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Fram-Kulik, Sheila

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Voices in a Preservice Teacher Discussion Group

Sheila Fram-Kulik

Abstract

This discourse analysis study focuses on the dominant voices in a preservice teacher discussion group in a language variation course included in a teacher education program. The voices in the discussion group have what Bakhtin (1981) considers heteroglossic characteristics and what Kristeva (1986) calls *intertextuality* and what Fairclough (1992) considers *interdiscursivity*. The analysis of the voices shows textualized voices, that include appropriated voices from mentors or previous teachers that replace the personal voices, at times. The dominant voice of the teacher comes into conflict with the other dominant voices during discussions. Thus, the relationship of these voices structures the discussion group sessions.

Key words: voice, voice appropriation, discourse analysis, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, positionings, preservice teachers.

Resumen

Este estudio se trata de un análisis de los discursos que surgen en un aula de docentes en formación en un curso sobre variación del lenguaje. El análisis toma como punto de partida los conceptos de *heteroglosia* (Bajtin, 1981); *intertextualidad* (Kristeva, 1986); e *interdiscursividad* (Fairclough, 1992). La característica intertextual de los discursos se atribuye a la manera en que los docentes en formación a veces apropian los discursos de previos maestros, y de como estos discursos a veces se ven en conflicto con el discurso dominante del maestro durante las discusiones en el aula. Esta característica interdiscursiva hace evidente la infiltración y la influencia ideológica tanto en los discursos de los docentes en formación como en los del maestro. Las conclusiones a que se llegan dan una explicación del por qué los docentes en formación y el maestro apropian los discursos de otros. Se concluye que estos apropian otros discursos para ganar más acceso al poder o para formar un vínculo solidario con los demás. Al reconocer las dinámicas que surge de voces dialógicas y de resistencia en el aula, se puede mejor entender como estos factores contextuales influyen en nuestro empeño de entablar una relación dialógica con los estudiantes.

Palabras claves: la voz, un análisis de los discursos, intertextualidad, interdiscursividad, heteroglosia, docentes en formación

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Voices in a Preservice Teacher Discussion Group

Introduction: Main Concepts

The actual hearing of voices in the classroom seems chaotic at times and in unison at other times. The initial experience of listening to the voices of students seems as if every voice is unique. But upon closer analysis these voices include the sound of dominant voices that rise above other voices either representing other voices or attempting to appropriate certain voices. But at the point of polyphony of voices, we are first taken aback by the amount of prominent voices. Upon a preliminary recognition of these prominent voices a researcher can understand the true meaning behind Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia.

Bakhtin (1981, 1986) defined the term *voice* to mean, on a larger scale, metaphorically, reverberations emanating through the person from structures or systems of power, knowledge and social practice and, on a smaller scale, to mean the recognition of particular texts (units with complete meanings) via such features as word and phrase choices and how these are layered with social, historical or political texts. Such researchers as Fairclough (1995), Scollon et al. (1998) and Wertsch (1995) agree with Bakhtin (1981) that all texts are fundamentally dialogic (or what Kristeva (1986) would say is intertextual) or heteroglossic. As Bakhtin (1981: 293) stated, "The word in language is half someone else's". At times, we take on other voices, I refer to this as *appropriation*. I use this term as defined by Bakhtin (1981) and his notion of voice(s) as a part(s) of other people's language that a speaker borrows and transforms to make it his/her own utterance. This is the point where a voice becomes textualized or has a characteristic of *intertextuality*. When we do appropriate certain voices they are elements of a specific discourse. I reference what Fairclough (1995) calls *interdiscursivity*. This term refers to the presence of one discourse intertwined with another (Lewis and Ketter, 2004: 117). Interdiscursivity occurs when one speaker or writer appropriates the discourse of another and reconstructs it as part of his/her learning process. Fairclough (1992) identifies this as a constitutive intertextuality, where the speaker reconstructs the discourse in order to take an ideological position discursively. I tie these terms together with the phrase, *dialogic discourse*, of which is based on the work of Bakhtin. This term refers to the ways in which speakers are always simultaneously addressing and answering past and future utterances across time and space in the present. To further clarify, I use the



linguistic term, *discourse*, to reference how a person or group of people are using language. Typically, those who use language or practice language use similarly are identified as practicing a specific discourse, of which is specific to a situation or event. To be more specific, the definition (as used by some sociologists) that I favor in this particular research study is ‘language in use’ as stated by Deborah Cameron (2001: 17).

