

~~struction that are theirs by right and that are necessitated by the doors that have and continue to be closed to them. The advantages of advantaged children lie primarily in the experiences described in the first article of the bill of rights just presented, though ironically, these sorts of experiences are often provided by their families in out-of-school sites. The other forms of instruction can begin to help disadvantaged children "catch up" and, given the metaknowledge and political awareness implied by articles 3 and 4, move beyond those who have attempted to keep the game to themselves. Lilia Bartolomé's book is a courageous attempt to change how we think about minority and poor children and schools. It is a courageous attempt, as well, to begin to imagine a socially just society, a world in which no one's lifeworld is denigrated and in which all the worlds we humans create beyond the lifeworld are open to all.~~

Bartolome, L (1998) The Misteaching of Academic Discourses: The Politics of Language.
Toronto: Harper-Collins.

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Understanding Academic Discourses

The education of low-status linguistic-minority students in the United States can be generally characterized as a form of miseducation that continues to produce an unacceptably high rate of failure.¹ The miseducation of linguistic-minority students is particularly noticeable among Latinos in general and Mexican Americans in particular.² Although the majority of all students begin their schooling with more or less the same hopes, aspirations, and dreams, a high percentage of linguistic-minority students who enter high school never graduate, compared to 17 percent of Anglo students. Approximately 45 percent of Mexican American students drop out of school, and in some communities, the dropout rate is even higher. Because of the schools' failure to educate the largest Latino subgroup—Mexican Americans—and because of this subgroup's *historical, pervasive, and disproportionate* academic underachievement, it is particularly urgent to better understand the multiple variables that influence the poor academic performance of these students.³ In addition to the intolerably high rate of academic failure, the projected increases for the Mexican American population dramatically illustrate the need for immediate academic intervention for these students as early as elementary school.⁴ Given the complexity of this problem, the high dropout rate and the academic failure of Mexican Americans have directly and indirectly generated numerous research studies examining the underachievement phenomenon from a variety of perspectives.

From a linguistic perspective, which is the focus of this book, the academic failure of Mexican American students has historically been attributed to their lack of English-language proficiency.⁵ However, recent research shows that proficiency in English, in and of itself is not sufficient for academic success. Although common perception suggests that the English proficiency of most Mexican American students is limited, a significant number of these students are bilingual in English and Spanish.⁶ Nevertheless, many English-proficient bilingual Mexican American stu-

dents continue to experience difficulties and failure in school. In fact, studies suggest that U.S.-born English-dominant Mexican-American students may actually experience more academic failure than their foreign-born, Spanish-dominant peers who have recently arrived in the United States; the latter may not have mastered English, but they are literate in their first language and have learned to communicate their knowledge via the academic discourses of their native language.⁷

The concept of "academic discourses" refers to more than just the student's ability to produce standard English by using the correct phonology (sound system), lexicon (vocabulary), and syntax (sentence structure). In addition to these three language dimensions, less easily measured language components such as cultural knowledge about rhetorical structures (the ability to create texts whose logic and structure reflect academic and mainstream ways of organizing texts) are equally important. For example, one valued academic discourse strategy involves the ability to produce texts that reflect a unidimensional and linear line of argument.

James Gee, Sarah Michaels, and other researchers have shown that working-class African American students often produce utterances in English that are difficult for their middle-class white teachers to understand.⁸ The communication difference often lies in the manner in which the students organize their texts and utilize contextual cues. For example, Sarah Michaels reported that middle-class white teachers often evaluated the narratives their African American students offered during sharing time as unwieldy, illogical, and confusing;⁹ this was because the children (1) produced oral text structures that did not follow a linear line of thought, (2) assumed the audience shared their background knowledge, and (3) utilized culturally specific intonation cues to signal emphasis.¹⁰ (A more detailed discussion of this body of literature is presented in Chapter 2.)

In the case of Mexican American students, the research suggests that older, recently arrived students who received their previous education in Mexican schools often come to U.S. classrooms already possessing knowledge about academic rhetorical structures and communication practices that are valued in school contexts and necessary for success, particularly if they come from middle-class backgrounds.¹¹ These students may be temporarily handicapped because of their limited proficiency in English; however, once they acquire a threshold level of proficiency in English, they eventually are able to transfer their Spanish academic discourse skills to English, thus guaranteeing some degree of success in the classroom.

