in order to better understand the compendium of data. Interviews were coded for references to (1) language history, (2) schooling history, (3) conceptions about languages or language learning, and (4) positioning of peers and/or self. Fieldnotes were coded for specifics about interactions (e.g., content, length,

initiator), and interactional or reflexive positioning moves. Artifacts were analyzed for languages used and connections to home language and practices.

During the second phase of data analysis, we used our coded data to construct individual cases for each of our participants. Each case explored how the EL participants reflexively positioned their interactional roles and responsibilities with their peers. Moreover, the cases explored how peers' interactional positioning of the ELs shaped the ELs' roles and rights during interactions in various school contexts. To build our cases, we started with the ELs' linguistic history in order to ground our study in the lived experiences of the ELs. Then, we describe the ELs' interactions in mainstream classrooms, as this was the schooling context where these students spent most of their school days. We have also included descriptions of ELs' interactions and positioning in other school spaces, e.g., the ESL classroom or informal spaces like the cafeteria and playground, to explore how ELs' positioning in these school contexts either supported or contradicted their positioning in the mainstream classroom.

In the third phase of our analysis, we created analytic memos (Marshall & Rossman, 2014) that looked across the cases to identify patterns in the positioning of EL participants during interactions with peers in this low-incidence school. There are various ways to conceptualize a cross case analysis, for example thematic analysis, functional analysis, or case-survey analysis (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005; Ramsay & Silverman, 2002; Yin, 1981). However, in alignment with our methodology, we have chosen to employ Robert Stake's (2006; 2013) conceptualization of cross case analysis focusing on the influence of context. Stake argued that phenomena operate differently in various contexts; therefore, in order to understand the larger quintain one must "illuminate" these contexts. By constructing a quintain across the three individual cases, we hoped to understand better how the low-incidence context of this school site interacted with EL participants' reflexive and interactional positioning with their English fluent peers.

Results

Anja: Limited Interactional Ease

Of the three case study participants, Anja had attended Cordova Elementary the longest, a total of four years at the time of this study. She entered the school in kindergarten as a monolingual Russian speaker, and did not have any previous schooling experience either in Russia or the United States. At home, Anja spoke with her family in Russian, primarily read in Russian, and watched Russian television. In the following, we will show that Anja exhibited limited interactional ease with her peers.

Reflexive positioning.

When Anja entered Cordova Elementary, she was the only Russian speaker in the school. In the following, Anja described her experience entering Cordova Elementary:

Anja: When I started [school] I didn't know a word of English. I was scared.
Amanda: What was that like at school?
Anja: Well it started hard, then it started getting easier then I really understood what everyone was saying around me.
Amanda: Did you have someone in your class that helped you that spoke Russian or were you with people that only spoke English?
Anja: Only me [spoke Russian]. (Introductory interview)

Anja went on to explain that being the only Russian speaker in her classroom was intimidating and left her feeling "scared" to talk to her peers and teachers. Anja exhibited limited interactional ease when she entered Cordova as a kindergartener, and she continued to be reticent to interact with her peers four years later.

During observations in her fourth grade school year, Anja rarely initiated conversations with her peers. The majority of her interactions were nonverbal or short verbal answers (e.g., yes or no) answers to her peers' questions or conversational gambits in the mainstream classroom. In other school spaces like the cafeteria and playground, Anja's isolation from her peers was more consistent as she was frequently observed walking around the field or sitting and eating her lunch while staring straight ahead. Reportedly, the pressure of speaking in English inhibited her interactions. In her words:

> Right now I don't really talk to anyone, well I kind of don't know how because I don't know a lot of words…when I want to say something I have the word in my mind in Russian but I kind of forget sometimes how to say it and then I don't talk to people. (Introductory interview)

Anja initially reflexively positioned her own English proficiency as a challenge when talking with her peers and as one of the reasons why she did not interact with her classmates. Later in the same interview, Anja went on to explain:

> I have a feeling like I'm kind of scared…[I] just not feel good with these people [peers]…. I don't really talk to them because they walk like and wear clothes like they're cool and I'm not cool and I don't want to mess with that. (Introductory interview)

Here, Anja reiterated her feeling that she was "scared" of her peers and that this was another contributory factor for why she was reluctant to interact with her peers. She reflexively positioned herself as somehow less "cool" than her peers and alluded to a dissonance between how her peers walked and dressed and how she saw herself.