Other Studies:

Recently, few studies have focused on the intertextuality of voices in courses for preservice teachers. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) focus on the characteristic of intertextuality in the voices of teachers and students and how they use intertextuality to define themselves and others, to form social groups and to identify and validate previous events as sources of knowledge. Though they concentrate on first grade students and on reading and writing, they do offer good examples of how intertextuality is constructed by speakers. Adelman (2001) does offer insight into the voices of preservice teachers by identifying the polyphony of different voices used by them. He further extends on this by making a connection to the various listening repertory of the students. Downs (2000), Gutierrez et al. (1995), and Lewis & Ketter (2004) focus on the discursive relationships in the classroom. These studies focus on the interactions between the teacher and the students during various classroom experiences. Candela (1998) focuses on the discursive resources used by the teacher in order to exercise power in the classroom and how these resources are available for the students who may appropriate them in order to defend their position to the teacher. Little research has been done on the discussion sessions in preservice teacher courses. Discussions are a language interaction that offer much insight into the thoughts of students and is a valuable resource for information on language use among individuals as well as groups. In addition, Green and Johnson (2003) show how group work such as discussion sessions “produce higher participation and deeper discussion, which should positively affect learning” (148). I will focus on the dominant voices in a preservice teacher discussion session, where the teacher and the preservice teachers position themselves and voice these positions in various ways.

Background of Study:

My focus in this study is to first identify the prevalent voices that are heard during discussion sessions. These personal and appropriated voices are being



sounded for a reason. Further focus is on what is occurring when these voices are sounded. My intent is to understand how powerful voices are being heard and why they are being heard.

My purpose for researching this course was to gain insight into the voices that were present in this particular classroom in order to further understand the power relationships between these voices. The voices I was hearing during the discussion sessions caught my attention immediately on the first day of observations. The first statement I heard was, "I'm confused could you tell me what to do?" The next statement I heard in the middle of a discussion was, "My mentor told me to do it that way." The focus of my research became evident. What are the dominant voices during the discussion group sessions in this particular classroom? I focused on the discussion sessions because these were the moments of interaction that offered the most insight into the language use by the teacher and the preservice teachers.

The participants in this study included twenty preservice teachers as students and one teacher. The teacher is a male in his late twenties, of middle class status, and from the Dominican Republic. The teacher has several years experience teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. The teacher is bilingual. Five percent of the preservice teachers are male and 95% are female, all of whom are of middle class status. Twenty percent of the group members are considered minorities, being either Asian-American or Latino-American, whereas, 80% of the group is Caucasian or white. A third of the female students are originally from the Southwest. A small percentage of the students are from the east coast. All of the preservice teachers have assisted other teachers (those teachers who mentored them during their teaching experiences in the field) at least once in the classroom already as a part of their requirements for their teaching degree program.

Data Generation and Collection:

In my study, I closely examined language in use in one particular classroom where the focus of the course is on language variations. During the summer of 2004, I researched an undergraduate, 300-level, course called "Language Variations in the Classroom" at a university in the Southwest. The required course is focused on language variation (dialect variation, stylistic variation, situational variation) in classrooms, people's attitudes toward such variation,



and classroom implications of language variation. I observed, took field notes, audiotaped the class meetings and collected surveys from the participants. The data that I generated were four, 90 minute tapes. I focused on one class experience that is about 30 minutes in length. I focused on this particular discussion because relationships had been established in the classroom at this point in the course and because the several voices were most prevalent at this point in time. This particular class experience was titled “article presentations.” Students were to choose, at the beginning of the semester, an article and, then, present the material to the class. The students were expected to facilitate or attempt to facilitate discussion after presenting the summary and important points of the article. The teacher, KS, was involved in this experience and was a pivotal participant. KS purposely modeled examples of how to approach an issue during discussions by asking critical questions in order to guide the students in their thinking. During the discussions, the teacher would further ask a student why he or she answered the way he/she did in order to guide them further towards a process of reflection.

