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“I’m Certainly No Language Police”: Language, Race, and Identity Negotiation Among White K-8 Teachers

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Abstract

Drawing on concepts from critical race theory and critical whiteness studies, scholarship on raciolinguistics and racial identity, and methods from grounded theory and discourse analysis, this thesis explores the following research questions: 1) How do White teachers of students of color understand language, race, and their own role as raced people teaching language? 2) How do they act on these understandings? Interviews with five White K-8 educators show how particular combinations of understandings of race, language, and self produce raciolinguistic and pedagogical tensions; these include knowing that the concept of “academic language” is racialized and power-laden while also believing that it is necessary for students to learn, alongside the practical challenges associated with implementing critical pedagogies. Even as some of the interviewed teachers explicitly rejected discourses of appropriateness and code-switching-as-necessary, the raciolinguistic ideologies circulating in state policy and broader society produced intense dilemmas for them as White educators committed to antiracism. As a result, the teachers used strategies to discursively manage 1) their distance from Whiteness and 2) race’s relevance to language, thus mitigating some of the raciolinguistic tensions. In addition, the teachers’ pedagogical strategies reduced the immediate harm of White supremacist raciolinguistic ideologies, but left the ideologies themselves unexamined and unchanged.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the beginning of formal research in linguistics, scholars have been documenting not only languages themselves, but also people’s attitudes towards their own and others’ language. Over time, this research has moved from describing attitudes and beliefs about languages to describing language ideologies (Kroskrity, 2016). An ideological perspective emphasizes the context, embeddedness, and material implications of how we think about language (Seltzer & de los Ríos, 2018). It also allows us to draw connections between conceptions of language and other discourses. For instance, Flores and Rosa (2015) conceptualize raciolinguistic ideologies, which “conflate certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective linguistic practices” (p. 150). With varyingly explicit attention to race, researchers have investigated language ideologies surrounding bilingualism (eg., Allard et al., 2015; Henderson & Palmer, 2015; Kinsella, 2018), within English Language Arts classes (eg., Godley et al., 2007; Metz, 2018; McBee Orzulak, 2015), and for pre-service teachers (eg., Bacon, 2017; Woodard & Rao, 2020; McBee Orzulak, 2013), among other contexts.

A second body of scholarship in Educational Studies, but typically not in Linguistics, examines teachers’ racial identity, positionality, and manners of engaging with race. Often relying on critical discourse analytic methods, this research on racial identity and racial literacy considers how teachers position themselves interactionally, including depending on the race and background of their students and in instances when race arises explicitly in the classroom (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015). In the United States, approximately 80% of the teaching force, but only 50% of the student population, is White\(^1\), despite clear evidence that having teachers of

\(^1\) There is little scholarly consensus on the capitalization of “White” as a race label. In this thesis, I capitalize it not in order to reify racial constructs or White Supremacy, but to emphasize that Whiteness is not neutral or race-less; rather, it is itself a race, like the oft-capitalized “Black” that it defines as its opposite (see footnote 2). When citing authors who do not capitalize “White,” I preserve their original punctuation.
color benefits students of color (Moss, 2016). Given this context, understanding the dynamics of teacher racial identity in the classroom is of the utmost importance.

My interest in raciolinguistic ideologies has crystallized as a result of fieldwork in diverse public schools and accompanying course readings that have taught me that what we do with language significantly impacts classroom process and students’ experiences. Furthermore, given the demographics discussed above and my own White racial identity, I am particularly concerned with the dynamics that occur in a classroom with a White teacher and a majority of students of color. By focusing on White teachers, I am engaging in a “lite” form of “studying up,” or researching people who hold power in order to understand “the actions of those… who create and maintain systems of inequality and injustice in the first place” (Aydarova, 2019, p. 34).

Throughout this thesis, there is a deep tension between the agency of the teachers, who do have power to change their classroom practices for the better, and their location within limiting and oppressive structures and institutions. This tension is not resolved within the thesis, nor is it necessarily resolvable. Indeed, it remains as something that is deeply troubling for both myself as a researcher and for the teachers I interviewed. As one teacher said of the messages she told students about code-switching, “I know I’m giving them garbage. But… this is the garbage I’ve got.” What does it mean to be a White teacher “giving” such problematic instruction to students?

While some scholarship has indirectly or secondarily addressed the intersection of language ideologies and teacher identity (eg. Daniels, 2018; Henderson, 2017), this thesis explicitly investigates the ways in which White teachers’ embodied and articulated raciolinguistic ideologies emerge in concert with, and perhaps in contradiction to, their racial
positionings. I use interviews with five K-8 educators investigate the following research questions:

1) How do White teachers understand race and language and their own role as raced\(^2\) people teaching language?

2) How do they act on these understandings?

This chapter has introduced language ideologies and racial identity as key issues informing this thesis. Chapter 2 outlines the understandings of language, race and racism, Whiteness, and identity negotiation through language that underlie my work. In Chapter 3, I review literature on language ideologies, noting three main themes of appropriateness, contradictions, and levels beyond the classroom. Next, Chapter 4 introduces my methods of data collection and analysis. In Chapter 5, I present my analysis of teachers’ understandings of language, race, and self giving rise to certain tensions that are navigated discursively and pedagogically. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with limitations, implications for theory and practice, and future directions for research.

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\(^2\) I use the term “raced” rather than “racialized” to distinguish that, while White people do indeed have a race, despite the construction of Whiteness as neutral, they do not undergo the active processes of racialization experienced by non-White people that mark the latter as non-neutral.
Chapter 2: Conceptual foundations

In this chapter, I introduce some of the assumptions, concepts, and terms that are central to my thesis. These include understandings of language and its varieties, race and racism, Whiteness, and how speakers use language to claim and negotiate identities.

Language

“Folk” or “commonsense” understandings of language often differ from the understandings of linguists, who generally study language with descriptive, rather than prescriptive, aims. That is, the field of linguistics broadly seeks to understand how language is actually used, instead of how it should be used; all language varieties “are equal in terms of linguistic potential” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 6) and none is bad, sloppy, or incorrect. Furthermore, under linguists’ understandings of accent, dialect, and language—slippery categories whose utility is limited in many contexts—everyone has some accent and speaks some dialect. The ideas of “non-accented” speech or a single “standard” language are “myths”—myths that, critically, are constructed to appear neutral with regards to race, class, and geography (Lippi-Green, 2012).

However, clear evidence from sociolinguistics shows that these notions are anything but divorced from issues of power and identity. For instance, White speakers from Indiana consistently rank California’s and their own region’s speech as most “correct”; interestingly, this trend holds relatively constant across the United States, with people from all regions ranking the speech of White upper-class Midwesterners as the “best” or “most correct” (Lippi-Green, 2012, pp. 59-60). This occurs in spite of the systematicity, internal regularity, and intelligibility of all regional dialects, including those receiving low ranks in the aforementioned research. A term
that is prevalent in the literature on raciolinguistic ideologies is \textit{standard language ideology}. Lippi-Green defines this as:

\begin{quote}
A bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class. (2012, p. 67)
\end{quote}

Flores and Rosa similarly write that “powerful allegiances to imagined linguistic norms persist regardless of whether anyone actually adheres to those norms in practice. That is, people embrace notions such as ‘Standard English’ even if they cannot locate them empirically” (2015, p. 151). In the United States, this mythical “standard”\(^3\) is also raced as White- specifically, as White middle/upper class language, and not as, for instance, White Appalachian language. The construction of Whiteness as an unmarked \textit{race without a race}, discussed further below, means that the myth of a “standard” language is maintained as race-neutral.

A final concept from linguistics that is essential to this thesis is \textit{code-switching}, which Lippi-Green defines as a “speaker’s ability to switch between languages or language varieties dependent on a large number of factors” (2012, p. 46), such as audience, purpose, and context. Flores and Rosa, citing Delpit (2006), note that:

\begin{quote}
The goal of additive approaches [to language education for linguistically diverse students] is to valorize students’ diverse linguistic repertoires by positioning their skills in languages other than Standard English as valuable classroom assets to be built on rather than handicaps to be overcome. For advocates of additive approaches, the goal is to
\end{quote}

\(^3\) Scholars have adopted many different terms and orthographic conventions to refer to what Lippi-Green calls a myth and Flores and Rosa emphasize is an ideology (see, for example, Baker-Bell, 2020; Kinsella, 2018; Lewis, 2018; and Lippi-Green, 2012). In this thesis, I will use the terms \textit{Standard English} and \textit{academic English}. 
promote the ability to code-switch between different varieties of English and/or across languages when appropriate (Delpit, 2006). (2015, p. 153)

Flores and Rosa critique the discourse of “appropriateness” that proponents of code-switching-based approaches engage. This critique will be further explored in Chapter 3.

**Race and racism**

It is sometimes said that “race is a social construct.” This statement attempts to highlight the non-naturalness of race as a distinct, coherent category; however, it can also appear to dismiss physical and material realities of race. Michael Hames-García suggests that saying that “race is real” could mean:

(1) Race has a material-economic reality in the immediate effects and legacies of racism.

(2) Race has a social and psychological reality as an existing system of beliefs and attitudes with material effects (this would include certain epistemic effects on the production and acquisition of knowledge).

(3) Race exists in a physical or biological form, as bodily matter. (p. 321)

Each of these points emerged in the interviews with teachers. Though the second is most directly relevant to ideology, raciolinguistics can help to connect the three points by showing how, through its associations with language, “bodily matter” becomes racialized within a “system of beliefs and attitudes” that has “material-economic” effects.

This perspective aligns with that of critical race theory (CRT), which emerged out of critical legal studies in the 1970s. CRT seeks to understand how race and racism operate and produce effects within society. Although it was originally applied more squarely within the legal system, CRT has become integral to the analytical approaches of many other fields, including Educational Studies. Gloria Ladson-Billings’ *Just what is critical race theory and what’s it doing*
in a nice field like education? (1988) points to the ways that systemic racism impacts educational issues including curriculum, instruction, assessment, funding, and school integration. This thesis addresses the first three of these domains, beginning with CRT’s assertion of the continual relevance of race in American society.

