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The Language of Ideas and the Language of Display:
Reconceptualizing “Academic Language” in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms

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In considering the language demands of mainstream content-area instruction in English, those concerned with the education of language minority students face a dilemma. On one hand, we want to understand, and demonstrate to others, what makes mainstream classrooms so difficult for students still in the process of learning the dominant language of instruction. We want teachers, administrators, and policy makers to understand why students who appear to have made progress in learning English still have difficulty on English-medium classrooms tasks and assessments (Cummins, 1984, 2000; Hakuta, Goto Butler, & Witt, 2000), what the problems are with expecting students to do grade-level work in English without support after learning English for only a short time (Guerrero, 2004), and what standardized tests may or may not tell us about their progress (Bailey, 2007).

On the other hand, we must avoid focusing solely on what students *cannot* do with English, a stance that can unwittingly result in placements that increase marginalization and reduce opportunities for English learners to close the very linguistic “gaps” identified by such an approach in the first place (Gebhard, 1999; Harklau, 1994; Valdés, 2004). Questions such as, “What *do* our students know?” and “What *can* they do?” (Orellana and Gutierrez, 2006, p. 120) are particularly important as educators around the world grapple with supporting students still in the process of learning the language of instruction with the language and literacy demands associated with mainstream content area standards, such as the new standards currently being implemented in the United States (Bunch, 2013; Bunch, Kibler, & Pimental, 2012; Moschkovich, 2012; Lee, Quinn, Valdés, 2013; van Lier & Walqui, 2012).

In this article, I consider how we might frame discussions about the language of schooling in ways that highlight what language minority students are *able* to do with their developing linguistic resources as they engage in academic tasks. While acknowledging the importance of articulating what is difficult about school language for individual language minority students, I argue that these same students, when given the opportunity, can work collaboratively with each other and with their peers with greater English proficiency to use a variety of linguistic resources—including those not traditionally considered “academic language,” to engage productively in academic tasks. I introduce a distinction between *language of ideas* and *language of display* as a means of expanding conceptions of what counts as “academic” language, and I use one brief stretch of talk by 7th grade social studies students to exemplify this approach.

Beyond the “Academic” vs. “Conversational” Language Dichotomy

Although the nature of language used in academic settings has been described in various ways (Valdés, 2004), those involved with the education of language minority students have often focused on the characteristics and acquisition of “academic language” (Johns & Snow, 2006; Scarcella, 2003). Many approaches focus on how this *academic* language “stands in contrast to everyday informal speech that students use outside the classroom environment” (Bailey & Butler, 2003, p. 9). As I have discussed elsewhere, academic language has been defined in contrast to its putative “non-academic” counterpart, termed variably *everyday*, *ordinary*, *informal*, *conversational*, *contextualized*, *inexplicit*, *cognitively undemanding*, *interpersonal*, *basic*, *playground*, and even *street* language. The assumption is often that students who have developed sufficient levels of English to function in social settings may still not be able to thrive in academic settings in English because of the unique nature of the language required.

Among those involved in the education of language minority students at the primary and secondary levels, this distinction is often associated with Cummins’ conception of a linguistically “decontextualized” and “cognitively demanding” academic language proficiency (CALP) contrasted with putatively less demanding basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) relying on more linguistic and extra-linguistic cues (Cummins, 1984, 2000). The BICS/CALP model from its inception has been the focus of much debate. It has been helpful to uncover the limitations and misuse of language proficiency tests, articulate language demands that language minority students are likely to face in mainstream classrooms, and highlight the responsibility of educators to help students meet those demands. It has also been criticized for privileging certain

class-based varieties of language, confusing oral language and written literacy, conflating language proficiency and academic achievement, and ignoring the sociolinguistic context of language use (see Bartolomé, 1998; MacSwan & Rolstad, 2003; Rivera, 1984).

In defending his position, Cummins (2000) has drawn on linguists who contrast the features of language used in academic settings and the features of language used elsewhere. Others have highlighted the linguistic differences between oral language and language that is written or influenced by the norms of written language (e.g. Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). Schleppegrell (2004) reviews the positioning of the language of schooling as “literate language” that is putatively more *explicit, complex, and cognitively demanding* than language used elsewhere. She argues that such an approach “ignores the cultural and experiential roots of knowledge about language use at school, and devalues the explicitness, complexity, and cognitive demand of interactional spoken language” (p. 16). As Schleppegrell puts it, “to call any language *decontextualized* ignores the context all language realizes” (p. 16).