Ironically, Mexican American students born and bred in the United States often are not similarly skilled. This is because, unlike their Mexican

peers, they usually have not had the opportunity to develop academic discourse skills in their primary language in a school context that supports their full linguistic development. The sad irony is that schools often require from these linguistic-minority students precisely those academic discourse skills and knowledge bases that they often do not teach. This is what Donaldo Macedo has called a "pedagogy of entrapment," in that teachers require of students what they do not explicitly teach them.¹² In other words, even well-intentioned teachers often fail to overtly teach the academic discourses necessary for school success.¹³

Even in bilingual education classrooms designed to help students with limited English proficiency make the transition into English-only classrooms, teachers often make false assumptions concerning the level of the linguistic-minority students' ability to use English academic discourses; moreover, they seldom teach these discourses explicitly to these students. Teachers often fail to understand that the academic discourses prerequisites are not inherently part of these students' working-class, native-language competency. For example, most of the Mexican American students I have worked with come from a working-class reality and speak a variety of Spanish different from the Spanish academic discourse generally taught in bilingual programs. Thus, they are often confronted with two major linguistic problems: a lack of proficiency in the academic discourse in their second language, English, and a similar lack in their native language, Spanish. Hence, to assume that these students will automatically transfer a presumed academic metalinguistic awareness in the first language to the second represents a form of entrapment. That is, teachers require these students to have linguistic competency in the academic discourse that they were never taught in either language. One unfortunate result is that many linguistic-minority students in either English-only or bilingual settings are not being explicitly prepared to comprehend and produce more formal academic speech and writing in any language.

The Myth of "De-Contextualized" Language

The very real pedagogical entrapment experienced by linguistic-minority and other working-class students contradicts much of the common-sense presumption that in school settings, teachers actually teach students more "academic" ways of communicating and students simply fail to acquire these more advanced communication skills. It is commonly accepted that an academic discourse that relies on linguistic cues such as precise vocabulary and unilaterally structured syntactic and rhetorical structures is more communicatively efficient in an academic setting. Unfortunately, the reality is that academic discourse conventions are

seldom explicitly taught to working-class, linguistic-minority students.¹⁴ Furthermore, there is also a tendency to glorify and romanticize a particular type of academic language discourse that is inaccurately referred to in the literature as "de-contextualized" language. I say "inaccurately" because language production for meaningful communication cannot be achieved outside the cultural context that gives the produced language meaning in the first place. In other words, all language is context bound in one manner or another.

A variety of terms have been used to identify so-called de-contextualized language. It has been referred to by researchers as *literate or autonomous language*,¹⁵ *school language*,¹⁶ *disembedded language*,¹⁷ *less contextualized language*,¹⁸ and *situation-independent language*.¹⁹ These terms all attempt to capture the numerous language features related to a text's overt levels of precision, explicitness, and clarity. However, the use of these apparently innocuous and "objective" terms hides the reality that dominant ideology often devalues language varieties that do not conform to the prescribed rules of the standard academic discourse.

For instance, it is assumed that speakers of the standard academic discourse generate meaning outside of context, conveying explicit and precise messages that would be universally understood without relying on the specificity of context to access meaning. The assumption here is that the working-class dialect is context bound, whereas the standard academic discourse transcends social and cultural locations and is therefore more universal, less localized, and more autonomous. The very use of the term *dialect* to refer to the working-class language variety signals the devaluation of this variety and its speakers. By using the standard academic discourse as a yardstick against which all other varieties are measured, one begins to view nonstandard discourses negatively, for they "lack" the features attributed to the standard discourse (which is, coincidentally also, the dominant variety). This valuation process hides the asymmetrical power relationship between the dominant standard discourse and all other, nonstandard varieties. For example, rarely do we refer to the standard discourse as a dialect, even though, linguistically speaking, it is just that. The term of preference for the dominant standard discourse is usually language. Thus, middle- and upper-class students, particularly whites, speak a language whereas lower-class racial and ethnic groups speak a dialect, which, among other features, is characterized by its lack of autonomy from its social and cultural contexts.