Anja's lack of interactional ease in the mainstream classroom and in less formal school spaces was particularly noticeable when compared to her interactional ease in the ESL classroom. Anja attended daily half-hour long ESL classes since she first enrolled in Cordova Elementary and was currently in a group with two Spanish speaking fourth graders. During observations in the ESL classroom Anja volunteered personal anecdotes to share with the teacher and her other group mates, e.g., sharing stories about what she did with her family on the weekends, and taught the group Russian words.

Ultimately, Anja's reflexive positioning influenced her lack of interactional ease and relatively few interactions with her peers in the mainstream classroom and informal school spaces. This reflexive positioning was partially shaped by her feelings of being "scared" of her English fluent peers, the lack of Russian speaking interlocutors in Cordova, and her own positioning of her English proficiency.

Interactional positioning by peers.

The instructional strategies used in Anja's fourth grade classroom left little time for students to interact. The majority of the lessons were teacher directed, students typically worked independently, and transition times were handled quickly with the teacher frequently reminding the students to "turn off" their voices. However, there were specific times during the day when the teacher did have students work together. On 6 occasions, the teacher had students work with partners or in triads to complete selected math assignments. In one illustrative event, Anja was working with two peers on a

review math packet. Anja's group-mates were observed repeatedly telling Anja which answer to circle, what to write on her paper, and even physically taking the packet from Anja to write down answers. The few occasions when Anja attempted to discuss an answer resulted in her peers telling her to "hurry up" and "just write down" the answer that they had already found. Over the course of observations in similar interactional events, peers regularly dominated Anja or excluded Anja. In sum, peers interactionally positioned Anja as an unwelcome academic interlocutor.

On the playground and in the cafeteria, Anja was regularly observed walking behind or sitting next to a group of 4 to 5 girls who were in her fourth grade class. However, she was not observed actually speaking to these girls. Instead, Anja would follow the group around a few steps behind or she would sit at the table where the girls where talking but not actually engage in conversation. When they were sitting, the group would often have their backs to Anja as they talked in a smaller circle. In social interactions, this group of peers, who were the only group that Anja was seen with regularly, interactionally positioned as an unwelcome social interlocutor. Overall, in both the classroom and in other school spaces, Anja had limited access to academic and social interactions with her peers. Her peers' interactional positioning of Anja as an unwelcome or passive interlocutor shaped Anja's limited access to academic and social interactions.

Cesar: Interactional Ease

Cesar moved to the United States from Mexico half way through his third grade when he enrolled in Cordova Elementary. His family moved to the United States because his father, a law enforcement officer in Mexico, took a temporary position in an international exchange program. The family planned on moving back to Mexico in the future. At home, Cesar and his sister were expected to speak in Spanish because "mom doesn't let us speak English because we could just forget Spanish and just start speaking English" (Introductory interview). In the following, we will show that Cesar exhibited interactional ease when conversing with his English fluent peers.

Reflexive positioning.

When he entered Cordova, Cesar recalled being "very nervous" about his new school but, after the first two weeks, he reported that "I was just like normal" (Introductory interview). During observations, Cesar was regularly observed initiating prolonged social interactions that his peers actively took part in. During these social interactions, Cesar reflexively positioned himself as an active contributor and even initiator, suggesting an appreciable level of interactional ease. Two factors reportedly contributed to Cesar's increased interactional ease in his new English-dominant school: previous English lessons in Mexico and the presence of Spanish speaking peers at Cordova Elementary.