I argue that focusing predominantly on the distinction between “academic” and “other” forms and uses of language can unintentionally mask how students productively use a wide variety of linguistic resources to approach academic tasks. These resources include language that typifies “interpersonal communication,” as well as non-dominant regional and social dialects (Lippi-Green, 2012; Valdés, 1999), “errors” to be expected in the speech and writing of second language learners, and normal dysfluencies associated with spontaneous talk of even the most competent English speakers. In contrast, sociocultural approaches highlight the “*multiple* sorts of events, subject areas, genres of language, and discourse and participation structures represented in the

classroom” (Hawkins, 2004, p. 25, emphasis added) and the importance of interactive talk for learning and language development (Barnes, 1992; Block, 2003; Gibbons, 2003; Gutierrez, 1995; Walqui & van Lier, 2010; Wells, 1999).

From Individual Prerequisite to Collective Interaction

Focusing on how students *use* language to engage in academic tasks also acknowledges that not all academic work is undertaken by individual students working alone. Consistent with the second language acquisition field’s focus on “identifying both (stable) characteristics of language and characteristics of individual language learners” (Hawkins, 2004, p. 15), much attention has been paid to how the language proficiency necessary to be successful in school might be measured (Bailey, 2007; Bailey & Butler, 2003; CCSSO, 2012) and the length of time it takes individual students to acquire it (Hakuta et al., 2000). In a policy context where such measurement carries high stakes for English learners, it is indeed important to these questions. Concurrently, however, it is necessary to address how students use language *collectively* during classroom academic tasks, what Wald (1984) calls the more spontaneous “language performance of speakers in face-to-face communicative contexts” (p. 57).

Similarly, we must revisit the assumption that students’ acquisition of particular linguistic features of “academic” language is necessarily a *prerequisite* to participation in academic settings where such language is used. It is true that many English learners, despite their ability to use English effectively in some contexts, may still struggle in mainstream academic contexts without support. Contrary to political campaigns designed to curtail primary language instruction, there is no evidence that students can learn all the English they need to succeed in regular mainstream English classrooms in one or two

years (Guerrero, 2004). However, especially for students at the intermediate levels of English proficiency or higher, focusing exclusively on perceived deficiencies in students' *language* may mask their ability to engage productively in academic *content* (Bunch, Lotan, Valdés, & Cohen, 2005). Assuming that language minority students should be excluded from mainstream classrooms until the relevant linguistic features of schooling are acquired can therefore lead to the ultimate irony: in the name of “support,” we may be preventing students from participating in precisely the kinds of experiences that can facilitate access to the language that we want for them to acquire in the first place (Valdés, 2004; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

The Language of Academic Engagement

Several approaches are available for understanding the range of language practices, and challenges, involved in engaging productively in academic work. MacSwan & Rolstad (2003) have suggested focusing on the second language proficiency necessary for English learners to “understand instruction and perform grade-level school activities” (p. 330), rather than on their acquisition of particular varieties of English. Cummins himself (2000, pp. 273-280) has proposed a framework that emphasizes the importance of students and teachers focusing on *meaning* (“comprehensible input” and critical engagement with that input), *language* (formal features of language and critical inquiry into issues of power), and *use* (to engage in knowledge making and act on social realities).

One starting place for teachers and researchers is to articulate what aspects of the curriculum students are able to access in English, and how students use language to demonstrate what they have done and learned. Beginning by describing what students are

able to do with academic *content* ensures that educators and researchers do not lose sight of students' academic understandings in efforts to focus on the characteristics of their language. It also acknowledges that language is never used in a vacuum; that students in school are always talking, reading, and writing about *something*; and that, despite their limitations in producing “standard” or “academic” language, students may be able to comprehend and express content-area meaning, especially with appropriate support (Bunch et al., 2005; Téllez & Waxman, 2006; Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