Researchers who, in the name of science, create (or sustain) a false dichotomy between *de-contextualized* and *contextualized* discourse fail to realize that their coinage of these terms is false in that no discourse exists outside context; they also fail to realize that they play a key role in reproducing the dominant ideology, which is often hidden by the lan-

guage they use to describe different linguistic varieties. The so-called de-contextualized discourse implies linguistic superiority while making its context invisible. How does one explain the fact that middle- and upper-class white students can answer questions on scholastic achievement tests (SATs) without having to actually read the accompanying passages? James Gee, for example, gave his students in an honors program (mostly populated by middle- and upper-class whites) at the University of Southern California the following SAT questions.²⁰

- The main idea of the passage is that
 - A) a constricted view of [this novel] is natural and acceptable
 - B) a novel should not depict a vanished society
 - C) a good novel is an intellectual rather than an emotional experience
 - D) many readers have seen only the comedy [in this novel]
 - E) [this novel] should be read with sensitivity and an open mind
- The author's attitude toward someone who enjoys [this novel] and then remarks "but of course it has no relevance today" (lines 21-22) can best be described as one of
 - A) amusement
 - B) astonishment
 - C) disapproval
 - D) resignation
 - E) ambivalence
- The author [of this passage] implies that a work of art is properly judged on the basis of its
 - A) universality of human experience truthfully recorded
 - B) popularity and critical acclaim in its own age
 - C) openness to varied interpretations, including seemingly contradictory ones
 - D) avoidance of political and social issues of minor importance
 - E) continued popularity through different eras and with different societies

Nearly 100 students who answered these questions answered them correctly 80 percent of the time without reading the accompanying passages. In fact, Gee noted, "virtually no student has missed the answer to question 3 (which is A)."²¹ However, when he gave the same questions to his "regular" undergraduate students (among whom there was more diversity along class, race, and ethnicity lines), "a great many more students answered them incorrectly."

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What guided the students in the honors program to answer the questions correctly without reading the passages? Gee explained:

Avant-garde literary critics certainly do not believe that a work of art is properly judged on the basis of its universality of human experience truthfully recorded. In fact, they believe something must closer to answer C; A work of art is properly judged on the basis of its openness to varied interpretations, including seemingly contradictory ones. And my honors students do not, in fact, believe that a work of art is properly judged on the basis of its universality of human experience truthfully recorded, either. They are prone to believe something much closer to answer E: A work of art is properly judged on the basis of continued popularity through different eras and with different societies.

Why do my honors students answer A to question 3? They do so because they immediately recognize, in this question and the others, a certain set of values. They recognize a value like "truth and beauty transcend cultures," so they know that the answer to question 3 is A. They recognize a value like "truth and beauty transcend time," so they know that the answer to question 2 is C. And they recognize a value like "truth and beauty are open (and only open) to people who are appropriately sensitive and open minded" (that is, people who are not "ideological"), thus they know that the answer to question 1 is E.²²

As this SAT test experiment exemplified, students socialized in a particular set of values that correspond to those values held by the dominant institutions (such as schools and testing centers) had no difficulty answering the test questions correctly even when they did not read the questions' accompanying passages. They did so because they were guided by a set of values required through their class and culture socialization rather than by any innate intelligence predisposition.

✓ As Gee also correctly argued, these students even betrayed their own beliefs so as to adhere to what they believed was a dominant consensus—a set of values shared by the dominant sector of the society. I would point out that the set of values that guided these students to the correct answers without reading the questions represented a contextual point of reference for meaning-making similar to the visible, context-bound signposts used by working-class racial and ethnic students in their own meaning-making. The difference is that in the so-called de-contextualized discourse, the point of reference is often made invisible in keeping with the inner workings of ideology. What is at work in the nomenclature of "de-contextualized discourse" is how students "respond appropriately to a specific hegemonic or displaced consensus centered on the values of dominant Discourses, a consensus achieved among persons (in the dominant groups or not) whose paths through life have [for a time and place] fallen together with the members of these dominant Discourses."²³