**Whiteness**

In the aforementioned article, Ladson-Billings writes,

It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for… deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. (1988, p. 9)

What is Whiteness, then? Rogers and Mosley (2006) note that it has been defined in many different ways, “including [as] the social distance from blackness and a cultural practice that constructs race-based hierarchies,” with some scholars suggesting that Whiteness “inevitably means” racism and others conceptualizing it as containing more positive possibilities, such as allyship (p. 466). In the former category, Picower (2021) distinguishes between White people, Whiteness, and White supremacy in that “[Whiteness] is the way in which people- generally White people- enact racism in ways that consciously and unconsciously maintain [the] broader system of White supremacy” (p. 6). Though this thesis does not take a firm stance on the positive possibilities- or lack thereof- of Whiteness itself, it does critically explore the relationships between White people, Whiteness, White supremacy, and linguistic racism in education.

Rather than focusing on the possibilities of Whiteness, I explore how it is currently enacted and experienced in the classroom. Rogers and Mosley explain that “white people, by virtue of their membership in the dominant group in society, construct identities defined as
‘normal’ and consequently set the standard for which racial and ethnic minorities are assessed” (pp. 474-475). Critical Whiteness studies attempts to “theorize and problematize the construction of whiteness as an absent racial category and dominant social norm” (Rogers & Mosley, p. 466), providing ways to deconstruct Whiteness-as-power and interrogate how it works, so that it may be disrupted. There is no single methodology of critical Whiteness studies. Its assumptions, goals, and theoretical underpinnings may be engaged through a variety of techniques, such as ethnography and discourse analysis.

**Negotiating identity through language**

On one hand, language and ideologies surrounding it serve as an object of study in this thesis. On the other hand, I analyze language to understand other phenomena that emerge through it, such as emotion and identity, as well as broader discourses and sites of ideological contestation. For this component of my analysis, language is less an object and more a means of analysis. This aligns with the approach of discourse analysis, which rests upon an assumption of language as not only *saying*, but as *doing* and *being* things (Gee, 2014, p. 2). That is, when a person makes an utterance, there are at least three levels of action occurring. On one level, the person is making an assertion (or asking a question, etc.). They are also making something happen socially; they are *doing* something to the social context, such as inviting a response of some kind from an interlocutor. In addition, they are claiming or rejecting identities, the specifics of which depend heavily on social context and aspects of the utterance like tone.

Gee (2015) provides an example that may be helpful: A teacher in a math class asks, “Mary, what do you think?” Beyond the superficial question, there are multiple possibilities for what the teacher may be doing, or what identities they are claiming, here. It is possible that the teacher may be assessing Mary’s knowledge of a math concept, an example of *doing*. However,
the teacher may also not really care about Mary’s answer, instead using this question as a launch point for a class discussion. Alongside these actions, the teacher may be adopting (being) the role of either an assessor or of a facilitator. Gee notes that Mary’s response to the teacher’s question depends heavily on Mary’s understanding of what the teacher is doing and being by asking.

Because this thesis focuses explicitly on teachers’ identities, discourse analysis serves as a key methodological lens to exploring how identity is claimed and negotiated through language. Although I do not engage in formal discourse analysis per se, the understandings that this methodology rests upon are essential to my approach to data analysis, as discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

What beliefs do teachers have about race and language, and how do they act on these understandings? Although this was the question around which this literature review was developed, it is not quite an accurate reflection of the scholarship examined. In particular, while beliefs is a useful shorthand to describe things that teachers think they understand to be true, recent scholarship is clear that it is not belief, but rather ideology, that merits attention. Ideologies are not necessarily things that teachers can “have,” so they are sometimes described as things research participants “articulate” or “embody” (Kroskrity, 2004), though “enact” might be another useful term. Why is the turn from belief to ideology so important? What is the difference between these two concepts?

At its most basic, this distinction highlights language ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language,” with connections to social context and implications for social reproduction (Lewis, 2010). Within linguistic anthropology, where language ideology scholarship first emerged, Silverstein defined language ideologies as “beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (1979, p. 193, cited in Seltzer & de los Ríos, 2018, p. 173). More recently, Woolard offered a definition of language ideologies as “morally and politically loaded representations of the nature, structure, and use of languages in a social world.” These representations are embodied, part of the habitus. At least three characteristics of language ideologies distinguish them from abstract beliefs. First, they “implicitly or explicitly… represent not only how language is, but how it ought to be.” Second, they “forge links between language and other social phenomena.” Finally, language ideologies “have real consequences for linguistic structures as well as social relations” (Woolard, 2020, p. 2).
As these characterizations address, a critical strength of an ideological approach is its ability to illuminate connections between language ideologies, other ideologies, and social practice. Connecting language with discourses and practices of racialization, Flores and Rosa theorize *raciolinguistic ideologies*, which “conflate certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective linguistic practices” (2015, p. 150). Since the publication of Flores and Rosa’s seminal paper, scholars of education and linguistics have begun to more critically examine the ways that language and race become co-constructed, such that one may “look like a language” and “sound like a race” (Rosa, 2019). An emphasis on ideology is essential here in that it does not strictly locate racist or otherwise problematic beliefs inside the minds of individuals; rather, social context, public discourses, and material policies and practices are all implicated. This aligns with critical race theory’s conceptualization of racism as pervasive, systemic, and material (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The following section examines some themes that are prevalent in the current scholarship on raciolinguistic ideologies. Though not all of the studies discussed utilize this framework explicitly, all involve students whose linguistic practices are racialized as non-White, including students who are emergent bilinguals and Black students. In addition, in keeping with the focus of this thesis, all studies described here involve pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, or teacher educators who are White. Three themes that emerge in this scholarship are *appropriateness*, including references to gatekeeping, Standard English, “academic” English, concern for students' futures, and codes of power; *ideological tensions and contradictions*, such as when teachers' ideologies are inconsistent or contradictory or when there is a gap between articulated and embodied ideologies; and *ideologies beyond the classroom*, which discusses the
relationships between teacher agency and the constraints placed upon teachers, when policy- and program-level ideologies interact with their own.

**Appropriateness**

The title of Flores and Rosa’s 2015 paper introducing the term *raciolinguistic ideologies* is *Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education*. The authors argue that approaches to the education of linguistically diverse students that emphasize the “appropriateness” for school of one language variety over another are deeply problematic, leaving untouched the racism that has allowed one idealized variety of English to be imagined as “standard” and “academic.” *Undoing appropriateness* draws attention away from the objective linguistic practices of students and towards the “white listening subject” that will always hear the language of students racialized as non-White as accented, deficient, or broken. In using terms like “appropriate,” educators invoke this white listening subject (in all its societal embeddedness, materiality, and broad scope) to argue fervently for students learning Standard “academic” English, without ever truly understanding that the listening subject’s perceptions have little to do with students’ actual language use. A focus on appropriateness “may reinforce– rather than reject– ideas that dominant language patterns are more acceptable, proper, or powerful than marginalized dialects or languages” (Woodard & Rao, 2020, p. 185). That is, when a discourse of appropriateness becomes commonplace, there may be little incentive for educators to interrogate the racialized power dynamics that causes the purported appropriateness of one dialect over others in the first place.

Not all of the works in this section were written after 2015 or reference Flores and Rosa’s arguments specifically. However, all demonstrate the pervasiveness of appeals to “appropriateness” and the ways that this rationalization is euphemized by teachers- as “concern,”
“granting access,” and more- and interrogated by researchers- as “gatekeeping” and “upholding,” among others. It is worth noting that these broad characterizations are not without debate among interested parties. Lisa Delpit notes, for instance, that many Black parents were concerned that their children being taught African American English (AAE) instead of Standard English was just one more way to hold the children down by keeping them linguistically subordinate. For these parents, the ability to code-switch- or even become monolingual in Standard English- was a crucial part of what they wanted their students to learn in school (Delpit, 1988, p. 285). In these cases of complex and sometimes contradictory interests among caregivers, educators, and academics with anti-racist goals, there is no clear answer about what to do in schools.

The following sections of this literature review explore discourses of appropriateness at work in school contexts with multidialectal students and those speaking stigmatized dialects that are racialized as non-White, in school contexts with bi- and multilingual students, and amongst educators teaching STEM subjects. Finally, I review literature that has explored how teachers’ harmful raciolinguistic ideologies may be changed.

**Dialectally diverse contexts**

Language ideologies and the discourses of appropriateness that often support them operate heavily in contexts with dialectally diverse students. In “I’ll speak in proper slang”: *Language ideologies in a daily editing activity*, Godley et al. (2007) utilize an ethnographic approach to examine the language ideologies represented at multiple levels of a writing activity in a high school classroom of mostly African American students. Emerging in part in state standards, state assessments, and official curricula are ideologies of 1) language learning as

---

4 The line between a “dialect” and a “language” can be murky, and is inseparable from issues of power and politics (Lippi-Green, 2011).

5 Though I primarily use the term “Black” in my own writing, I preserve the language of race labels used by the authors I cite.
prescriptive rather than dialogic, 2) language form as independent from meaning, and 3) there being a singular correct way (and therefore many incorrect ways) to use language. Particularly in connection with this last ideology, the researchers note that the focal teacher, who is also a coauthor, expressed great concern for granting students access to the Standard English that is valued by “mainstream” society (p. 123), believing that “stigmatized dialects” such as (AAE) are only appropriate for non-academic, social contexts. The authors write,

Although [the teacher’s] overarching goal was to teach her students ‘the codes of power’ (Delpit, 1988, p. 293) by insisting that they speak Standard English in class… [she]...

implies that [AAE] is incorrect language because her implicit correction of [the students’] language is framed by a language ideology that categorizes all language dichotomously as either correct or incorrect. (p. 119)

This study draws clear connections between race and language ideologies, since it is specifically the students’ use of African American English that the teacher routinely corrects. In the classroom analyzed in the article, the teacher does not engage students in explicit investigation of the reasons why this language variety is considered inappropriate for school, thus maintaining the linguistic status quo.

Providing another look at the ideologies of pre-service teachers who work with students who speak diverse dialects of English, McBee Orzulak (2013) describes the teachers’ subject positions, which are similar to roles but can be “multiple” and “contradictory” (p. 13). Although McBee Orzulak’s framework is not explicitly raciolinguistic, her focus on teachers’ reading and editing practices resonates with Flores and Rosa’s shift towards the white listening subject. McBee Orzulak finds that the seven pre-service teachers interviewed position themselves as both gatekeepers endeavoring to “correct” students’ grammar in order to “level the playing field,” and
as guides to Standard English, even when they describe their own speech as “sloppy” or “incorrect.” Some of the interviewees’ language, such as the invocation of the phrase “proper words” (emphasis added), lends insight into their understanding of their own role in discerning the “appropriateness” of and responding to students’ language use. Though the teachers are well-intentioned, their self-identified gatekeeping role is in conflict with linguistic principles of the validity of diverse language practices. McBee Orzulak concludes by calling for teacher educators to develop sustainable, explicit, and practicable curricula to help beginning teachers navigate the “ideological, dilemmic” space of language instruction.