In his previous school in Mexico, Cesar took regular English classes as part of his regular school curriculum. Cesar shared that these English lessons in Mexico shaped his comfort level when he entered Cordova Elementary. In his words:

> They [teachers in Mexico] used to teach us a little bit of English, like to say hello
> and days and nouns and those kind of stuff so, when I came here [Cordova], I
> knew a little bit of [English] words" (Introductory interview)

He reported that these lessons in conversational English were immediately useful when he entered Cordova because he was able to "say hello" and introduce himself to his new peers.

Additionally, Cesar reported that the presence of another Spanish speaking student helped him feel comfortable in his English dominant environment. In Cesar's words:

> Well, my friend, Edward [Spanish and English speaker], teach me how to speak more English and my friend David [monolingual English speaker] too, but he doesn't speak Spanish, he's not Mexican. But he helped me too. (Positioning interview)

Cesar explained that initially his third grade teacher asked Edward and David to help Cesar transition into his English-dominant third grade classroom. Specifically, she asked Edward, who was a bilingual Spanish and English speaker, to help translate classwork for Cesar. Reportedly, Edward became a key peer ally in Cesar's third grade classroom, as he was able to serve as translator and English teacher. Another peer, David, was asked by Cesar's teacher to help show Cesar what he needed to do at lunch and recess, and eventually David also started helping Cesar in learning English. By Cesar's report, this relationship was strengthened when he and David found themselves in the same fourth grade classroom the following year.

In sum, Cesar was observed frequently initiating and taking part in social interactions with his fourth grade mainstream classroom peers which indicated a positive reflexive positioning for Cesar regarding his interactional rights and an appreciable level of interactional ease. This positive reflexive positioning and interactional ease was partially shaped by Cesar's previous exposure to English in his Mexican grade school and his early access to a Spanish speaking peer upon his enrollment in Cordova Elementary.

Interactional positioning.

Cesar was a frequent initiator and contributor to social interactions with his English fluent peers. Conversations typically centered around common interests (e.g., toys or classroom supplies) and shared events (e.g., an ongoing football game at recess involving several classroom peers, including Cesar). The majority of these interactions took place between Cesar and a consistent group of 5 friends, with whom Cesar played football, or with the peers at his table group. In the classroom, students sat at groups, and Cesar sat at a long table of desks in the center of the classroom with 7 other students. Cesar was frequently observed verbally and nonverbally interacting with his group mates, particularly two that sat very close to him. These interactions typically involved joking, discussing various objects, making silly faces, and generally talking about topics of interest both in and out of school. The teacher rarely reprimanded Cesar for his social interactions, even when Cesar initiated some very visible behaviors to get the attention of his peers, e.g., somersaulting in the classroom and proclaiming he was a ninja or belly crawling across the floor to talk with a friend about an incident at lunch. Cesar's interactive initiative resulted in Cesar having frequent access to social interactions with his peers.

However, during academic interactions Cesar was frequently excluded or ignored by his peers. In one illustrative incident, Cesar worked with two peers on a problem solving activity where they were given number tiles to build a number based on clues (i.e., build the smallest even number). As the group discussed how to solve the problem, Cesar repeatedly attempted to interject his own thinking; however, his partners ignored his contributions and eventually physically took the math tiles away from Cesar. In

response, Cesar took a small flag out of his desk and started playing with it. Then, Cesar took out a book and read for the remainder of the activity.

Overall, Cesar's peers interactionally positioned Cesar as a welcome social interlocutor as evidenced by their frequent and prolonged conversations in the classroom, cafeteria, and playground. However, these same peers positioned Cesar as an unwelcome academic interlocutor as evidenced by their exclusionary positioning moves during academic interactions. While Cesar exhibited interactional ease and confidence with his peers based on his reflexive positioning, he was still afforded limited interactional rights by his peers during academic conversations.