Hence, the teaching and acquisition of the dominant academic discourse requires much more than linguistic knowledge; it requires knowledge about "ways of being in the world, ways of acting, thinking, interacting, valuing, believing, speaking, and sometimes writing and reading, connected to particular identities and social roles."²⁴ If a teacher fails to acknowledge that certain groups of students who come from subordinated cultural and racial groups do not have access to and membership in the dominant discourse, he or she makes the power of the dominant discourse invisible and also reproduces the distinction (often invisible) that is inherent in the dominant discourse and that serves as a measure in society as a whole. Thus, teaching and the acquisition of the dominant discourse would inevitably involve democratizing social structures so that the dominant academic discourse and the social, economic, and political structures it sustains become more accessible to subordinated students. Despite the ideological nature of this type of discourse, the operationalization of so-called de-contextualized language in the literature has tended to focus on solely linguistic features that render written and oral text overtly explicit, such as using precise vocabulary and syntax.

Operationalizing "De-Contextualized" Language

Much of the current educational research identifies numerous linguistic features, all related to a text's overt levels of explicitness and implicitness, in its operationalization of "de-contextualized" language. Researchers' foci range from the use of lexical and prosodic cues to the complexity of sentence structure and the use of pronouns, as well as the texts' overall cohesiveness.

These researchers recognize that, in reality, so-called de-contextualized language is not truly *de*-contextualized (that is, devoid of all context) but rather is contextualized using chiefly linguistic cues and strategies restricted to the text to render a message explicit, instead of relying on extralinguistic cues or cues located outside the sentence (such as use of body language, varying intonation, and assumptions of shared knowledge with interlocutors). However, the researchers stop short of recognizing that these linguistic cues and strategies rely on values that become the contextual point of reference. (See Chapter 2 for a more fully developed review of the body of literature produced by these researchers.)

Nonetheless, linguists such as James Gee are quick to point out that all language is contextualized, and they remind us of the culture-specific nature of using and valuing language that is linguistically contextualized. In fact, Gee has specifically linked children's ability to speak in

"school-like" ways with their socialization in "school-like" home cultures:

Certain cultures, as well as unschooled people in our culture, simply do not have, and thus do not use, the conventions prevalent in our schools that in certain contrived situations (like "show and tell time") one pretends that people do not know or see what they obviously do know and see. . . . Such assumptions—that one should ignore what the hearer knows and explicitly say it anyway—are . . . the hallmark of many middle-class home-based practices with children (e.g., having the child repeat back an often read book or rehearse at the dinner table daily events that one already knows about). In other social groups . . . such explicitness may be seen as rude because it is distancing, blunt or condescending to the hearer's intelligence.²⁵

As Gee suggested, certain cultural and social groups place great value on producing texts that are overtly explicit and do not require interlocutor negotiation. That is, more middle-class and schooled ways of contextualizing text require distance between interlocutors so that the only visible cues for making meaning are linguistic ones.

I use the more specific descriptor *linguistically contextualized*, rather than the more conventional *de-contextualized language*, because, as discussed, the latter term erroneously connotes that language can, indeed, be *de-contextualized*, that is, free of all context. The use of this popular term obfuscates the fact that *de-contextualized language* actually refers to language that utilizes the mainstream or dominant culture's preferred ways of contextualizing. I believe that the term *linguistically contextualized* constitutes a more accurate and objective descriptor of the type of language strategies we value in schools; it also does not perpetuate the erroneous and almost mystical air surrounding the term *de-contextualized language*.

For example, the use of text-organizing strategies such as the "topic-centered" organization of narratives that middle-class white children use (presenting a main point or theme and then elaborating about only that point or theme) and the use of specific linguistic cues (such as introductory sentences that inform the listener of the speaker's main point as well as his or her plans for organizing and presenting the text) are treated in the literature not as culturally specific ways of contextualizing oral and written messages but as text that is *de-contextualized*.²⁶ Described as *de-contextualized* text, it is thus believed to be capable of transmitting meaning on its own, irrespective of the context in which the communicative effort takes place.

Despite the *linguistic* reality that so-called *de-contextualized* language really is not free of all contextual information and cues, the *social* reality is that not all contextualizing conventions or strategies are per-

ceived as equally valuable by the dominant culture. The use of linguistic cueing is perceived as more desirable and cognitively superior than relying on subordinate cultural cues (body language, the use of prosodic cues such as changing intonation, and so forth). Here, we begin to see how the dominant valuation system operates through distinction so as to asymmetrically distribute cultural goods. In fact, as argued earlier, even the so-called *de-contextualized* discourse relies on extralinguistic structures such as value systems to generate meaning. To a great extent, especially in classroom situations in which students manage to communicate their intent, these preferences for form over content reflect social and cultural preferences rather than purely linguistic value.