The goal, of course, is not only to facilitate English learners' ability to engage with content-level material, but also to create the conditions under which they can further develop language for academic contexts. Because language represents action by means of words (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969), one way to understand what students do with language in academic settings is to articulate language *functions* used to engage in academic tasks. Villalva (2006) has described functional approaches as those that “focus on the unique uses of language, such as analyzing, explaining, and comparing, demanded by specific classroom tasks” (p. 93; see also Bailey, 2007; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Of course, disciplinary expectations vary for *how* students employ these functions, and efforts have been made to articulate the linguistic and discourse features associated with school-based subject areas, along with how English learners might be supported in engaging in them (Crandall, 1987; Moschkovich, 2013; Lee, Valdés, and Quinn, 2013). These efforts vary, from Hallidayian Systemic Functional Linguistics' focus on linguistic features associated with particular school subject areas (Halliday & Martin, 1993; Schleppegrell, 2004) to frameworks for understanding the productive and receptive

language functions associated with the communicative activities, “key practices,” and analytical tasks associated with content area standards (CCSSO, 2012).

In sum, focusing on the academic content expressed in English, language functions used to engage in academic tasks, and subject-specific uses of language all help to highlight what students are able to *do* with language instead of the ways in which their language does or doesn’t match a set of *a priori* expectations for “academic” language. A focus on what students can do with English for academic tasks keeps the eyes on the prize: how students use language to engage in key academic activities and ideas central to instruction. It also reduces the chance that learners who have developed enough English to participate productively in English-medium settings with support will be denied access to them while waiting for their language to be judged “academic” enough.

The Language of Ideas and the Language of Display

By asking “how do students use language to engage in academic tasks?,” I explore the ways in which students, in groups, employed a wide variety of linguistic resources, including those common to “non-academic,” informal social settings, in one particular classroom setting (see Bunch, 2006, 2009 for details of the study). In order to highlight (a) the language used when student groups initially discussed texts and responded to assigned questions and (b) the language ultimately crafted for sharing with an audience outside the group, I introduce the notion of “language of ideas” and “language of display”. *Language of ideas* consists of the use of any and all linguistic resources students bring to bear on the engagement in and completion of an academic task, no matter how far from “literate” language it is. *Language of display* refers to the

evolving oral and written texts students develop, either individually or as a group, to present to particular academic audiences.

Using English in One 7th Grade Social Studies Classroom

Fiona, Sylvia, Eric, Elena, and Laura were 7th grade students studying in a social studies classroom at Gerona Middle School in central California.¹ Students at Gerona were predominantly Latino and poor, and they had not typically fared well on standardized tests. In the group of five students focused on here, four were identified as Latino and one (Eric) as Filipino. Like the larger student population at the school, students in this group represented a range of language proficiency levels. Fiona was designated as “English Only” by the school. Sylvia, previously considered “Limited English Proficient” (LEP), had by the 7th grade been redesignated as “Fluent English Proficient” (FEP) and therefore deemed to no longer need English language support. Eric and Elena were labeled “Mainstreamed LEP,” still designated LEP but considered ready to participate in some mainstream classrooms. Laura was labeled “transitional LEP,” a designation that under normal circumstances resulted in students remaining in “sheltered” classes separated from their mainstream peers. None of the students in the classroom discussed here were beginning-level English learners, and they all spoke English well enough to carry out conversations with each other and with their teachers.

As a result of an instructional and research intervention, Laura and other transitional students were placed in a mainstream classroom designed to provide students access to (a) a more rigorous curriculum than the one traditionally offered in sheltered classrooms at the school and (b) to classmates with higher levels of English language proficiency (Bunch, 2006, 2009; Bunch, Abram, Lotan, & Valdés, 2001). The excerpts

¹ People and place names are pseudonyms.

below come from students' work on a group project during a larger Complex Instruction unit on the Reformation that included a number of different hands-on activities designed to address the central question, "How do individuals and institutions challenge the authority of institutions?" Complex Instruction is an approach in which academically and linguistically heterogeneous groups complete hands-on learning tasks that require multiple abilities to complete (Cohen & Lotan, 1997). One activity called for student groups to analyze a political cartoon from the time of the Reformation (Figure 1) and answer questions about the cartoon's meaning, design, and use in helping challenge the authority of institutions at the time. Each group was also responsible for creating its own political cartoon challenging a modern-day institution. During the group time, students also prepared to present their work to their classmates and teacher the following day. Below, groups discuss two of their assigned questions.²

Segment A: "What is the message of this cartoon?"