Alejandra: Interactional Ease

Of the three case study participants, Alejandra entered Cordova the most recently. She enrolled in Cordova Elementary in the beginning half of her fourth grade year and, at the time of this study, had been enrolled at the school for three months. Additionally, she was the only case study participant who had actually been born and lived her entire life in the southwestern United States and came from an English-dominant home environment. In the following, we will show that Alejandra exhibited interactional ease when conversing with her English fluent peers.

Reflexive positioning.

Both of Alejandra's parents spoke some level of Spanish but the degree to which the two languages, English and Spanish, were used in the two different homes was very different. In her words:

> I mostly talk English in my mom's [house] but a little tiny bit I talk Spanish at my mom's too. But at my dad's [house] I mostly talk Spanish every day because…my dad's girlfriend, she was teaching me [Spanish], because I didn't know what words meant in Spanish but so whenever they told me something that I didn't know in Spanish, they pronounced it in English. (Introductory interview)

At her mother's house, Alejandra reported that she conversed with her mother, brother, and younger sister mostly in English because her brother and sister reportedly preferred English in the home. When she was with her father, Alejandra reported that her father's family would help her develop her Spanish proficiency by primarily speaking in Spanish and teaching her words and phrases that she did not know. She explained:

> I'm more of an English person because I already know more English than Spanish. (Introductory interview)

Ultimately, Alejandra positioned herself as an "English person" given her English dominant interactions at home. This reflexive positioning of her positive interactional ease with English was carried into her interactions with peers in her mainstream classroom.

When she entered Cordova Elementary, Alejandra explained that her transition was relatively smooth, except for being "nervous for the first day." Part of her comfort in the English-dominant environment was attributed to the fact that at her previous school Alejandra spent the majority of her day in a mainstream classroom where English was the language of instruction. The program closely mirrored the support that she was receiving at Cordova Elementary because Alejandra also received pullout ESL services for two hours a day in her previous school.

Alejandra was a frequent contributor to social interactions with her peers both in the classroom and in less formal school spaces. She reported that she enjoyed talking

with her peers and teacher "in English" so that she could "learn more about them" (Positioning interview). In sum, Alejandra reflexively positioned herself as comfortable interacting with her peers, thereby, establishing her interactional rights. Alejandra's interactional ease in English can be partially attributed to her positioning of herself as an "English person" and her previous experience in an English-dominant school in the United States.

Interactional positioning by peers.

Alejandra was in the same English-dominant fourth grade classroom as Cesar, and in this classroom students were given multiple opportunities to interact, particularly during independent work time. However, during observations this interactional freedom often resulted in more social interactions than academic interactions for Alejandra. Alejandra regularly interacted with several different peers in her mainstream classroom, including: (1) Kenzie, her self-identified best friend, (2) group mates and/or nearby desk neighbors, and (3) a social group of 6 students in the class who played football at recess. While Alejandra did not play football with the group, she became a regular interlocutor with the group members during class time because of her regular conversations with 2 groups members, David and Fernando. The 3 were frequently observed playing, teasing, and talking in class and in less formal school spaces like the playground, lunchroom, and hallways. As an extension of her frequent interactions with David and Fernando, Alejandra also regularly interacted with other group members of the "football team" because they would often join in with teasing and conversing with Alejandra.

However, during academic interactions, Alejandra was excluded from conversations, often by the same peers she regularly interacted with socially. During one conversation about a mathematics assignment, Alejandra worked two peers who were members of the "football team", Fernando and Janey. According to the teacher, each triad was expected to collaboratively finish a worksheet about finding the area and perimeter of squares and rectangles. During the interaction, Fernando refused to work with Alejandra because he claimed that Alejandra was "mean," while Janey refused to work with Alejandra because she claimed Alejandra would "cheat." Alejandra repeatedly attempted to join the pair and even started telling the two to "stop being so dramatic"; however, Janey and Fernando started to build a physical barrier of folders to rebuff Alejandra's attempts to contribute to the conversation. In the end, Alejandra stopped talking to Janey and Fernando, and sat back in her chair looking around the classroom while the rest of the class completed the activity.