I chose to implement a discourse analytic method in order to identify the various voices in this classroom setting (Gutierrez et al., 1995). I transcribed the tapes including as much detail as I could in the transcription: interruptions, word or phrase emphasis, and actions that went along with the speaking. I first analyzed the participants’ contributions in order to identify what voices they appropriated for themselves and those that seemed their own voices. I used this analysis to decide which voices were dominant during the discussion. I started with pronoun usage as markers of group affiliation. I continued with word choices as markers of a discourse being spoken. And I looked at the dialogic discourse; specifically, how each utterance was relative to the previous and following utterances. I then divided the data into categories: voice, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity. I then analyzed each excerpt again as it was a part of an entire dialogical action, which was the discussion session. This process led to my assertions.

Data Analysis:

My discourse analysis began with the identification of the voices that existed within one large group discussion session, which lasted about 30 minutes in length. This particular session was typical in comparison to other sessions and seemed to be a very good example of what the discussions were



like overall. [For highlighting purposes, words and phrases are in **bold** in the examples, so as to point out identifying markers that support an assertion.] Once I identified the various voices, I narrowed my focus to the dominant voices. I started with pronoun use.

Voices:

To illustrate, the use of pronouns in such a manner that identifies a person with others in a group or separates a person from others in a group is a way of recognizing positionings. In particular, an identity has a positioning and a voice which is a characteristic of it. Positionings can offer insight into particular personal voices and appropriated voices.

The teacher (KS) frequently used such pronouns as “we”, “us” and “our” to reference his inclusion of himself with the rest of the preservice teachers. In this example, KS includes himself as a member of this group of teachers when he is trying to make a point about teacher responsibility.

KS: //...I think it's important for **us** teachers to begin to appropriate those discourses so that **we** can have access to them...//

This is a common discursive resource used by KS in order to show a group affiliation with the preservice teachers. KS positions himself just as responsible as the preservice teachers to take advantage of access to more powerful discourses.

During this discussion, KS distinguishes himself from the preservice teachers in two ways: as a teacher who is teaching students and as a minority in this classroom. For example, KS identifies at times that he is in power:

KS: //...I just decided to give them to **you** early...I will give **you** the readings for this day [pointing to the syllabus] tomorrow...I will do it after class...//

KS also implicitly declares that he is a minority and that he is fully aware of his audience. KS acknowledges that the majority of the class and their color of white affords them certain privileges. KS uses the phrase “you know” only in one way throughout the entire discussion. He is referring to the white majority as read in this example.



KS: //...the way **you** talk that can vary um this is not to say though that white middle class children do not experience um difficulties at school with language because there is another issue here which is gender that we're going to look into that adds something else to—it adds to the equation another factor so we can not say that oh no no no white middle class children are perfectly fine (.) because they **you know** [?] the language at school is much more similar **you know** to their ways of talking at home...//

KS does not use “you know” in any other way, but to reference what affects him and positions him as a minority, which is that language in the classroom is similar to white, middle class language in the home. His experiences with this classroom English is in complete contrast with his experiences in his home as a child [per a question the researcher had asked him in an interview]. He spoke a dialect of Spanish in the home. It is supposed to be recognizable to the preservice teachers at this point in the discussion because they can easily draw a similarity between their home language and classroom language, which is what KS wants them to do [as stated by KS after class when I asked him some clarification questions].

Other voices in the classroom were heard, in particular the appropriated and personal voices spoken by Johanna and Cassy (all names are pseudonyms). First, Johanna's voice is identified and is understood as the representative voice of others in the classroom because of its similarities to the voices of the other preservice teachers. Throughout the discussion, almost all of the preservice teachers used the pronouns “they”, “their” and “them” to distinguish other groups than the one they, themselves, within they are affiliated. In the first example, Johanna most frequently spoke in this manner.

Johanna: //(mumbling) it was a part of **their** dialect...//

Johanna naturally associates differences in dialect as characteristics of dialects that she does not speak.

Lee: //(mumbling) what **their** home life is like...//

Similarly, Lee associates differences as effects of the home life experiences.

Amy: //--It's really hard to have **them** get involved [?]...//

Those students who did participate in the discussion, spoke a similar voice as Johanna did (Johanna was one of the presenters of an article on discourses in



the classroom and Missy was her partner). Focusing mainly on Johanna, notice how her voice is prominent. She is a white, middle class, female preservice teacher. In addition, a researcher can recognize evidence of the naturalization of whiteness through the dichotomy of the one/the other in the next example. This particular example was the one of the few times that Johanna spoke her own personal voice in this particular discussion. KS prompted her and then she spoke. One major marker of her own voice is the interjection of the utterance “um”. Johanna was always hesitant when speaking her own voice.