The talk below occurred after the group opened an envelope containing a Reformation-era political cartoon and the discussion questions. The excerpt takes place just after students recalled that they had earlier seen a version of the cartoon in their textbook. Eric had observed, "that's the guy that's selling indulge/indulgences," and Sylvia had found the cartoon in the book. Students then turned to the questions:

² Each line of text represents an attempt to capture "intonation units" in the audiotaped data (DuBois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, & Paolino, 1993, p. 47). Other transcribing conventions:

Sylvia speaker
 ? unknown speaker
 " " tone indicates reading written material
 ‘ ’ tone indicates suggestion for written language
 @ laughter
 ? at end of utterance = rising intonation
 xx unintelligible
 i::s elongated vowel
 (()) description of interaction not included in transcript, or transcriber comment
bold text highlighted for analytical purposes

A1 **Sylvia:** ok the first question is
A2 “what is the message of this cartoon
A3 what visual”
A4 what
A5 ok what is xx say
A6 ok what is the message of this cartoon
A7 what was the message
A8 and what would it be
A9 ? : umm
A10 **Fiona?:** they’re paying their taxes
A11 **Sylvia:** no its xxxx
A12 **Fiona:** @
A13 **Sylvia:** ‘the message’
A14 **Elena:** ay
A15 **Sylvia:** ‘of this cartoon’
A16 **Elena:** that paper’s for you know to write stuff on that
A17 we’re going to draw
A18 **Laura:** are we all gonna do the same questions?
A19 or are we gonna
A20 **Elena:** we should be drawing this
A21 **Sylvia:** well we should like all talk about it and all know it
A22 so like when he asks us all questions
A23 **Fiona:** we should
A24 **Sylvia:** we can all know it
A25 ok ‘the message of
A26 this cartoon’
A27 well I don’t know
A28 should we all write it?

A29 **SS:** yeah

A30 **Sylvia:** yeah

A31 so just so that everyone knows it

A32 you don't have to write like full sentence

A33 just write like the message of this cartoon

A34 i::s

A35 the Reformation?

A36 ((4 omitted turns))

A37 **Eric:** oh that guy's selling indulgences

A38 **Sylvia:** remember we talked about it

A39 yeah

A40 so

A41 the message of this cartoon

A42 is

A43 a man selling indulgences @?

A44 **Eric:** that's a monk

A45 **Sylvia:** oh

A46 yeah

A47 ((pause))

A48 is that it?

A49 is it?

A50 ((3 omitted turns))

A51 ((long pause))

A52 **Sylvia:** I just

A53 I put "the message of this cartoon is a man

A54 selling indulgences

A55 during the Reformation"

A56 **Elena:** ohhhh

A57 Sylvia: is that what it would be?

A58 **Laura:** yeah

A59 ? : yeah

A60 ((5 turns plus pause))

Segment B: “What visual symbols are used to show this message?”

Students next discussed the second question, and a similar conversation followed.

Sylvia read the question, after which students proposed and discussed answers and articulated a potential response:

B1 **Sylvia:** and the second part of the question

B2 this is also part of question one

B3 it says “what visual symbols are used to show this message”

B4 umm

B5 **Eric:** look that guy is holding a bunch of scrolls

B6 in a suitcase

B7 the monk

B8 **Sylvia:** the the the

B9 **Eric:** the guy is like begging him

B10 and look he’s holding a briefcase

B11 full of scrolls

B12 **Sylvia:** ok ‘the monk is

B13 the monk is holding

B14 rolls of paper

B15 as the

B16 person’

B17 **Elena:** wait read read it again

B18 the monk is

B19 **Sylvia:** wait wait

B20 I'm trying to think of what @ to put
B21 'the monk is'
B22 ask him
B23 he got it
B24 what do we write?
B25 **Eric:** 'the monk is holding a briefcase full of
B26 um
B27 indulgences to sell to the guy that's begging'

Students then continued to discuss their assigned questions, before turning to plans for creating their own contemporary cartoon.