In summary, Alejandra exhibited interactional ease and positive reflexive positioning during interactions with her English fluent peers. This supported her frequent access to social conversations as well as several peer groups consisting of monolingual English speakers in her mainstream classrooms. However, peers' interactional positioning of Alejandra limited her access to academic conversations. In fact, some of the students who excluded or ignored Alejandra during academic interactions were observed initiating social conversations with Alejandra on other occasions. This suggested that Alejandra's peers positioned her as a welcome social interlocutor but a limited academic interlocutor.

Looking Across the Cases

In the following, we explore the larger quintain, or phenomena, under-study, i.e., the positioning of ELs in a low-incidence school. We start with patterns in EL

participants' reflexive positioning across the cases, and then turn to describing patterns in English fluent peers' interactional positioning of the EL participants.

English Learners' reflexive positioning.

All three participants reported feeling "scared" or "nervous" when they first entered Cordova Elementary. However, over time Anja, Cesar, and Alejandra reported variable interactional comfort levels with their primarily White, monolingual English speaking peers and teachers. Based on analyses of collected data, it appears that this variable reflexive positioning was partially shaped by the three ELs' varied linguistic, cultural, and schooling history, as well as the established language context which they entered when they enrolled in Cordova Elementary.

Out of the three case study participants, Anja attended Cordova Elementary for the longest amount of time, i.e., 4 years at the time of this study. However, her experience in Cordova's language context was different from Cesar and Alejandra as she because she was the first Russian speaker to enter Cordova Elementary, and, at the time of this study, the only Russian speaker in third, fourth, or fifth grade. Additionally, Anja had no previous formal schooling experiences in Russia, and reportedly came to the United States with no previous English exposure. Her lack of previous English exposure and lack of access to peers or teachers with knowledge of the Russian language and culture contributed to her current reflexive positioning as not being comfortable in her English-dominant school environment.

In contrast, Cesar and Alejandra appeared to acclimate to their new school and English-dominant context relatively quickly. At the time of this study, Cesar reported that now he "never gets nervous speaking in English." Cesar's transition into Cordova Elementary was eased by his previous experience learning "a little bit" of English in his school in Mexico, and his early partnering with a Spanish bilingual peer who taught him "how to speak more English." Alejandra entered Cordova Elementary most recently and was the only case study participant who lived at least part of her time in an English-dominant home, and had been born and attended school in the United States. Alejandra's home experiences and previous schooling experiences contributed to her reflexive positioning as an "English person" who was learning Spanish.

Davies and Harré (1999) argue that individuals are continuously "re-constituting" themselves and their identities based on their interactions with interlocutors in specific contexts. Within the unique receiving context of Cordova Elementary, the EL participants had limited access to first language interlocutors because of the relatively small number of linguistically diverse students and teachers. However, Alejandra and Cesar's previous exposure to English, along with access to Spanish speaking peers and teachers, bolstered their reflexive positioning and access to social conversations. In contrast, Anja had no previous exposure to English and was the only Russian speaker when she first entered Cordova. This contributed to her diminished reflexive positioning and limited interactional ease as well as her lack of access to social conversations. Ultimately, the receiving context of Cordova and previous language experiences shaped the EL participants' current reflexive positioning regarding their interactional initiative and ease with their English fluent peers.

English fluent peers' interactional positioning of English Learners.

While the three case study participants showed variable reflexive positioning, they also experienced variable peer positioning. In conversations with peers the EL

participants were afforded or constrained access and interactional rights by their peers' verbal and nonverbal actions, i.e., their positioning moves. Specifically, peers' interactional positioning of the ELs resulted in these students having more access to social conversations than academic conversations. Alejandra and Cesar were frequent initiators and contributors to social conversations in their mainstream classroom and in informal school spaces. While, Anja was not a loquacious contributor to social interactions with her peers, she was often observed participating in nonverbal ways or with short responses and interjections. Overall, the three participants took part in varying levels of social interactions.