~~I believe that as educators committed to improving the academic achievement of linguistic-minority students, we need to investigate how and why the language and literacy practices and the contextualizing strategies utilized by the schooled and socially powerful have come to be touted as inherently superior and desirable in comparison to those practiced by lower-status cultural groups. It is important to understand that the practice of contextualizing language by relying chiefly on linguistic cues reflects Western European essayist or essay-text tradition.²⁷ Historically, oral language that resembles this type of written text organization has been heralded as more "logical" and desirable than less formal ways of structuring linguistic messages. Instead of recognizing the appropriateness of overtly explicit language (as well as its inappropriateness) in certain situations, the tendency has been to glorify this type of text organization. In the process, ideological claims are made about the essay-text's superior value, whether in speech or in writing, and these, in turn, become part of "an armory of concepts, conventions and practices" that privilege one social formation as if it were natural, universal, or, at least, the end point of a normal developmental progression of cognitive skills.²⁸~~

Thus, we strip so-called *de-contextualized* language of the almost magical properties attributed to it when we understand that, in reality, it refers to a speaker's and writer's ability to rely on dominant cultural knowledge and linguistic cues to render language *overtly* explicit and precise. As I have noted, researchers employ a variety of terms to describe oral and written language that relies primarily on linguistic cues for conveying meaning because shared meaning between interlocutors cannot be assumed. Consequently, linguistic messages must be elaborated on in an overtly precise and explicit manner and in an almost metacognitive fashion so that the risk of misinterpretation is minimized.

It is useful to dissect the concept of linguistically contextualized language (or "*de-contextualized* language," as it is more commonly referred to in the literature) to understand that its high value in part reflects the

dominant culture's preference for structuring and contextualizing language in ways that minimize the interlocutors' joint creation and negotiation of meaning. In academic settings, high value is placed on producing text that is linguistically contextualized, thus reducing the importance of and need for human interaction and negotiation of meaning, especially when the interlocutors come from different class and ethnic groups.

Linguistically contextualized language therefore becomes a kind of lingua franca in academic domains. Certainly, the ability to contextualize language by relying chiefly on textual features, especially in academic domains where individuals are expected to communicate with distant and unknown audiences, is a desired one. A set of agreed-upon contextualizing conventions becomes necessary for successful communication to take place. Ana María Rodino accurately described the types of skills and conceptions of language that students must possess in order to produce this academic lingua franca:

Being removed from the face-to-face setting, and assuming no prior knowledge on the part of unsupportive interlocutors, [linguistically] contextualized language requires anticipating recipient's needs/expectation; filling in background information; assessing message effectiveness on-line; self-monitoring and self-repair; careful planning to achieve a coherent whole; using precise lexical reference; controlling the complex syntax necessary to make explicit all relationships between ideas, and to sustain lexicalized cohesion across the whole text.²⁹

It is important to recognize the value of this lingua franca in formal academic settings. However, I argue that instead of imbuing linguistically contextualized language with almost magical properties and denigrating students from cultural and social groups that generally do not rely on these types of contextualizing cues, it is important for educators of linguistic-minority students to clearly comprehend the sociopolitical dimensions of language and literacy teaching. By doing so, these educators can resist viewing the dominant groups' uses of language as inherently superior and desirable, and they can begin to identify ways for helping linguistic-minority students in the critical appropriation of academic discourses.

Language Devaluation and Resistance

In addition to the tendency to render the contextualizing strategies of the mainstream "invisible" (hence the term de-contextualized), there is also a tendency to make value judgments that adversely affect what is labeled *contextualized language* or language that is contextualized in

paralinguistic ways and generally spoken by nonmainstream populations. In other words, nonlinguistically contextualized language is often associated with the language variety spoken by groups that are generally relegated to the margins of the society. Thus, their linguistic production is not only devalued but also perceived as needing a "metamorphosis" of sorts into the standard discourse and text organization style, which is identified as *de-contextualized*.