**Bilingual contexts**

School contexts with predominantly multilingual students, rather than strictly multidialectal ones, may be less likely to use the word “appropriate” to describe students’ diverse linguistic practices. However, similar rationalizations are at work when educators speak of concerns for students’ futures in a country that educators perceive to be English-speaking. Providing a theoretical base for understanding “concerns for students’ futures,” Flores et al. (2018) utilize the concept of “raciolinguistic chronotopes,” which “co-construct race and language in ways that produce particular relationships between the past, present, and future” (p. 16). In particular, *Raciolinguistic chronotopes and the education of Latinx students: Resistance and anxiety in a bilingual school* argues that, in addition to a chronotope of resistance that foregrounds Spanish as part of both historical and contemporary Latinx activism; the focal school has a pervasive chronotope of anxiety that positions Spanish as the past, and English the future, for the Latinx population. Through this chronotope, educators view students’ use of Spanish as inappropriate, unmodern, or even backwards in the school context. Even at a school
where bilingualism was intended to be celebrated, anxiety about the role of language in students’ futures led to devaluing of their language.

At the school examined by Flores et al. (2018), appropriateness was leveraged in ways that did not always support students’ “doing being bilingual” (Auer, 1984) in practice, although the school had a clearly stated mission in support of bilingualism. Many other schools and districts do not have such clear stances on linguistic diversity. Kinsella (2018) examines the raciolinguistic ideologies at work in a New Jersey bilingual school where educators and administrators alike struggled to accurately characterize the bilingual program—was it transitional by design? Was it something else? Operating at the school was a pervasive deficit perspective on Latino students’ Spanish, positioning these students as “languageless” (Rosa, 2016): “…they don’t have that academic language and they don’t have the academic language in Spanish. They are just stuck in the middle,” one teacher said in an interview (p. 33). In this quote, specifying “academic language in Spanish” but not “in English” positions English as the default language, the norm for school. Furthermore, underlying this comment is an assumption that the Spanish that students speak at home is incomplete and/or incorrect for use with the academic tasks of the school. Similar to the teacher discussed by Godley et al. (2007), educators in Kinsella’s study enacted raciolinguistic ideologies that necessarily deficitized non-White students’ language practices, suggesting that the remedy was monolingualism in Standard English.

Another study of language ideologies in a bilingual classroom is that of Martínez et al. (2014). In this examination of dual-language bilingual education (DLBE) classrooms, the authors consider how, even where translanguaging is a supported practice, an ideology of linguistic purism— that only some language practices are correct or “pure”— pervades, legitimized

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6 The authors use the term “translanguaging to describe how these teachers and their students moved fluidly across multiple languages and dialects in their everyday interactions” (2014, p. 26).
by appeals to appropriateness. In one example, the teacher asks students for the Spanish version of the word *rolipoli*, which the students pronounce using Spanish phonology, as a loanword. The students are perplexed and disagree about how to translate the word, and the authors posit that the students already consider *rolipoli* to be a Spanish word— in this case, one that the teacher has deemed inappropriate and unacademic because it is a loanword, violating an ideology of linguistic purism. The authors’ discussion of this incident and other examples of the focal teachers’ articulated and embodied language ideologies highlights the ways in which appeals to appropriateness can intersect in powerful and important ways with broader ideologies.

Acknowledging the complexity and multiplicity of language ideologies, much of the literature on this topic employs interviews and ethnographic methods. However, there is still much that can be learned from systematic examinations of ideology that use written surveys and similar approaches. In *Educator language ideologies and a top-down dual language program* (2017), Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al. survey over 300 educators in a school district attempting a shift to a DLBE program. The authors use Likert-style and short-answer questions to trace eight prominent language ideologies and the demographic factors that correlate with them. This approach shows how claims about the “appropriateness” of one language form over others relate to broader ideologies, which the authors have classified. For instance, appropriateness is related to an ideology of *academic language as a marker of intelligence*, indicating that teachers who believe that some students cannot appropriately “code-switch” into “academic language” may entertain a broadly deficit-based perspective on their students. Robust scholarship has demonstrated the harm that such a perspective inflicts on students of color (e.g. Valenzuela, 1999). This harm can be perpetuated by a discourse of appropriateness.
Disciplinary contexts

Although most studies of language ideologies focus on bilingual, English, writing, or other literacy classes; ideologies that engage with the idea of [in]appropriateness are also highly salient in other disciplinary contexts. Within science education, in particular, there is often a large focus on “technical” vocabulary, a curricular space that has the potential to generate debate about “academic” and “appropriate” language. Tapping into this area for differing opinions, Lemmi et al. utilize focus groups to encourage teachers to talk to each other about science and language practices in schools with many emergent bilingual students. The authors break down the ideologies expressed by teachers into language-exclusive ideologies, which “[hold] that certain forms of language are expected in a science class, and others are not appropriate,” and language-inclusive ones, which “[suggest] that multiple forms of language use are acceptable in science classrooms” (p. 854). Vocabulary development and “academic language” were two of the most common directions for the teachers’ discussions as they struggled to navigate what they perceived to be a tension between rigor and clarity, on the one hand, and the use of students’ home language practices on the other. Linguistic diversity, here, posed a problem to be solved (Ruiz, 1984) on the path towards developing scientific literacy and content knowledge. Although educators are unlikely to state that they believe students’ languages- and thus cultures and full selves- are fundamentally incompatible with certain academic subjects or even academia as a whole, this is the implication of an ideology that positions language variation as a problem.

Changing ideologies

Concerns about appropriateness are not benign; they have real consequences for what students learn about the value of their languages. Given this, some scholarship examines how teachers’ ideologies, including as these manifest in beliefs about appropriateness, may be
changed. While it has been argued that changing individuals’ ideologies is ineffective in that it
does not address the structural and material nature of racism (Lewis, 2018), it is noteworthy that
changing these ideologies is often more challenging than one might expect. Bacon (2017) found
that a module on multi-dialectalism in a course for pre-service teachers led to only “cosmetic”
changes in their language ideologies. Though conceding that the module was short and would
have benefited from more time discussing specific intersections of language, race, and power,
Bacon notes that teachers’ (de)valuing of linguistic diversity, which would likely emerge in
appeals to the need for “academic” language, remained largely unchanged at the conclusion of
the course. This result points to the inability of the basic sociolinguistics content presented in the
module to meaningfully address the justice issues that lead to teachers’ doubt about the
appropriateness of stigmatized varieties of English.

With a similar eye towards examining the development of pre-service teachers’
ideologies as Bacon (2017), Woodard and Rao (2020) utilized interviews with teachers over the
course of two years. Despite participating in ongoing coursework “with a focus on equity and
social justice” (p. 187), the teachers appeared to be engaged in an ongoing “push-pull” with
standard language ideologies that assume the superiority of dominant language varieties; while
the pre-service teachers did show some development of more critical ideologies, they did not
experience significant change in their ability to dissect issues of language, race, and power. As a
result of these findings, the authors, who were the professors of the interviewees, modified their
coursework to engage more direct examinations of “the ways… assumptions about ‘good’,
‘proper’, ‘standard,’ and ‘appropriate’ language are informed by racist and classist ideas” (p.
191). It remains to be seen how these changes, which focus on classroom scenarios and
consistent, expansive asset-based framings of students’ languages, will be taken up by the pre-service teachers whose critical language ideologies are “emerging” and “evolving.”

**Ideological tensions and contradictions**

People, as well as the structures and institutions in which they are situated, are complex. Accordingly, any individual’s ideologies can be multifaceted, informed by numerous sources, and even apparently in opposition to each other. A variety of scholars have highlighted the ways in which teachers hold contradictory ideologies. This tends to occur in at least two distinct but related manners: 1) teachers verbalizing ideologies that seem inconsistent with each other, and 2) teachers articulating one ideology during interviews, but appearing to embody another in their classroom practice. In addition, following McBee Orzulak (2015), discussed below, some scholars have turned towards investigating how these tensions emerge during specific moments of instruction or interaction with students. The three subsections of this part of my literature review- *inconsistent articulated ideologies, contradictions between articulated and embodied ideologies, and language ideologies in classroom dilemmas*- demonstrate key ways that raciolinguistic ideological tensions surface, including for the teachers interviewed in this study, as will be shown in Chapter 5.

**Inconsistent articulated ideologies**

“Language ideology” is a broad term that can refer to something as large as a so-called “standard language ideology” or as specific as an ideology of “language as a social bridge” (Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al., 2017). Especially when researchers identify these more narrow ideologies, they find that educators often articulate ideologies that appear to be inconsistent with each other or even contradictory. The degree to which this causes cognitive dissonance for any individual teacher is not something that has been specifically interrogated, although how these
inconsistencies show up in teaching practice is a topic of research, as discussed in the section on dilemmas in the classroom, below.

Providing a clear classificatory scheme of relatively narrow language ideologies, Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al. (2017) demonstrate that educators can hold multiple ideologies that may not seem to align. Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al. note that “language ideologies, even if apparently contradictory, often co-exist within single communities or individuals” (p. 704), a claim that is well-supported by their survey results. Educators responded to 31 Likert-style assertions “presenting ideological statements about language” (p. 708); the authors used an exploratory factor analysis to group educators’ responses into clusters representing specific language ideologies. The survey also contained two short-answer questions, where respondents frequently expressed “ideological tensions.” The first of these often showed conflict between ideologies of languages other than English as endowments (resources and/or rights, following Ruiz [1984]) and language as a symbol of majority influence or multiple languages as a problem. Educators felt caught between these additive and subtractive views of students’ home languages, a tension that was salient enough to emerge in short responses of many of the surveys.