In contrast, the three participants were all excluded from academic interactions by their peers' interactional positioning moves. During multiple teacher-assigned academic interactions, Cesar was observed being ignored or verbally and physically excluded from the conversational context with his teacher-assigned partners. Peers similarly positioned Alejandra during academic interactions until, as with Cesar, she physically and verbally withdrew from the interactions. While Anja was observed as being less participatory during social conversations with her peers, there were still notable peer positioning moves during academic interactions. For example, Anja was observed being physically and verbally commanded by her peers.   Across the cases, all three ELs were effectively allowed limited access to and interactional rights within academic interactions because of the interactional positioning moves by their peers, which in turn may impact "normative constraints" (Harré, et al., 2009) that could limit their access to academic interactions and opportunities to increase their academic knowledge.

Conclusions

The ELs in this study were a population of one or two ELs in the mainstream classroom, and we argue that their unique status shaped their access to interactions with their English fluent peers. Using a positioning theory framework (Davies & Harré, 1990), we found that the EL participants' reflexive and interactional positioning during conversations with their English fluent peers varied by context and content of interactions. Scholarly work regarding the experiences of identified ELs in the mainstream classroom has found that ELs are often reluctant to interact with their monolingual English speaking peers because of socio-emotional factors like increased anxiety (Pappamihiel, 2002) and inequitable pedagogical practices like grouping by linguistic ability (Iddings, 2005). Adding to these scholarly findings, we argue that an ELs' reflexive positioning and their interactional positioning by their peers has the potential to limit their interactions with English fluent students.   An individual's reflexive positioning can be shaped by whom they are speaking with, the interactional positioning moves of others, and larger storylines present in the linguistic milieu (Davies & Harré, 1999). For the ELs in this study, the larger language context of Cordova Elementary and their own language history contributed to their variable reflexive positioning. Specifically, access to other Spanish speakers and/or previous English exposure contributed to Alejandra and Cesar's positive reflexive positioning regarding their English proficiency and interactional ease with their English fluent peers. On the other hand, Anja's lack of previous exposure to English and lack of access to other Russian speakers contributed to Anja's less positive reflexive positioning regarding her English proficiency and interactional ease with her English fluent peers.

While some have argued that interactions between ELs and English fluent peers can be beneficial to ELs language development (Chesterfield et al., 1983; Greenwood et al., 2001; Saville-Troike, 1984; Strong, 1983, 1984), others have pointed out challenges that can arise during these interactions (Ferris & Hedgecock, 1998; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Krashen, 1983). Adding to these challenges, we found that the three ELs in this study were interactionally positioned by their peers as somehow less welcome academic interlocutors while being welcome social interlocutors. This interactional positioning resulted in the ELs being afforded fewer interactional rights during academic conversations, which may have resulted in less academic and linguistic development opportunities.

Implications

Before outlining the implications of this study, we would like to address potential limitations. Case studies are designed to focus on the individual experience rather than form generalizations for the larger population. Therefore, findings from this study must remain situated within the individual lived experiences of these three ELs in this particularistic low incidence school context. Specifically, the relatively small participant pool and unique context of Cordova Elementary in a middle class, suburban neighborhood contributed to the distinct schooling experiences of the ELs in this study. However, even though the goal of case study analysis is not generalizability, there are some considerations that can be highlighted for teacher research and practice.

This study shows that English fluent students may exclude ELs from academic interactions while actively engaging them in social conversations, a finding that is important for teachers to consider when grouping English learning students with English fluent students. Specifically, teachers should be prepared to pay particular attention to interactions between ELs and English fluent students so that they can intervene if the voices of ELs are silenced or inequitably represented in the larger conversation. While these findings add to our current understandings, more scholarly inquiry is needed in order to create more equitable academic and linguistic access for ELs during interactions with their English fluent peers. Ultimately, the positioning of ELs in mainstream classrooms has the potential to shape their ongoing interactional access as well as their academic and linguistic development.

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