The shift from a so-called context-bound to a seemingly *de-contextualized* discourse often involves psychological ramifications that can be far-reaching and yet are largely ignored by most teachers. For instance, the shift from a context-bound to a *de-contextualized* discourse can often be accompanied by the development or exacerbation of linguistic insecurity, to the degree that students are encouraged to abandon or repress their so-called context-bound language (which is usually devalued by the standard, middle-class-oriented curriculum). This form of linguistic coercion can produce linguistic resistance in students, who begin to experience antagonism toward the academic discourses they are often cajoled into learning.³⁰ If teachers do not fully understand these psychological processes, which are generally shaped by competing ideologies, they often fall into a binary position that does not bode well for a psychologically healthy pedagogy conducive to learning academic discourses. This lack of understanding about student resistance often eclipses any possibility that teachers may detect linguistic resistance so they can mediate it and effectively teach the academic discourses while honoring the home discourses of their students.

I am reminded of a story told by Dell Hymes, a respected anthropologist and educator, that illustrates my point. During the early sixties, while he was a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Hymes was recruited to help solve educational problems experienced by students in a Boston public elementary school located next to what was then the poorest and most dangerous housing project in Boston, populated primarily by African Americans. The school's student population was almost 100 percent African American, but over 95 percent of the teachers and administrators were middle-class whites.

Hymes put into place mechanisms that encouraged and facilitated African American parents' involvement in the schools. These mechanisms also enabled teachers to familiarize themselves with the cultural backgrounds of the students they were teaching. Many African American mothers became teachers' aides and helped bridge the gap between the school and the community. During one of the teacher-parent meetings, a well-meaning middle-class white teacher commented on her students' inability to learn standard English: "I have tried everything under the sun. I have gone downtown to buy colorful books, I have bought

crayons, I use overheads, and these students still don't seem to be able to learn the standard." She was interrupted by an African American mother who was serving as an aide in her classroom: "Ma'am, I'm sorry, but I have to disagree with you. When I take these students outside for recess, and when they play school, when they role play the teacher, they speak exactly like you do."³¹

Here was a case in which students as young as seven or eight had, albeit unconsciously, begun to resist performing in the academic discourse in the classroom, although they were fully able to do so when the middle-class white teacher was absent. This example illustrates the fact that students whose language and culture are devalued by schools generally develop resistance mechanisms to protect their already fractured culture from the symbolic and real violence perpetrated against it by the middle-class white school culture.

The blind imposition of the so-called *de*-contextualized academic discourse not only reproduces the false assumption that academic discourses are not context bound, it also functions as a measure against which linguistic-minority students' contextualization of their language is devalued. This, in turn, may produce potentially serious psychological scars, even in students who fully master the academic discourses and go on to become highly successful professionals. For example, José Cárdenas, former director of the Intercultural Development Research Association in San Antonio, Texas, noted that his school experience was linguistically traumatic and left him with identifiable psychological scars: "I still remember it, not as an uncomfortable, unpleasant, or challenging situation, but, rather, as a traumatic, disconcerting, terrorizing experience."³²

By not understanding the psychological ramifications of their pedagogy concerning the teaching of academic discourses to minority students, teachers more often than not blame the students for their failure. In the process, they fail to examine the erroneous assumptions that inform their pedagogy, which itself is predicated on the false dichotomy between context-bound and *de*-contextualized discourse. It is not true that minority students cannot learn standard academic discourses, as demonstrated by the young African American in the Boston public elementary school and by José Cárdenas. Instead, the problem often lies with the "traumatic, disconcerting, terrorizing experience" that generally leads minority students to find refuge in linguistic resistance to the imposition and promotion of what has been characterized by the dominant school culture as *de*-contextualized language.

As mentioned before, the tendency to label linguistically contextualized language as "*de*-contextualized" conjures up images of a mystical type of language, an entity in and of itself, which is touted as inherently

superior to linguistic messages that may be entirely appropriate situationally but that rely on less academic ways of contextualizing. The theoretical framework that underlies my research effort is anchored in a critical sociocultural view of language and literacy. I find this approach useful for demystifying the notion of *de*-contextualized language while objectively understanding the academic communicative benefits for producing this type of language separately from its socially ascribed value. In other words, all language is "contextualized" in some manner, and the ways in which individuals decide to contextualize their utterances reflect, in part, the ways in which they have been socialized to construct utterances in various social situations. In some instances, individuals contextualize their language by relying chiefly on linguistic cues. In others, individuals contextualize their utterances by relying on extralinguistic cues, or they co-construct the context by depending on active listener interaction and collaboration.