When given more space than short-answer questions to discuss their beliefs and practices, how do teachers navigate tensions in language ideologies? Examining the language ideologies at work in transitional bilingual education programs, Palmer (2011) describes the complex maneuvers that teachers used to “[manage] the discourse of transition while attempting to maintain an equitable stance toward Spanish in their classrooms” (p. 111). The very nature of the transitional program encouraged English- which the teachers associated with the word ready, in contrast to Spanish’s association with need- to be positioned as superior, more intelligent. While the teachers’ language reflected a “discourse of transition” that said students needed to “move
on” from Spanish, the educators also spoke of the importance of bilingualism and biculturalism. Palmer notes that the interviewees oscillated rapidly between these competing subtractive and additive perspectives, creating a complex ideological web that defied neat categorization. A similar oscillation—moving race in and out of the discourse, rather than moving between additive and subtractive perspectives, as Palmer found—will be discussed as a tension-managing strategy in Chapter 5.

McBee Orzulak (2013) explores both the complexities of pre-service teachers’ language ideologies and a key component for understanding how teachers manage these complexities: identity work, which informs the self-understandings I present in Chapter 5. In contrast to scholars who point to ideologies that themselves are contradictory, McBee Orzulak suggests that a single standard language ideology leads teachers to position themselves in contradictory ways—specifically, as both gatekeepers and guides. Representing the first of these subject positions, the study’s pre-service teachers spoke of the need to correct the “errors” in students’ writing and emphasize the use of “proper words.” A guide or “access provider” subject position, argues McBee Orzulak, is one that may feel uncomfortably at-odds with the gatekeeper role; some interviewees showed an awareness of linguistic diversity and wanted to “[guide] students through multiple varieties and even [redefine] what is ‘correct’ while providing access to standard English” (pp. 16-17). This desire to be an expert guide also conflicted with the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their own language use: they described their own speaking in negative terms that were similar to those they used to describe the type of speech they would “correct” in students. McBee Orzulak shows that a single ideology, in this case that of (a) standard language, leads educators to develop complex and inconsistent understandings of their own language use, roles, and responsibilities.
In other cases, ideologies may not themselves be contradictory or lead to the adoption of conflicting identities, but may point to divergent teaching practice. This difficulty, faced by many teachers in the present study, is also described by Metz (2019). Employing a similar methodology as Fitzsimmons et al., Metz surveyed over 300 high school English teachers to ascertain patterns in their ideologies. Metz groups the educators’ ideologies into “hegemonic” and “counter-hegemonic” categories and finds that they reflect beliefs about 1) language’s relationship to speaker characteristics, 2) social perceptions of language use, 3) the dominant school narrative around language, and 4) the role of the educator. While most teachers aligned themselves with counter-hegemonic beliefs, they also perceived a hegemonic “dominant school narrative”—made up of items like “students should use SE [Standard English] in academic and professional settings, teachers should teach students to use SE, [and] SE is correct while other dialects contain mistakes”—to be very influential and in conflict with their own ideologies. Alignment with this “dominant school narrative” increased with years of teaching, which Metz interprets as an indication of the power of this narrative in shaping the beliefs of educators exposed to it, even when they desired for their own role as educators to be more counter-hegemonic. Metz writes that, ultimately, “Even if teachers feel that they should take on a more counter-hegemonic approach to language teaching, the belief that their school and society will view this approach negatively may prevent teachers from teaching what they believe is right” (p. 32), a tension similar to the raciolinguistic ones I discuss in my analysis.

Contradictions between articulated and embodied ideologies

In addition to finding that educators often articulate contradictory ideologies, scholars have documented a pattern of teachers articulating one language ideology during interviews and embodying another in classroom observations. Although I was not able to observe classrooms for
this study, the teachers’ descriptions of their own practices can provide some insight into how their teaching may differ from the ideals they articulate. The goal of describing such patterns is not to “catch teachers in the act” of enacting an ideology that is usually more “hegemonic” (Metz, 2019) than what they had described, but rather to illuminate the ways that the active dynamics of the classroom complicate the practices of even the most well-intentioned teachers. For instance, Martínez et al. (2014) write of a teacher who described herself as a “big fan” of code-meshing, but who also, when asked at a different point about more specific instructional practices, indicated that she would not “allow code-switching” within students’ writing. This comment, which was in a part of the interview that involved more direct discussion of classroom practices, as well as the authors’ observations of the teachers in the study, demonstrates a gap between an idealized articulated ideology surrounding translanguaging and the one that was actually embodied.

While Martínez et al. (2014) focus on ideologies surrounding translanguaging, specifically, Metz (2018) focused on educators who were particularly enthusiastic about teaching critical perspectives on language and language variation, a population that may be similar to the intentionally antiracist teachers in this thesis. Even among Metz’ sample of five educators, there was surprisingly little meta-talk about language in the English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms that were observed; Metz also found that, during such “episodes of language talk,” only one teacher consistently demonstrated a counter-narrative to the prevailing standard language ideology. The majority of the educators, who were all teaching Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in their high school English classes, engaged inconsistently or shallowly with counter-hegemonic ideologies, despite their clear statements of support for critical discussions of language when they were interviewed. Metz’ robust data clearly demonstrates the
ways in which, and extent to which, teachers’ articulated ideologies can differ from the ones they embody.

**Language ideologies in classroom dilemmas**

How do educators navigate their own competing ideologies and the many contextual layers that inform their teaching practices? This is a guiding question in this thesis, and a developing body of scholarship has begun to explore it through the examination of small, challenging moments in the classroom. Personally held ideologies; school-, district-, and state-mandated policies; student demographics and identities; and the flow of the school day all factor into the dynamics of these moments. One of the most clearly-directed explorations of such instances is McBee Orzulak (2015), *Disinviting deficit ideologies: Beyond “That’s standard,” “That’s racist,” and “That’s your mother tongue.”* In this title, there is a complication of simple, categorizable language ideologies. McBee Orzulak conceptualizes *linguistic ideological dilemmas* (LIDs), which “provide a useful way to theorize conflicts that arise as participants engage in teaching interactions, in particular between… linguistically informed principles and deficit language ideologies” (p. 180). Building on McBee Orzulak’s prior work on subject positions of teachers as “gatekeepers” and “guides” to Standard English (2013), this approach highlights that there is often no clear, single best response in episodes of language meta-talk. In one example, the author analyzes how a pre-service teacher navigated an LID in which she described herself as occupying “two conflicting positions: (1) the equitable teacher who asked [the student] to question her use of ‘proper’ as a value-laden term; (2) the English teacher who had the authority to define what counts in standard English(es)” (p. 188). Situations such as this one highlight that there are many roles/subject positions for teachers to occupy as they navigate conflicting policies and discourses about race and language.
Metz (2018) also considers ideologies in conflict during moments of instruction. To conduct this analysis, Metz relies on data from both interviews with in-service teachers and observations of their practice. Contrasting with McBee Orzulak (2015), in which the majority of LID examples provided by participants occurred during one-on-one interactions with students, rather than whole-class discussions, Metz describes cases of group and teacher-led discussion of language variation. All of the educators in the study were teaching a unit on *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), which is partially written in AAE. Reading aloud from the text sparked conversations that, among other themes, either 1) positioned AAE as “a dialect” while “standard English” was not, or 2) more critically considered AAE as one language variety among many. McBee Orzulak writes that LIDs are “managed” by teachers; although Metz does not explicitly reference the LID framework, his analysis shows evidence of teachers attempting to manage the dilemmic situations that arise as students grapple with new ideas about language. In his discussion, Metz notes, “We [teacher educators] can support teachers in enacting critical language teaching by examining key points where dominant language ideologies assert themselves and exploring ways to craft counter-narratives” (p. 473, emphasis added). While “ideology” can seem large and abstract, the author’s examples show what ideological conflict actually looks like in the classroom.

Similarly, and helping to inform the interview questions of this thesis, Razfar (2012) utilizes a narrative analysis methodology and perspective to examine how a teacher “[represents] and [transforms] herself in the course of interactions focused on language, culture, and identity” (p. 62). As the teacher told emergent narratives- small stories that have some sequenced events, even if they are not linear, and that convey (a) moral stance(s)- during interviews, she expressed “ideologies of language and learning that minimize students’ use of languages other than English
when learning English” (p. 70). These ideologies complicated her stated positions on the value of multilingualism, especially as it related to her own personal experiences. Razfar argues for the value of narrative analysis, particularly as it relates to ideology rather than belief, to explore the complex and situationally-dependent “tensions, contradictions, and multiple positionalities” (p. 78) that are salient in language ideological inquiry.

Narratives, as Metz (2018) and Razfar (2012) emphasize, have great potential for illustrating tensions that may arise around linguistic diversity. Taylor et al. (2018) further explore the potential of story and narrative; their research participants are teachers taking a course called “Classroom Discourse and Teacher Research.” As they discussed Lippi-Green’s *English with an Accent*, the teachers told small stories that positioned themselves as either passive observer, active resistor, or uncertain participant in situations that they thought of when discussing language and power. Citing McBee Orzulak (2015), the authors note that focusing on small stories was useful to help navigate the complexities of language ideologies and identity negotiation, but this focus alone was not inherently critical: in the majority of small stories, race was only indexed indirectly, instead of being a topic of direct conversation - a pattern that is consistent with my interviews. Nevertheless, with adequate steering towards issues of power, narrative approaches promise to hold space for contradictions in ideology in all of the manifestations discussed here: within what educators articulate, between what they articulate and embody, and during moments of instructional tension. As such, active consideration of narratives informs my interview and analytical approach, as discussed in Chapter 4.

**Ideologies beyond the classroom: agency and constraint**

As discussed in the introduction to this literature review, a language *ideological* approach emphasizes that beliefs about language are not bounded and contained within individuals’ minds.
That is, all language ideology scholarship attends, to some extent, to the broad discourses, policies, institutions, and practices that inform individual beliefs. In addition, some studies maintain an even more specific focus on the interactions between macro and micro scales of policy and practice. This includes how teachers “take up” discourses into their language ideologies; how their ideologies reflect discourses in their schools or within the field of education more broadly; and how teachers navigate policies, including high-stakes testing and mandated curricula, in relation to prevalent language ideologies. In this section of my literature review, I explore teachers’ agency and the ideological constraints placed upon them. This collection of studies demonstrates that the relationship between individual power and structural/institutional power is complex, both theoretically and for the teachers who must navigate a heterogenous ideological landscape.