Johanna: //Yeah]...and you could still teach **um** you know [?] the information and the knowledge for the tests and stuff and still **allow them to speak their own culture...**//

In a second example, Johanna attempts to take on the voice of the researcher in the article by restating discourse from the article in the context that it is used, so as to present her own question, Bakhtin calls this *intertextuality*. In this example, Johanna uses her own voice to maintain a flow in her speech as she restates the discourse from the article during her presentation.

Johanna: //...it talks about how it is complexly situated, socially, culturally and historically **um** [she reads her handout verbatim]...**um my question is what are the factors that influence or affect a child's success with acquiring new discourses...**//

In a third example, Johanna appropriates a voice with power in order to substantiate her own voice, which has less power in the current context of the classroom. The reason this has occurred is because the discussion focus is on fully accepting language diversity in the classroom and this conflicts with Johanna's beliefs regarding the use of classroom English (or standard English). The teacher asks a prompting question that directs the students towards what is stated in the article, “Why should I pay any attention to this child's different ways of speaking?” Johanna responds to the teacher and in some respects the article. Even towards the end, “she” becomes “I”, which is evidence that Johanna has completely appropriated the voice of her mentor/teacher and has taken on that voice as her own voice. This is an example of what Fairclough would call *interdiscursivity*.

Johanna: // Well I know that when I was in my [?] class, my teacher was like, she would say that she needed to be **their guide** and **she spoke the right**



way you know by **allowing them to like talk freely** you know encouraging the different ways and different languages she thought she was like not doing her job and **she wasn't giving them like a structure** and [?] and she figured oh like they can do that on their own you know **I need to like show them the right way** and how **they should speak in class** [?]

It seems as if Johanna is establishing her position on this point of teaching a classroom English, of which is commonly called standard English. Johanna does not position herself similar to KS and his position on this point. Johanna's voice is consistently in conflict with KS's voice in many of the discussions. Johanna appropriates a powerful voice in order to take her position.

A voice that is very different than Johanna's voice is Cassy's voice. Cassy consistently positions herself in another way. Her voices have few similarities to Johanna's voices. Cassy does participate more than many of the other preservice teachers on a regular basis, but when she participates, her actions and her speech are in direct contrast to the other preservice teachers. Cassy frequently speaks her own voice. She consistently uses the pronoun "we" to implicate the other preservice teachers and to identify group responsibilities to the preservice teachers.

Cassy://--Well, I know when [Dana], my daughter is afraid sometimes and I think that that comes from being laughed at you know and it's like you know and it's really hard for [Dana] in the classroom but if I was you know a Spanish teacher I would take in account a student's fear of you know being laughed at you know **we** have a responsibility to the students (starts to mumble)...//

In the next example, Cassy declares that each preservice teacher can affect change.

Cassy://--and **we** can all do what we can to change their policies [?]...//

In this final example, Cassy substantiates her claim that the preservice teachers should attempt to do something.

Cassy://...you know **I don't think that we can do nothing about it** I think that is it's possible you know...//

Cassy is consistently maintaining the preservice teacher group identity and its responsibilities as a group as well as the responsibilities of teachers as individuals. This is similar to what KS does when he wants to convey teacher



responsibilities. Another way that Cassy maintains a group connection with the others is through her attempt at developing and maintaining dialogical action.

Dialogical Discourse:

Bakhtin's *intertextuality* is understood as "ways in which speakers are always in the process of addressing and answering previous and future utterances across time and space in the present." Cassy's voice has intertextuality or an unconscious awareness of the voices of others in her repeated attempts to maintain this connection between the teacher and herself and the preservice teachers and herself. Cassy is using a dialogical discourse.

Cassy consistently maintains a connection with the preservice teachers similarly to this example in the discussions by bringing in personal experiences. In this example, she uses "you know" to maintain a connection with everyone in the classroom because she is assuming that they all have experienced being laughed at in one way or another, as teacher or as student.