Engaging in Academic Tasks

Did this group use “academic language”? As I will discuss shortly, much of the students’ language would fall on the “conversational” end of an “academic”/ “conversational” continuum, were such a distinction to be used. Yet, it is clear that the students were using language productively to engage in their academic task. Students discussed central players during the time of the Reformation, including church officials (“that’s a monk,” Line A44) and parishioners seeking forgiveness (“the guy that’s begging,” Line B27). They made reference to a contested social practices at the heart of the unit: the selling of indulgences. They analyzed visual and textual details of an historical document (“look that guy is holding a bunch of scrolls/ in a suitcase/ the monk,” Line B5-B7). And, throughout the excerpts, they attempted to interpret the historical meaning of a political cartoon. Although I am not evaluating the accuracy of students’ answers or the depth of their understandings, it is clear that the group was capable of using English to discuss the people and ideas central to the study of the Reformation.

From a language perspective, students' accomplishments were also significant. They read printed discussion questions aloud verbatim and repeated and paraphrased them orally. They proposed answers to the questions and reworded them in "answer form." They commented on observations of the assigned resources ("oh that guy's selling indulgences," Line A37); made connections with previous instruction ("remember we talked about it," Line A38); and discussed available material resources ("that paper's for you know to write stuff on that/we're going to draw," Line A16). They questioned the division of labor to complete the project ("are we all gonna do the same questions? Line A18) and argued for a particular strategy ("well we should like all talk about it and all know it/ so like when he asks us all questions," Line A21-A22). They read their written responses ("I put 'the message of this cartoon is a man/ selling indulgences/ during the Reformation," Line A53-A55); asked each other for repetition ("wait read read it again," Line B17); and elicited the group's approval ("is that what it would be?," Line A57).

Using the Language of Ideas and the Language of Display

As would be expected in any group setting in which students were examining and discussing visual documents, students used linguistic forms that did not always conform to the kind of "literate" or "decontextualized" language often associated with academic work. Instead of being an impediment to their academic work, however, these conversational resources served to exchange ideas crucial for the completion of their academic task.

For example, when responding to "what is the message of this cartoon?," students used exophoric references (Halliday & Hasan, 1976) to take advantage of the immediate, shared, visual context of the cartoon:

A10 Fiona?: **they're** paying their taxes

A37 Eric: oh **that guy's** selling indulgences

B5 Eric: look **that guy** is holding a bunch of scrolls

Pronouns are used far more frequently in speaking than in writing (Biber et al., 1999), and the use of pronouns without stated antecedents is not “decontextualized” in the way that written language often appears to be. However, these responses are appropriate in the context of an academic conversation surrounding a visual cue, and the contextualization in this case is to the assigned academic resource: the political cartoon. Students were engaged in collectively viewing a visual diagram, probably pointing to it, and sharing their initial reactions to what they see. In this case, students’ use of “contextualized” language contributed to, rather than detracted from, the academic work at hand.

Students also used discourse markers typical of spontaneous talk:

A16 Elena: that paper’s for **you know** to write stuff on that

A17 we’re going to draw

Both as signals of involvement with an audience (Chafe, 1982) and as a result of processing demands of spoken discourse (Macaulay, 1990), such discourse markers are common in daily conversation and contrast with the “detached” nature of written language (Chafe, 1982). They are therefore both necessary and useful when conversing with others, even during academic tasks.

Students also used the ubiquitous discourse marker “like”:

A21 Sylvia: well we should **like** all talk about it and all know it

A22 so **like** when he asks us all questions

In addition:

B9 Eric: the guy is **like** begging him

Such markers serve both social and functional purposes (Jucker & Ziv, 1998; Schiffrin, 1994; Underhill, 2003) that facilitate, rather than detract from, students’ academic work.

In short, as all scholars do, students engaged in *conversations* surrounding their *academic* work. Unsurprisingly, the language used for these conversations did not always conform to the norms of “literate language.” Because this language was used to advance students’ academic work, I call it the *language of ideas*.

While students usefully employed the “conversational” *language of ideas* in order to engage in their academic task, they also created different kinds of “texts” to present to their teacher and classmates, demonstrating an awareness that such texts might call for language different from that used to discuss the cartoon initially within the group. Instead of coming to a consensus regarding the content of an answer and moving on to the next question, students revised wording until they seemed to be satisfied with it. I call this language, designed for consumption by an outside audience, *language of display*.