**Teachers’ agency**

Some scholars have emphasized teachers’ agency within their own classrooms even as hegemonic language ideologies operate at the policy level (and beyond); my analysis in Chapter 5 attempts to hold this balance of agency versus structure. Studying the same school district as Henderson (2017), Fitzsimmons-Doolan et al. (2017) use a survey methodology on a broad sample of educators and find evidence for the complexity of the language ideologies held by individuals. The authors write, “Individuals’ language ideologies are… complex and inextricably linked to their interpretations of – and subsequent implementation of – language policies in their schools and classrooms” (p. 717). A combination of Likert-style and free-response questions was essential for this study because, while teachers’ responses to the Likert questions alone would have indicated near universal support for an ideology of “languages other than English as endowments,” many educators’ written answers complicated this perspective. In particular,
because the DLBE program was being implemented “top-down” from the school district, many teachers indicated feelings of conflictedness about the fit of the model for their students. These expressions illuminate their beliefs about and judgements of students’ abilities and needs, often in ways that, the authors write, may shape the practical implementation of the DLBE program.

Also considering the roles of educators in shaping language policies and practices at the classroom level, Kinsella (2018) explores the confusion and tensions surrounding the bilingual program at a New Jersey elementary school. Due in part to limited availability of certified ESL teachers, the school used a combination of a limited number of designated bilingual classrooms and, for the most part, push-in support. Kinsella found that teachers and administrators at the school expressed disagreement about whether the school even had a “bilingual program” and whether that program was transitional in nature; they also consistently articulated deficit-based ideologies surrounding students’ home language. Describing the relationship between the teachers’ ideologies and the structure of the bilingual program, the author writes that, “...a language ideology that stigmatised the Latino students as incapable of producing spoken Spanish forms that correspond to standardised language practices... lent support to the practice of learning only in English even in the bilingual classrooms” (p. 34). While scholars have criticized approaches to social change that target the level of teacher beliefs (Lewis, 2018), Kinsella argues that, ultimately, the relationship between ideology and de facto class- and school-level policy calls into question the ability of an “explicit language policy, per se” (p. 34) to effect counter-hegemonic change in the classroom. Foundational ideological work, as well as work that connects ideology to practice, is needed.
**Using agency to further constraining ideologies**

Under some analyses, “...language ideologies can shape practices, but these practices also provide opportunities for individuals to articulate, contest, negotiate, and reify these ideologies (Wortham, 2001)” (Pacheco et al., 2019). That is, teachers may be constrained by the ideologies operating in policy, but can also engage in a variety of actions on those ideologies, including reinforcing them. One place this can occur is when teachers are required to use certain curricula. This may look like a requirement to use a particular reading list or textbook, or more specific requirements for types of lessons and content. Sometimes, curricular models down to the lesson plan are not explicitly required, but other pressures- from the training that teachers receive to their ultimate deference to high-stakes tests- drive the use of curricula.

(Racio)linguistic ideologies do not occur in isolation; examining the ways standards, tests, and books are written can thus provide a framework to explore and understand what occurs in classrooms both ideologically and practically. For instance, the inclusion of direct grammar in standardized tests appears to have correlated with “renewed interest in the explicit teaching of grammar” (Godley et al., 2007); Godley et al. find that the classroom teacher in their study “was often reminded by [school staff and administrators] that any activity that she used in class had to align with the state standards and, more importantly, with those standards and skills that would appear on the state assessments” (p. 112). The authors’ analysis emphasizes that the state standards, standardized assessments, and grammar instruction practice from a textbook all reflected ideologies of a single correct English language; this ideology was “reinforced” by patterns of classroom discourse that “positioned [the teacher] as the only authority in the class on appropriate language use” (p. 116), an identity of power that bears resemblance to some of the self-understandings described in Chapter 5.
Offering another example of curricula mandated by school administrations whose ideologies teachers then reinforce, Daniels (2018) utilizes Participatory Action Research (PAR) to examine the experiences of White teachers who were required by their departments to teach students of color to code-switch. The teachers stated that such instruction was “basically considered a standard” or that they “absolutely have to teach code-switching” (p. 166). Although the four teachers in the study expressed deep discomfort with teaching code-switching, particularly given their identities as White women, Daniels found that all continued to engage in the practice, even as they comfortably transgressed other rules and directives from administrators. Thus, the pressure from others in the school did not seem to account for the teachers’ willingness to teach code-switching into “Standard,” “formal,” or “academic” English; rather, such pressure was cited as an additional justification for this practice as teachers also described their students of color as “needing” to know how to code-switch. Ultimately, as Daniels shared her ongoing analysis with the teacher participants, they recognized the ways in which their ideologies surrounding code-switching were “tethered to Whiteness” (p. 169) in ways that were informed, but not dictated, by school policies and pressures. The teachers in this thesis had similar awareness of the tensions inherent in teaching code-switching, feeling pressured from many sides to continue to engage in this practice even as they questioned it (Chapter 5).

Similarly exploring both constraint and agency in reinforcing ideology or making other moves, Henderson (2017) analyses teachers as language policymakers. Henderson shows how “educator language ideologies and context work together in complex ways to mediate teacher decision-making and the construction of classroom language policy” (p. 31). The author situates their study at a school district undergoing a shift to a DLBE program that the author describes as
counter-hegemonic in its valuing of students’ home language, Spanish, but perhaps less so in its enforcement of strict separation between English and Spanish. The language ideologies of the two teachers in the study- one in favor of and the other less invested in code-switching- mediated how closely they attempted to follow this separation encouraged by the official DLBE program; as a result, their de facto classroom language policies differed. This phenomenon resonates with some comments from my interviewees, who attempted to manage conversations about language in ways that aligned with their values and understandings. Though Henderson (2017) demonstrated teacher’s agency as policymakers within their own classrooms, the author’s analysis also found significant limits on teacher agency. Beyond their own ideologies, both teachers in Henderson’s study were constrained by concerns about language policies at the school level: “[the] transitional language ideology [at each school] restricted each teacher’s agency to implement an additive bilingual program, as they had to take into consideration their school’s broader structures of transition and English dominance” (p. 31). Classroom language policy, school and district policy, and teacher ideology shaped each other in ways that were complex and highly salient to the experiences of the students and teachers in the classrooms.

**Ideological constraints**

While some studies discuss how teachers agentically counter or reinforce the language ideologies present in policy, others focus more exclusively on the constraints placed on teachers. In particular, scholars have illustrated how school and program structures influence teachers’ language ideologies. In *Immigrant Spanish as Liability or Asset? Generational Diversity in Language Ideologies at School* (2014), Allard et al. contrast two schools- one elementary and one high school- to illuminate how demographics and bilingual support relate to the language ideologies circulating at each school. At the racially diverse high school in the study, students
designated as ELLs made up a relatively small proportion of the student population and were segregated from the rest of the students in contained classrooms, with little contact with students in English-medium classes. This contrasted with the structure at the study’s elementary school, where a larger percentage of students were designated as ELLs but where bilingual support was primarily rendered through pull-out programming. The authors found that the elementary teachers articulated ideologies of Spanish as an asset to students’ futures. Few of the teachers spoke Spanish, so they were unable to pass judgements on their students’ fluency in the language. Meanwhile, the high school teachers articulated ideologies of Spanish as a liability or disability, with many educators drawing connections between the ESL program and the structure of special education programs, and describing students’ Spanish as informal or non-academic. The way that support was rendered to bilingual students at each school, in part because of the school demographics, was closely intertwined with the ideologies that teachers expressed about their students’ language use. This shows the importance of considering both student and teacher demographics, as well as school programs and policy, when analyzing language ideologies.

Particularly for educators who are committed to antiracism, such as those in this thesis, their individual ideologies- as contradictory as they may be- can come into even starker conflict with the ideologies circulating at school sites. Examining this situation, Pacheco et al. (2019) turn their attention to the experiences of pre-service teachers in student-teaching placements. The PSTs in Pacheco et al.’s study are undergraduates majoring in bilingual education; the study participants expressed favorable attitudes towards translanguaging, positioning this approach “as a bridge for connecting languages, a scaffold for participation, and a sign of students’ linguistic expertise and understandings of content” (p. 194). In addition, while the PSTs’ experiences with their cooperating teachers (CTs) varied, many study participants indicated that, in watching their
CTs, they learned that translanguaging was “transgressive of local classroom norms and language policies” (p. 204). Although the PSTs continued to value translanguaging, the authors note that the fact that participants learned to see the practice as transgressive may limit the transformative potential of translanguaging: incoming teachers may accept translanguaging as something to get away with or do when necessary, but not as a way to fundamentally restructure their classroom language policies/practices towards counterhegemonic goals. The authors point to a need for PSTs to be supported in their coursework to navigate the challenging dynamics and instructional moments that may occur during student-teaching, particularly with regards to language ideological tensions. This is a point to which I will return in Chapters 5 and 6.
Chapter 4: Methods

This qualitative study draws on interviews with in-service teachers. In this chapter, I discuss my research questions and their development, data collection, data analysis, and researcher positionality.

Research questions

Design of interview questions, participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis were conducted with consideration of the most effective approaches for answering the research questions (RQs):

1) How do White teachers of students of color understand race, language, and their own role as raced people teaching language?
2) How do they act on these understandings?

Originally, RQ2 was phrased somewhat differently, as “How do these understandings manifest in the classroom?” This question evolved for two reasons. One is that the original research proposal included classroom observations, which would have been an appropriate data source for this earlier version of the question but whose lack- due to COVID-19 restrictions, discussed below- would have made answering it challenging. Another reason for the change in question phrasing is that the original question removes the teacher as agent, suggesting that teachers’ understandings naturally “manifest” *themselves* rather than being specifically acted upon, whether consciously or unconsciously. Given my analytic attention to the teachers’ discursive moves of positioning and identity negotiation, it was more accurate- and more respectful of
teachers as active agents- to center their own processes of translating understanding and ideology into classroom practice.