Lee:// (mumbling) what their home life is like...//

Johanna://Yeah...//

Cassy:// --Well, I know when [Dana], my daughter, is afraid sometimes and I think that that comes from being laughed at **you know** and it's like you know and it's really hard for [Dana] in the classroom...//

This is Cassy's first dialogical action and attempt to connect with two of the preservice teachers, Lee and Johanna, by explaining to them what she sees happening to her daughter in the classroom. Cassy does stress the words, "you know." Throughout the discussion she only says "you know" in this manner. She does not use the phrase as filler because of how she stresses the phrase when she says it. In this example, Cassy is implicitly bringing up the point to Johanna and Lee that they are teachers who probably teach students who have had this experience of being laughed at in class or they have been laughed at themselves.

In another example, Cassy attempts to reconnect with those who are participating in the discussion at one point. This is a consistent dialogical action for Cassy in the discussions.



Johanna: //Well I know that when I was in my [?] class, my teacher was like, she would say that she needed to be their guide and she spoke the right way you know by allowing them to like talk freely you know encouraging the different ways and different languages she thought she was like not doing her job and she wasn't giving them like a structure and [?] and she figured oh like they can do that on their own you know I need to like show them the right way and how they should speak in class [?]/

KS: //How would anyone respond to that teacher? How would you respond to that teacher? //

Johanna: //**What's the right way**--//

KS://What would you say to her?//

Cassy://**She's an oppressor!**//

KS://**Yeah but would you say you're an oppressor** and you're not supposed to do that and why are you yaa ya ya—you have [the rationale of—

Cassy://**What is the right way and** [why

Johanna://Yeah]...

Johanna has a history of repeatedly positioning herself different from KS during discussions, whereas Cassy always seems to attempt to maintain a connection with KS and the preservice teachers such as Johanna. In the above example, Cassy appropriates KS's voice (and the voice of Paolo Freire) and discourse from a previous discussion by saying "She's an oppressor!" She is attempting to connect with KS by appropriating his voice, but KS attempts to keep Cassy's response in context. Cassy, then, appropriates Johanna's voice in order to connect with her—to show that she agrees that this should be the proper response to KS's question, "What is the right way and why?"

Intertextuality is identified as a way to make a connection with those in the classroom and Cassy practices this naturally without realizing it. Cassy is constantly involving herself in the discussions and uses these sessions as an opportunity to reflect. She is comfortable speaking her own voice. Cassy is consistently using a dialogical discourse as a way to make connections in order to reflect and work through issues that are discussed or experienced. KS similarly attempts to make connections with the preservice teachers, but only to show them what they have in common with each other, which are teacher responsibilities to all students.



In regards to characteristics of interdiscursivity, Johanna appropriates other voices in order to gain power in the classroom, so as to substantiate her claims. Johanna is not comfortable sharing her own voice in these sessions. But she does know how to defend theories with which she agrees. She brings in the voices of experience. KS follows similarly in presenting a defense for the inclusion of language variations in the classroom. The article that is the framework for the discussion was chosen by KS as a reading requirement. KS references this and other articles on classroom research in order to substantiate the course's claim that a respect for language diversity is needed in the classroom.

Discussion:

I realized the presence of a consistent voice that textualized the students' voices. Johanna's language use and the appropriation of her previous mentor's voice was a repeated occurrence during the discussions in this course. Since all of the preservice teachers had classroom experience already assisting other teachers (or their mentors), much of their knowledge about the realities of the classroom experience was framed by their mentors' experiences and what they choose to practice, as well as the preservice teachers' own experiences as students. This voice of practice was in conflict with the KS's voice at times, which was textualized with the voices of language acquisition theorists, the voices of multiculturalist theories, and his experiences teaching ESL.

Another voice present in the discussions was identified by the repeated mentioning of "the right way". Johanna's interdiscursive voice and her repeated references to being told that certain practices by teachers are "the right way" was a consistent comment by her and most of the other preservice teachers during discussions. Such questions asked on various occasions which I observed were: "...what about agreeing on the right way..." or "...if her way is working isn't it the right way?" Variations on these statements included, "Tell us what to do" or "Give me examples of practices to follow". This prescriptive voice could have been an example that could have lead to a discussion on people's attitudes towards language variation, but this was never brought up as an issue nor mentioned in the class at all. Gutierrez et al.(1995) would call this type of discussion, if it had occurred, "third space". This is the place where the teacher's script (or repeated way of teaching) and the student's



counterscript (or repeated way of responding to the teacher) intersect thereby developing a possibility for an authentic interaction to occur (p. 465). At times, because of Cassy's use of a dialogical discourse in order to make connections, the discussions progressed as if they were heading towards this "third space", but what prevented this was Johanna appropriating voices that conflicted with KS's voice and Cassy's voice.