One of the ways students showed used language of display was by attempting to articulate a “complete sentence” for each answer, even while discussing its content. Sylvia did this five times in the first segment alone, beginning immediately after Fiona’s suggestion that “they’re paying their taxes” (Line A10):

A13 **Sylvia:** ‘the message’

A14 **Elena:** ay

A15 **Sylvia:** ‘of this cartoon’

She framed the answer a second time after students discussed the fact that they should all be prepared to answer all of the questions (Lines 24 to 28), and then again to propose an answer and suggest how students’ should write it:

A30 **Sylvia:** yeah

A31 so just so that everyone knows it

A32 you don’t have to write like full sentence

A33 just write like **the message of this cartoon**

A34 **i::s**

A35 the Reformation?

Immediately after Eric proclaimed “oh that guy’s selling indulgences,” Sylvia incorporated the new content offered by Eric into her next framing:

A38 **Sylvia:** remember we talked about it

A39 yeah

A40 so

A41 **the message of this cartoon**

A42 is

A43 a man selling indulgences @?

Finally, she articulated what the group appeared to agree was an acceptable answer:

A52 **Sylvia:** I just

A53 I put “**the message of this cartoon is** a man

A54 selling indulgences

A55 during the Reformation”

Students, especially Sylvia, were clearly attending to language for display. Had the group’s sole interest been in using the questions to interpret the cartoon themselves, there would have been no need to re-frame their answers in this way.³ The trajectory was clearly toward more “literate” language as students prepared for the presentation (Table 1). Although the answers by the end of the excerpts are not completely devoid of features of spontaneous interpersonal talk (nor would they be expected to be, given the fact that students were still speaking to each other interactively in a group setting), the references

³ As Goffman (1981, p. 5) points out, in the normal course of spoken interaction, there is no such thing as an answer that stands alone from the question that prompted it. It is only in school that answers to questions are expected to appear as autonomous texts.

have been made more “decontextualized” (e.g. “that guy” has been revised to “a man” in the first case and “the monk” in the second).

However, this trajectory toward more “literate” language did not necessarily represent a trajectory from less to more *academic* development, but rather the awareness that different audiences and purposes suggest the use of different forms of language. In fact, much of the students’ intellectual work, in terms of interpreting the cartoon, was actually done prior to the “literate” resolution of their answers. It is possible that focusing on language for display could lead to deeper academic engagement as students attempt to clarify their perspectives to explain them to others (Gibbons, 2003). However, focusing prematurely on the final “answer” form prematurely also has the potential to stifle discussion, especially if students are preoccupied with constructing a minimally acceptable answer as quickly as possible, or if they are required to use “sentence frames” or other templates before they have had the chance to discuss their observations and interpretations. As Barnes (1992) has demonstrated, students’ shifting too quickly from what he calls “exploratory” talk in groups toward “final draft” talk designed to show teachers that they have the “right answer” can actually impede students’ learning.

Conclusion

I have argued that asking “how do students use language to engage in academic tasks?” makes it possible to consider (a) the accomplishments related to the academic tasks that students, both individually and in concert with others, use language to make, (b) the wide range of linguistic resources that students bring to bear on an academic task, including those that may be initially regarded as “conversational” or “informal,” and (c) students’ awareness and strategic use of different registers for different purposes and

audiences. In order to highlight how students' language varied between initially discussing possible answers to assigned questions and crafting answers to be shared with an audience outside the group, I highlighted two aspects of language used for academic purposes: *language of ideas* and *language of display*.

To be clear, I am not proposing new terms for the existing “conversational” vs. “academic” distinction. On the contrary, using interactive language such as in the excerpts presented here (*language of ideas*) constitutes a central if not essential part of academic discussions. Eric's use of the non-“literate language” (“oh that guy's selling indulgences,” “look that guy is holding a bunch of scrolls,” and “the guy is like begging him”) represented key moments in the group's interpretations. Meanwhile, the *language of display* may or may not advance the academic content of a conversation. Although Sylvia's multiple repetitions of the *frame* for the group's answer (“the message of the cartoon is . . .”) made important contributions to the phrasing of the groups' answer, other students contributed more to the substance of the response. It is hard to argue that Sylvia's “literate” language, achieved by rearranging the words in the question so that they occur in an answer format, represents “academic” language by itself.