Data Collection

Teacher Recruitment

Following project approval by the Educational Studies Department’s Institutional Review Board process, participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Professors and staff members in the Department of Educational Studies at Swarthmore College contacted current teachers they knew who matched the inclusion criteria. In addition, faculty and staff members provided me with lists of teachers to contact. In the recruitment materials sent to potential participants, I emphasized the interviews and classroom observations as an opportunity for reflection on teachers’ practices. Original inclusion criteria indicated that I was seeking:

1) White K-8 teachers of predominantly students of color;

2) working in a private school, charter school, or other non-public education program; and

3) teaching summer school in 2021

who were willing:

4) to be interviewed two to four times, and

5) to have their classroom (zoom or in person, as restrictions allow) observed and audio-recorded for up to six hours per week, or up to eighteen hours total.
As it became clear that the data collection in point 5 would not be possible because of logistical and pandemic-related difficulties, some of the other inclusion criteria shifted. Point 2 had been chosen due to anticipated challenges with getting classroom observations approved by the school district of the major city most participants taught in. Point 3 had been included because data collection occurred during the summer. These two inclusion criteria were dropped in later emails to teachers. In addition, point 4 specified two-four interviews with the goal of interviewing teachers before, during, and after classroom data collection; when observations did not occur, participants were interviewed only once.

Once interested teachers emailed me, I gave them the opportunity to ask questions, provided the interview consent form, and inquired as to their availability for an interview, described in more detail below.

The Teachers

The five participating teachers currently teach kindergarten through eighth grade in the city and suburbs of a large urban center on the east coast. None of the teachers were new to the field; they had between seven and 16 years of classroom experience. The teachers were all White teachers whose students were majority African American/Black, Latinx, or Asian/Asian American. Many students spoke languages and language varieties other than Standard English at home.

Interview Procedures

I followed a semi-structured interview protocol in order to flexibly gather data that would both address my research questions and attend to what the teachers felt was important to share.

7 To protect the anonymity of the teachers, individual descriptions will not be provided here; instead, only relevant characteristics of the teachers and their schools will be provided in Chapter 5.
This meant that I entered each interview with a set of 22 questions, some including sub-questions and further prompts to employ depending on the interviewee’s responses. These interview questions were developed with the assistance of my advisors, after conducting my literature review on language ideologies and considering the types of questions that would best elicit answers to research questions.

In particular, there were two related elements of the interview protocol that encouraged interviewees to tell anecdotes and “small stories” (Taylor et al., 2018; Razfar, 2012). As can be seen in Appendix A, interview participants were informed at the beginning of the interview that sharing anecdotes and other small stories was encouraged. In addition, several of the interview questions that most clearly related to research questions used the phrasing *Can you tell me about a time when…?* in order to elicit talk of specific moments or stories. I employed this focus for two reasons. One is that, because I was not able to conduct classroom observations, it became even more important to have data speaking to actual classroom practices and interactions. Furthermore, given the complex and often contradictory nature of language ideologies, narratives and “small stories” have particular power to convey ideological nuance, the multiplicity of subject positions available to teachers in the classroom, and the tensions present in language ideological dilemmas (Taylor et al., 2018; McBee Orzulak, 2015).

Interviews were conducted over Zoom and lasted 1-1.75 hours. At times, there were brief interruptions from the participants’ environment, my own environment, or technical difficulties, but there were no major challenges to this format. As I became more comfortable conducting the interviews, I made minor adjustments to my interview questions and added some that were more explicit about race, since this did not seem to be emerging as organically from my original questions as I had hoped it would.
**Data Analysis**

Conducting the interviews over Zoom offered several affordances, including the automatic generation of transcripts. Immediately following each interview, I edited the transcripts while re-watching the taped interviews in order to capture details such as air quotes or iconic gestures. Video files were subsequently deleted to protect participant privacy. Editing of the transcripts also included identifying speakers, adding punctuation, correcting mis-transcribed words, and removing most fillers (with the exceptions of the phrases *You know/You know what I mean?, Right?,* and some instances of *Uh/Um* used in situations of dilemma or uncertainty).

Once all interviews were conducted and their transcripts were edited, I began an initial round of data analysis via open coding. That is, at first, I employed a “maximalist” approach, including tagging multiple words and phrases within each sentence with as many relevant categories as possible. After working through two and a half interviews in this manner, I felt ready to take a different, more structured approach that would bear greater attention to my research questions and would mark similarly broad levels of detail. For example, when coding the first two and a half interviews, codes included tags such as “curriculum” and “teacher hometown,” which vary significantly in their specificity. When conducting the first round of analysis of the latter two and a half interviews, in contrast, I used a list of approximately twenty codes that were more consistently specific (eg. “teacher’s characterizations of students” and “teacher’s beliefs about school”).

After this initial round of coding, I was beginning to notice concepts that seemed to recur and to group them together into related categories. In addition, I began to more carefully consider the ways in which my theoretical frames and methodological lenses could be mobilized to address my research questions. While being mindful of “cherry-picking” data to craft an
inaccurate narrative out of the interviews, I entered the second round of coding with a focus on process rather than practice. I generally considered practices to be rigid sets of steps- answering “what” questions- as compared to flowchart-style processes- answering “how” questions. How did the teachers talk about language, race, and self? How and when did tensions manifest for them, and how did they respond- both in the interviews and in the classroom- to these tensions? How did the teachers invoke or relate to discourses including, but not limited to, those in my literature review?

Although, in writing my analysis, I ultimately did need to describe a clear what of teachers’ understandings, tensions, and strategies; utilizing the second round of coding to focus on the how allowed me to maintain openness to the complex dynamics of agency within systems. This is because, rather than simply “finding” an established set of practices or ideas, I was able to consider the variety of moves available to the teachers and seek to understand their processes of making the moves they did. I sought to understand the teachers’ choices and innovations within a constrained set of actions. In practical terms, this approach to coding included noting combinations of round-one tags that relatedly strongly to research questions, focusing on the teachers’ social actions and claims to/rejections of certain identities, and remaining open to other emergent themes.

After this second round of coding, I began a third with an eye towards identifying specific small stories, quotes, and interview moments that embodied the themes I had identified. During this round of coding, I was challenged to remember that the interviews were both propositional and interactional. Occasionally, some of the teachers’ statements seemed to contradict each other, reminding me not to take them at face value, but to consider what the teachers’ propositions were doing within the interview context and beyond (Gee, 2014). In doing
so, I drew on some of the ideas of discourse analysis outlined in Chapter 2. In addition, I
maintained a document in which I tracked notable turns-of-phrase, invocations of other
discourses, and other language choices.

**Researcher Positionality**

In qualitative research, it is understood that a researcher’s identities and experiences
impact every stage of their work, from formulation of research questions to data collection and
analysis. Making positionality explicit can aid readers in understanding the research study and
the ways in which the researcher’s social locations are integral to it. To this aim, the present
section explores my positionality and why and how it has impacted this thesis.

I am a White, middle-class, trans person. I have been socialized into White supremacy,
beginning with my upbringing in a gentrifying neighborhood of Oakland, California.
Individually and in relationship with friends, colleagues, and mentors, I have been working to
unlearn and relearn what my Whiteness means and how I need to navigate the world to be not an
ally to, but a co-conspirator with people of color (Love, 2020). As Bree Picower writes, “White
people don’t have the answers [to racism]” (2021, p. 14); thus, we must seek to be accountable to
and learn from people of color, without expecting them to educate us. Furthermore, it is
important to note that my other more marginalized identities do not erase my Whiteness or the
ways I benefit from White supremacy, even as they complicate my experiences with privilege
and power.

In addition to the demographics discussed in the introduction to this thesis, my own racial
identity is a critical part of what drew me to work with White teachers. I am wary of the dynamic
of White researchers “studying” and critiquing (the work of) teachers of color, particularly given
the histories and actualities of objectification and harm in education research (Picower, 2021, p.
Beyond this, however, I believe that there is great positive potential in self- and reciprocally-critical White people working together to explore the workings of Whiteness in education. As a researcher, I have a shared experience of racial socialization with my interviewees; this provides me with a lens that is both empathetic to the teachers’ experiences and struggles, and attentive to their agency and opportunities for growth.

In addition to shaping how I approached questions of agency and accountability, my Whiteness likely had a significant impact on the dynamics and content of my interviews. The five teachers were highly forthcoming, including about their emotional experiences and dilemmas. It is likely that they would have shared different (though not necessarily less) information had their interviewer been a person of color. My status as a racial insider allowed us to establish rapport relatively easily, and the teachers may have anticipated that I would have a more forgiving disposition towards them than would a non-White interviewer. This was especially important because the teachers’ emotional experiences (of discomfort, etc.) emerged as crucial to my analysis.

Though race stands out as especially important because of this project’s focus, other identities also had significant bearing on my work. For instance, given my personal experiences, I noticed and was intrigued by one teacher’s description of trauma- both her own, as a result of teaching in a difficult context, and that of her students, who were newcomers to the United States. As an example of a more limiting identity, because I have never been a classroom teacher, I was likely oblivious to many nuances of that experience- nuances that a researcher who had been a teacher would have taken into account when designing research questions, engaging with interviewees directly, and analyzing their data. While my positionality is not a methodological
limitation per se, it has certainly shaped this thesis in significant ways, and a researcher of
different identities would have produced an entirely different project.
Chapter 5: Analysis

The base: understandings of language, race, and self.

This section begins to answer research question 1:

How do White teachers of students of color understand race, language, and their own role as raced people teaching language?

Some of the understandings presented in this section were shared by many or all of the teachers; others were articulated only by one or two, but served as important underlying assumptions for the dilemmas and tension-navigating strategies described in the following two sections.

Importantly, none of these understandings are necessarily “wrong,” problematic, or even factually inaccurate; indeed, many linguists, psychologists, and other social scientists would likely agree with the teachers’ characterizations of language, race, and their own roles as educators. Thus, rather than attempting to show that there is something flawed about the ways the teachers understand the world, I am presenting these understandings with the goal of showing how their particular combinations lead to deep, enduring raciolinguistic tensions that the teachers must navigate both personally and pedagogically.

Language, language/race, and curriculum

The teachers in this thesis all taught literacy, language arts, or English in some capacity. Several interview questions sought to encourage the teachers to describe how they conceive of language and the relationship between language and race; teachers’ understandings of curriculum- what makes a good one?- also emerged as significant for their language pedagogies. In the sections that follow, I examine conceptualizations of language as possessable; the idea that there are many “ways with words,” including ways that are tightly intertwined with social
identities; that “academic” language is a single way with words that students must learn; and that
good curricula should reflect the “real world.”