The voice of practice is a valuable voice to hear. This voice would be a point of transition into theory. This would be a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate the connection between theory and practice. In addition, a teacher could create the experience of praxis (the practice of reflection and, then, action) as discussed by Paolo Freire (1970: 51). These experiences that they witness or learn about from other teachers would be examples used for understanding other theories on language. If this is the case, this is a learning opportunity for the students and the teacher to further investigate the connection between theory and practice in the classroom in regards to language variation and to further attempt to reach that "third space".

I do not leave out the learning value of the prescriptive voice. The responsibility as a teacher (like KS) promoting acceptance of language variations includes a respect for various perspectives. In the context of teaching that language varieties or dialects, such as the Southern dialect, African American English or standard English, are more appropriate to practice in certain situations (whether formal or informal), such is the same for the respect of this prescriptive voice as a voice variety that should be taken as one's own in certain situations. By discussing this voice in the manner of appropriateness, the preservice teachers who willingly appropriate this voice would not be isolated nor be put on the defense. Indeed, in some contexts of classroom practices, certain ways of teaching are more effective than others, depending on the intentions of the teacher in solving an issue. Dualistically speaking, in this respect a "right way" is being used.

Because two of the required assignments for this course are discourse analytic in form, KS could use this method and these two assignments as ways to introduce these voices to the students. KS or any teacher teaching this course could teach the students how to analyze their language use so as to hear various voices. This would be the point of entrance into discussions on these dominant voices, albeit a lofty goal but worth attempting.



Several issues that may arise from the existence of these voices could have a disastrous effect on the acceptance of the course on a whole. One issue that could occur is the possibility of students resisting the discourses of the course and the teacher. If students are unable to practice open-mindedness or the acceptance of other perspectives, then they would not be willing to acknowledge the premise of this course, which is the acceptance of individuals as speaking differently and having different perspectives and the ability to accommodate for these differences in the classroom. On further reflection, though, it could be a large part of a teacher's job in teaching this particular course is to overcome resistance and show the value of it.

Another issue that may arise is the inability of students to reflect and to critically think. If the students are repeatedly told a "right way" or "exactly what to do", then they are not being taught to prepare themselves for individual experiences that will occur in their own classrooms. By teaching the students how to reflect and to practice reflective practice daily, teachers are teaching students the ability to adapt to unexpected situations and how to grow as individuals (Dewey, 1997). As one of the preservice teachers stated, "...everything is different you'll have twenty-five different classes and twenty-five different teachers teaching..." I agree with Schön (1987) that if this is the case and it is, then no one "right way" exists for every teacher and for every course. The implications of these voices existing in this context would be that the preservice teachers and the teacher of this course need to take in account that every factor involved, including the constant uniqueness of individual students and their voices, means that no one "right way" of teaching this course exists.

I have begun to recognize how certain types of curriculum can come into conflict with certain voices. Along with the combination of the practice of a specific pedagogy, this language variation course presents a unique experience for the teacher and the students. In this classroom, conflict and resistance take a front and center position. Because of this, conflict and resistance should be treated as, dualistically, positive tools or as resources that, if their function is taught as a part of the curriculum, can benefit all who are connected with the curriculum in the long run. In this context, resistance, as recognized by dominant voices, needs to be treated as a vital element of this type of curriculum and should be respected as a point where reflection and action need to occur.



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THE AUTHOR

Sheila M. Fram: I am a doctoral student in the Language and Literacy Program at Arizona State University. I, presently, teach a course on language variation in the Curriculum and Instruction Department. My lens on the world was developed from sociolinguistic theories, poststructuralist theories, French Feminist or sexual difference theory, and critical theory. My focus on Language includes specific interests in discourse studies, critical discourse analysis, gender and language, language variations, ideology and language, and the universe of discourses (sheila.fram-kulik@asu.edu).