I contend, therefore, that the term “academic language” should be reconceptualized to include both the linguistic resources students use to discuss ideas, no matter how far that language is from “literate,” and the language students construct to present those ideas to various academic audiences. The language of display will often involve making the language of ideas more “literate,” but, because there is no single “academic” audience, there is no single language of display. Because students are often confronted with *multiple* audiences in academic settings, sometimes simultaneously

(Bunch, 2009; Bunch & Willett, 2013; Valdés and Gioffrion-Vinci, 1998), they will actually use a variety of *languages of display*, in the plural.

The distinction between the language of ideas and the language of display is not a perfect one. *All* talk involves both expressing ideas and using language to “displaying” thoughts to someone else (Goffman, 1959, 1981). Furthermore, I do not mean to imply that discussing or displaying ideas are uniquely academic endeavors; people do so in “everyday” settings all the time. The distinction does serve, however, to highlight how students use language differently for different purposes and audiences in classroom settings, all while engaging productively in academic tasks.

To revisit the dilemma that I began with, ignoring the challenges of English for language minority students in school settings can lead to unrealistic expectations regarding what students may be able to do, premature exit from support services, and misdiagnosis of students as having learning disabilities (Cummins, 1984, 2000). However, constructions of academic language as “literate” registers that individual students must master before gaining access to content instruction in English is problematic as well. Ironically, while educators wait for evidence that students have acquired what Bartolomé (1998) calls the “almost magical properties” attributed to decontextualized language, students may be excluded from access to opportunities in which they could hear, read, and use this language themselves (Valdés, 2001, 2004).

Different conceptions of academic language also suggest different foci for the instruction of English learners, and for how teachers can best be prepared to enact it (Bunch, 2013). Agreement exists that English learners need support to acquire academic language (Bartolomé, 1998; Scarcella, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2004; Valdés et al., 2005;

Walqui & van Lier, 2010), yet perspectives vary widely on the nature of that support (Valdés, 2004). Importantly, conceiving of academic language as encompassing both *language of ideas* and *language of display* does not preclude an explicit focus on language. Students will undoubtedly need models, guidance, and practice in order to expand the range of academic audiences, real and imagined, that they can appropriately address. But the message to students need not be that only particular varieties of languages are appropriate for doing substantive work in school, but rather that different academic audiences presume different kinds of language, and that students will be well-served by being able to address many different audiences. In this view, students should not only be *allowed*, but also *encouraged*, to use as many different linguistic and extra-linguistic resources as possible in order to engage with academic ideas, just as they should also be expected to expand those resources to include the more traditional institutionally- and societally-valued forms of presentation that may serve them well in the future.

Expanding definitions of academic language in the ways I have discussed here is only a small step toward understanding how English learners use, and develop, language in academic settings. There is much about language use in academic settings I have not addressed, including the ways that students' prior language and literacy practices outside of school interact with school-based expectations, and the personal, political, and ideological reasons students might decide they *want* to use language considered more or less "academic" in the first place (Villalva, 2006). As Freedman and Ball (2004) point out, students "make conscious and unconscious decisions about how much to identify with and acquire school language and school ways; they come to school with ways of

talking that mark them as members of a particular socioeconomic class, and they decide whether to move away from those ways; they decide what to read and write and whether they care most about pleasing the teacher or their peers or both or neither” (p. 5). It is only by challenging some of the assumptions behind current conceptions of “academic language” that we can begin to understand such decisions—and support students in building the linguistic resources needed to enact them.

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CHALLENGING THE AUTHORITY OF INSTITUTIONS

Activity 1-2: Political Cartoons--Art as a Weapon Resource Card



Caricature of Tetzel's sale of indulgences.

The German verse recounts the famous verse attributed to Tetzel:

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,
the soul into heaven springs.

(Lutherhalle, Wittenberg)

Figure 1: Indulgences Cartoon

Table 1. From the Language of Ideas to the Language of Display

Question on activity card	Group members' initial response(s) <i>(Language of Ideas)</i>	Proposed answer at end of excerpt <i>(Language of Display)</i>
What is the message of the cartoon?	oh that guy's selling indulgences (Line A37)	the message of this cartoon is a man/ selling indulgences/ during the Reformation (Lines A53-A55)
What visual symbols are used to show this message?	look that guy is holding a bunch of scrolls/ in a suitcase/ the monk (Line B5-B7)	the monk is holding a briefcase full of/ um/ indulgences to sell to the guy that's begging (Line B25-B27)
	the guy is like begging him (Line B9)	