**Language as possessable.**

Two of the teachers, Kate and Marielle, described language as something that one can
“have.” This characterization of language is a prime example of one that many linguists would
not disagree with, at least in some contexts: “language acquisition,” which may call to mind
images of material accumulation, is a robust field of scholarship, even as other scholars take an
approach that emphasizes *doing* language rather than *having* it. So, while there is nothing
inherently problematic about framing language as possessable, as when speaking of students who
“do not have enough [English] language” to negotiate classroom norms (Marielle) or who
“lacked this academic speaking” (Kate), this understanding of language is not without
consequence. For instance, it is perhaps more amenable to deficit frames—emphasizing that
students do not *have enough*—as compared to understanding language as an activity. As will be
seen below, teachers must grapple with their own roles when operating within a framework that
suggests that their students’ language is deficient.

**Many ways with words.**

In her pioneering work on literacy as social practice, Heath (1983) describes various *ways
with words* that young children engage as they develop practices of reading, writing, and
speaking. Heath’s work emphasizes that literacy does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is always
connected with identity and social practices that are culturally relevant, and the audience of and
context of literacy events are of high importance. Here, I adopt the term *ways with words* to
examine how the teachers understand sets of language practices as being related to identity,
community, and culture; although these connections address language as a social practice, they
are not incompatible with an understanding of language as possessable, as described in the previous section. The teachers described language as varying according to country of origin and culture (Kate), race (Kate, Sean, and Will), age (Sean, Marielle, and Will), geographic area within the United States (Will), and disability or neurotype (Samantha). Will also noted the relationship between these identity factors and power, citing his teacher mentor as describing some language practices as the “language of power,” a term used by Delpit (1988).

Notably, all of the teachers drew connections between identity-connected language, on the one hand, and affect/emotion and student “voice” on the other. This understanding of language emerged in varied and, at times, almost poetic ways. For instance, Kate noted that a language variety like “African American Vernacular” might feel “really comfortable… really like a homey place for you [as a Black and African American person]”; Marielle suggested that some language practices might reflect a student’s “authentic self,” introducing a theme of authenticity to which I will return below.

Characterizing language as related to (racial) identity and “voice” also quickly turned towards discussion of the impacts of attempting to change students’ language practices. Three of the teachers invoked descriptions of erasure as they spoke of their attempts to “have the students’ voices front and center in everything” (Will), or to have “kids speaking... and kids owning the space of the world- not owning, but using the space of their own classroom to help them figure out what they want to learn” (Kate). Sean, in a strong condemnation of “code-switching,” which will be explored in depth as a raciolinguistic dilemma below, cautioned that enforcing code-switching as a “norm” could “erase [a student’s] voice completely.” Even when they did not mention race specifically in their trepidations about shaping students’ language- a move of omission I understand to be a discursive strategy for navigating raciolinguistic tension, as
discussed below- the teachers had notable concerns about code-switching and its consequences for students’ personal experiences in the classroom.

“Academic” language as a way with words.

If there are multiple ways with words, how did the teachers think about the language practices towards which to guide their students? One descriptor that proliferated in the interviews was “academic language,” which Kate described as a single “way”- indeed, the way to engage with peers in a school context. Few teachers described with much precision what this type of language actually involved, but implicit characterizations of what it is not abounded across the interviews. More than one of the teachers drew a distinction between academic language and social language, a separation that resonates with discourses of appropriateness that legitimate teaching code-switching (eg. Godley et al., 2007; Fitzsimmons-Doolan, et al., 2017): Kate, critiquing her current curriculum, characterized academic language as different from “fun,” “joyous,” “expressive,” and “communicative” uses of language. Marielle similarly separated “authentically social” language from an academic way with words; Sean simply stated that the latter form was different from “the way the students talk,” a separation that resonates with Flores and Rosa’s analysis of the white listening subject necessarily hearing the speech of non-White students as non-academic (2015).

Reflecting a dynamic that has been explored by other scholars of race and language (eg. Godley et al., 2007), “the state” began to emerge as an important power in defining “academic” language. While I will elaborate on the tensions this created in section 2 of this chapter, it is worth noting here that the teachers were hyper-aware of the role and presence of the state as an arbiter of academic language. References to state testing, as well as testing of emergent bilingual and special education students, were common across the interviews. Will noted that the use of
certain “rules” and “conventions” would be assessed on standardized tests, and Sean described the state as “judging” and “penalizing” students’ writing if it did not conform to “academic” expectations.

Interestingly, several of the teachers whose students are primarily non-Black people of color expressed the belief that explicit conversations about academic language did not occur, or occurred only minimally, at their schools because of this student demographic. While noting that “in other school settings, there might be a lot of that around Standard American English, talking in a specific way,” Kate said, “That isn't much of a thing at my school. We don't have a lot of conversations about that.” Kate’s comment seems to align with other teachers’ understanding that problematizing academic language is primarily a Black (not even Black and White) issue, separate from, say, bilingual education. Significant academic scholarship, in contrast, explores language ideologies in precisely the field of bilingual education, and Flores and Rosa’s raciolinguistic perspective deliberately attends to the experiences of emergent bilingual students alongside others whose language is racialized as non-White.

The teachers’ references to the state as an entity with almost omnipresent, standard-defining power are helpful context for a related assumption about language: that academic language is something that students must be taught. Embedded in this belief are the assumptions that this way with words isn’t something that students would already know, that is something they can be taught, and that it is important for them to know; this last component may be undergirded by the broader pedagogical belief that school work should reflect, or at least be applicable to, the “real” world, where academic language is the “language of power” (Delpit, 1988).
That academic- or even Standard-English is required for success beyond high school is contentious. There is evidence that discrimination based on language and dialect is real (Baugh, 2003). Decades of code-switching- and contrastive analysis-focused language pedagogies for language minoritized students have been fueled by assumptions about this discrimination-including that there is a straightforward, causal relationship between language variety and racism experienced (i.e. that a language variety provokes negative stereotypes or racism, which leads to discrimination). However, Flores & Rosa, as well as other scholars with an explicitly raciolinguistic orientation, are critical of the notion that it is language variety or style per se ("objective linguistic practices," p.150) that causes such discrimination (2015). They instead argue that the "eyes and ears of whiteness" (p. 151), the white listening subject, will always hear racialized speakers as accented and linguistically deficient. Thus, learning "Standard" "academic" English may be less important than teachers anticipate in supporting students’ future success. While a full evaluation of empirical literature on this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis, I note the scholarly discussion here as a way to problematize the teachers’ assumption of the importance of learning Standard English.

Helpful curriculum and instruction.

In addition to the above understandings of language and language/race, some assumptions about what constitutes helpful, good curriculum and instruction emerged as important foundations for the teachers’ practices regarding language. Both Will and Marielle expressed the belief that curriculum should reflect, or at least be applicable to, “the real world.” For Will, this concern emerged in a focus on students’ “voice” and the centering of social issues that interested students in the curriculum. Marielle, meanwhile, was attentive to the complex roles of students’ past experiences and present communities in shaping the learning that would
feel meaningful to them. This understanding of curriculum interacts in significant ways with the teachers’ beliefs about the type of language that society would expect of students. That is, if schoolwork should reflect the “real world” and the “real world” is one of Standard or academic English, it is a logical inference that schoolwork should also be geared toward this “mythical” (Lippi-Green, 2011) language. Although the teachers may not have followed this precise sequence of assumptions, and some were quick to question the neutrality of the idea of the “real world,” these understandings have the potential to form a critical web underlying classroom language practices.

A final understanding of (language) curriculum that has important implications was expressed by Marielle. Marielle described a particular type of grammar instruction for her emergent bilingual middle school students—“grammary kind of sentence structure practice. Change the, change the word that's wrong, kind of stuff like that. Make the contraction”—as both “garbage” and “helpful.” Though she did not elaborate on why she feels this type of practice is “garbage,” the teacher showed a complex understanding of her curriculum that resonates with a significant theme of raciolinguistic scholarship: tension and dilemma. At least in Marielle’s own understanding, curriculum has the potential to be simultaneously good and bad, meeting some needs and not others; it can be accepted and utilized while also being recognized as refuse.

**Self**

This section explores the multiple and sometimes contradictory understandings of self that the teachers articulated. In contrast to the section on strategies, below, which explores some of the discursive moves the teachers made as they negotiated identities during their interviews, this section relies more on the content of the teachers’ descriptions of themselves. Still, I do not take the teachers’ stated identities at face value, as I understand their invocations of certain
identities during the interviews to be indicative of what felt socially significant to them when speaking with me. These understandings of self as 1) powerful, 2) visibly different from students and their families, and 3) in the process of “unpacking” race/racism can be fluid; they surface based on what each teacher aims to do pedagogically and socially in any given classroom or interview moment.

**Self as powerful.**

Four of the teachers described themselves as holding power in relation to their students and students’ families. They brought up this power with varying degrees of explicitness. For instance, Kate suggested that parents might feel “nervous” or “on edge” speaking with her because “there’s a race factor, there's... a socio-economic factor, there's, possibly... citizenship.” While Kate did not name this dynamic as one of a power differential, other teachers did, with Marielle calling it a “power dynamic.” Sean provided examples of when, because of White privilege, his own behavior might be judged less harshly than a Black child’s might; he also emphasized the power he held over young students as their “first everything. I’m their first male teacher... And then when I’m talking about topics, I'm usually their first… this is their gateway into it.” As he described it, this gave Sean the power to shape students’ understandings of not only content, such as when he introduced them to “Native Americans,” of whom they had never heard, but of the (gendered) racial dynamics they would face later in life:

> You don't want to be that White person, White... thing of authority, screaming at them. And I definitely had days where I came home from school and I feel like I screamed the entire day... every year I just tried to minimize it a little bit more, just try to have positive interactions because it's like, for a lot of kids, I'm the first man out of their... I might be the first man figure they've had, period. You don't know. And then I might be the first
White man they've encountered. So it’s like... When they think of White men for a while, you're going to be the template. So, I mean, I started to think about that responsibility, I think, as I got older.

Here, Sean grapples with not only his own understanding of himself, but with the experiences of him that he expects students will have, shaping their views of White men for years to come. For Sean, this seems to be a dynamic that is much broader than himself as an individual; it is a “responsibility” that carries “for a while” into the future. In addition, his use of the phrase “White… thing of authority” suggests an absorption of himself into a larger non-human specter of authority, a ghostly figure of Whiteness that will lurk in students’ lives even when Sean is no longer their teacher.