Despite the importance attributed to the ability to linguistically contextualize discourse in academic settings, I have found no studies that examine the real-life linguistic contextualizing demands placed on bilingual Mexican American students in classrooms where teachers take a culturally sensitive approach to working with students. Research conducted on working-class African American students suggests that these students, in contrast to their middle-class white peers, produce language that is contextualized prosodically and is perceived by their teachers as less explicit, logical, and precise than language characterized as *de*-contextualized.³³ As a result, African American students (as is probably the case for other linguistic-minority students) are often misinterpreted and misassessed by their teachers. The few studies that have been conducted on bilingual students suggest that mainland working-class Puerto Rican students, like their African American peers, also rely chiefly on extralinguistic cues to contextualize their language.³⁴

Teaching Academic Language to Linguistic-Minority Students

Given the importance accorded linguistically contextualized language in the exhibition of academic knowledge, as well as the likelihood that working-class Latino students (similar to other working-class students) may not develop middle-class academic contextualizing skills in the home, teachers must assist their linguistic-minority students in developing these skills at school. Thus, the challenge is not merely acquiring the English language per se. The real issue is the creation of appropriate pedagogical spaces where students can appropriate the middle-class-specific English discourse in all of its dimensions. For this reason, I be-

lieve that it is important to determine whether teachers' instructional demands and their evaluations of students' contextualizing strategies correspond to their actual classroom practices regarding the teaching and use of academic discourses.

Mexican American Students and Linguistically Contextualized Language

As discussed earlier, one reason for the differences in academic performance among Mexican Americans may be linked to their varying ability to "appropriately" contextualize language (oral and written) in academic ways—that is, to rely on linguistic cues to render their language overtly explicit and precise. The important work that Catherine Snow and her associates conducted with upper-class bilingual elementary students indicates that those who possess the ability to linguistically contextualize language in their primary language are soon able to transfer this ability to the second language.³⁵ This explanation lends support to the empirical work that shows that older immigrant students who are successful readers and writers in their first language are able to transfer and apply their literacy skills to the second language, once they achieve some minimal level of English proficiency.³⁶ I would argue that older working-class immigrant students not schooled in their primary language would not demonstrate the same ability to transfer discourse such as decontextualized correspondence does not apply to their linguistic reality. Class is usually a determining factor in the successful acquisition of English academic discourses.

It is interesting to note that it is precisely during the later elementary grades (fourth grade and beyond), when language (both oral and written) becomes more linguistically contextualized, that Mexican American students begin to fall behind in school.³⁷ As Snow and her associates suggested, "The reading and writing tasks expected of children in the later elementary, middle and high school grades cannot be accomplished without both productive and receptive [linguistic contextualizing language] skills."³⁸ Despite these findings, little has been done to study the actual language demands placed on working-class Mexican American bilingual students to linguistically contextualize their language (in both English and Spanish).

In the chapters that follow, I discuss the academic discourse used by working-class Mexican American students and their teacher in one fifth-grade English and Spanish bilingual classroom. Specifically, I examine one bilingual teacher's efforts to create participation structures that elicit students' production of linguistically contextualized language. I also analyze the students' ability to linguistically contextualize their lan-

guage in both English and Spanish in the classroom during normally occurring lessons. Although the student sample in this instance is Mexican American,³⁹ I argue that similar language patterns possibly hold true for other working-class linguistic-minority students and students who speak nonstandard English.

Research in bilingual and linguistic-minority education has not thoroughly addressed the issue of linguistic conflict, although some efforts have been made to explain the resistance of linguistic-minority students to learning a second language and culture.⁴⁰ Much of the literature continues to treat the phenomena of acquiring English as a second language and acquiring standard dialects as apolitical undertakings that are relatively easy if students are cognitively capable language learners.

It is my hope that the information contained in the six chapters of this book will serve to advance the present theoretical debate concerning what constitutes academic discourses and how they are (mis)taught in schools, particularly to working-class linguistic-minority students.