Another identity of power to which teachers related themselves was police, often explicitly rejecting this role. For instance, in describing the elements of language that she expected students to use during a Socratic seminar, Kate said, “if they did those three things, then don't police the other parts of the language.” Will also stated confidently, “I… am certainly no language police when students are talking and sharing.” Here, policing is what not to do. Still, this phrasing indicates that “language police” is a role that teachers could occupy- they have the power to do so. A similar understanding was expressed by Marielle, who said that “as a teacher, even if you're not White, you sometimes put on the policing aspect that these kids react so badly to.” This comment indicates that Marielle understands policing as more than a role or job held by individuals embodying Whiteness, White supremacy, or racism; it is a power-laden “aspect,” similar to Sean’s “thing of authority,” that may be adopted by teachers of any race. This understanding aligns with Flores and Rosa’s conceptualization of the white listening subject “not as a biographical individual but as an ideological position and mode of perception that shapes
our racialized society” (2015, p. 151). Out of a multiplicity of identities that teachers could adopt as they related to students around language, police was one that they consistently renounced.

One more related characterization of themselves as powerful appears in how the teacher described their relationship to “the state,” particularly as it manifested itself through testing. In particular, while the state was an important arbiter of academic language, the teachers mediated between the state and students, taking on some of the power of the former. For instance, Will described his pre-testing speech to students, telling them:

This is how you do one of these things [exams] and I'm going to tell you this just because this is what the state's looking for and literally, taking a test is like playing a game. This is how you play the game. And that's how you win the game.

In both explaining the state’s expectations and giving students specific instructions for “playing the game,” Will shows that he understands himself as able to offer this translation from state to students; he is a legitimate representative of the state’s message, even if he disagrees with it. Thus, while the teachers did not directly endorse the state’s perspective on academic language, their understanding of themselves as carrying some of the power of the state led them to work with this perspective in nuanced ways.

**Self as visibly different from students and families.**

As part of their understanding of their own Whiteness, several of the teachers showed an understanding of themselves as visibly different from their students and students’ families, including in ways that indexed linguistic difference. At times, this visible difference seemed to be something the teachers found awkward or uncomfortable, but they also used their students’ responses to their White selves to gain more information about students’/families’ experiences.
Kate described the reactions of her students’ families when they saw that she was a White teacher, unlike some other teachers at the school:

...a lot of our families will come in and they, you know, you see certain people and you're like, ‘Ah’ I mean, they just start speaking Spanish and stuff and it's like, [beckoning hand gesture] ‘Ah, thank God! You! Come here!’ And then I'm like, they look at me, and they’re like, [pause] ‘Hello.’ [awkward facial expression] I’m like, ‘You don't have to switch!’

In this excerpt, Kate identifies how her Spanish-speaking students’ families respond to her with less comfort than they might to someone they perceived to be Latinx. In understanding the parents’ response, Kate also understands herself as being visibly different from them, even if she wishes that they recognized she spoke Spanish. Marielle developed a similar understanding of herself as visibly different from students when she found that some of her students’ parents were “super excited” that she was a monolingual White woman with blond hair, or when a young Black student told her that she was “light-skinned, not White.” Through interactions such as these, the teachers came to understand their phenotypic Whiteness as a salient identity when working with students and families of color. As they developed this understanding of self, several of the teachers embraced explicit acknowledgement of their visible difference: “students want authenticity from a teacher” (Sean). As will be discussed further below, however, “authenticity” takes many forms, and the teachers strategically moved visible racial identities in and out of the discourse as they tried to make sense of their own roles in students’ language learning.

The majority of instances in which teachers mentioned their race or spoke of being visibly different from students were cases in which I asked explicitly about not only the
relevance of race in teaching, but the teacher’s own race. As Marielle noted, “When you're White, people don't often ask you to describe yourself”; Whiteness is constructed as the default, neutral, a race without a race. White people are socialized to view themselves as “normal” in contrast to a racialized “Other.” (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). This was something that several of the teachers discussed clearly when I asked about it directly: “I didn't really think about urban education at all, which shows you the White area I came from. Of course you don't think about it. Because it's, it's... I guess it's a privilege not to” (Sean).

Others indicated that, while they might not necessarily have lacked this understanding entirely, an ideology of Whiteness as default was difficult to shake. For instance, Will referred to race as an “important... factor… for so many students,” a characterization that appears to neglect the ways that race shapes the experience of all people, not just some [racialized] students. In addition, when not asked about race directly, some of the teachers showed an understanding of themselves as a teacher above all or just a teacher- a teacher identity that was absent of other identity markers, including race. Marielle described this archetype as “the apples-on-skirts people” who denied that education is political, with other teachers invoking this self-understanding at times during their interviews.

**Self as in the process of “unpacking” race/racism.**

As they discussed situations in which race and other identities felt salient, the teachers described themselves as having engaged in what is often colloquially called “unpacking” of their own understandings of race/racism. That is, they understood themselves as having done some of the personal work of antiracism and, often, needing to continue doing that work. Kate described this process as occurring simultaneously with needing to “correct” “racist things that come up” with students: “I'm working to unpack my own understandings of race, and talking about race
issues, and correcting my own family.” For some of the teachers, this started with tender realizations that they were afraid of being called “racist” (Sean) or of teaching about topics like slavery (Sean and Samantha). Several of the teachers were participants in an organization that helps White educators develop antiracist classroom practices, including one teacher who had been involved in the leadership of the organization; two other teachers, including Sean, were committed to teaching the Black Lives Matter Week of Action even when faced with pushback from school administrators. Indeed, lack of administrative support for deeper antiracism work—beyond popular “book studies,” in which school faculty all read and discuss a book together—was a pervasive theme. This both posed and fueled pedagogical and logistical tensions to which we will return below.

Self-understandings as in a process of “unpacking” racial issues were not static for any of the educators, including those who were experienced with antiracism work. This is consistent with models of racial identity development as an iterative process of stages that an individual may cycle through when confronted with racially challenging experiences (Michael, 2017). Samantha noted that returning to antiracist work was challenging after taking a break for personal reasons: “I'm feeling like everyone has grown in a way that I haven't, in just their ability to talk about things and antiracist work as White people.” Marielle, who described herself as “antiracist” in multiple instances during the interview, also stressed the continual nature of “unlearning”: “There's so much garbage, even that I have to unlearn constantly.” Amidst this understanding of herself and her own antiracist process, Marielle also grappled with a specific identity towards which she felt pushed by external forces: the White savior. She said:

It's so easy for me to try to be the savior, the White savior teacher. So much in culture, in teaching stuff, pushes me toward that narrative. [dramatically] ‘I teach kids who are
learning English. I teach refugee students. I am amazing.’ Right, there is so much that
wants me to be like that. And it is so easy to be like that. But at this school they don’t let
you be like that. And I’m so glad.

Marielle here stresses the importance of a school community that supports antiracism and
explicitly rejects a White savior mentality; in other anecdotes she shared, she expressed gratitude
for colleagues of color whose assistance helped her “realize that I ain’t no savior.” Not all
teachers experienced their school communities as rejecting White saviorship, however. Though
she did not use this term explicitly, Kate described a mentality that she felt was pervasive among
colleagues: “poor baby syndrome,” in which teachers infantilized students and did not hold them
to high standards because of their newly emerging bilingualism or immigrant identity. Kate’s
explanation of this “syndrome” focused on students rather than teachers, including through the
use of passive voice- “There's a lot of excuses being made…” Although Kate rejects the “poor
baby syndrome” that may be associated with teachers seeing themselves as saving “poor babies”
by giving them English (see section on language as possessable), she also de-agentifies this
savior subject position. In rejecting this role, Kate, similarly to Marielle, shows an implicit
understanding of herself as not a White savior.

The tensions

This section explores some of the tensions and dilemmas the teachers experienced as a
result of complex and conflicting understandings of language, race, and their own selves. In
addition, I explore the roles played by broader discourses, such as that of the “appropriateness”
for school of racialized language practices, and the pedagogical and contextual factors that
contributed to these tensions. As I conducted the interviews and became more adept at guiding
the conversations, I was struck by the frequency with which the teachers said simply, “I don’t
know,” a phrase with 134 tokens across the interviews. They became visibly or audibly upset on occasion. The teachers were explicitly conscious of many of the tensions described below, and their deep care for their students was evident as they spoke of classroom dilemmas. At the same time, the teachers were acutely aware that caring did not preclude them from perpetrating harm. Many issues and situations were simply “hard” (Sean), or, as Marielle put it, “You're climbing a mountain and you're wearing flip flops.”

In the next two sections, I explore raciolinguistic tensions that emerge from teachers' understandings of language, race, and themselves; as well as pedagogical and logistical tensions that compound the raciolinguistic ones. Across these tensions, we see how concerns about the nature of academic language- and what makes it supposedly appropriate for school- come into conflict with teachers’ understandings of what students must learn, both for standardized tests and for post-K-12 life.

**Raciolinguistic tensions**

What language is considered “academic”? I did not ask this question explicitly, instead attempting to allow it to emerge more organically in the contexts that felt relevant to the teachers; as a result, they addressed it with varied levels of directness. Some mentioned it briefly and then moved on, as if attempting to avoid opening a can of worms; others were quick to introduce issues of power and race as they pondered it. Even those who spent less time directly speaking of this issue acknowledged its loadedness:

[The rubrics assess] that very academic way of speaking, which again is… there’s good sides and bad sides because again... I do know that, that then it can kind of lead down this problematic slippery slope of what, what is- what is considered academic language?

What is considered academic speech? (Kate)
Here, even though Kate does not attempt to answer her own question, she recognizes the issue as “problematic” and appears to struggle with it, re-starting her question three times. Other teachers shared this difficulty, including when they were more direct in answering Kate’s question. Will characterized academic language in various ways during his interview, at some points using a teacher mentor’s phrase “language of power” and at other times providing his own descriptors, saying that class discussions about language variation were

Largely connected to this idea of… the language of power that that teacher had kind of shared is that, you know, this is what society, American society, White dominant American society expects… We discuss how this [unspecified language practice] often counts as not valued and oftentimes not a part of the- not really dominant culture, but the way in which we conduct many aspects of our lives and education today.

Understandably, it seems difficult for Will to precisely articulate the relationship between race, power, and language. The seat of the white listening subject is “society, American society, White dominant American society,” but also “not really dominant culture”; it involves an unspecified, de-raced or race-neutral- and thus, presumably, White- “we.”

Other teachers also centered race in their explorations of academic language: “The students, unfortunately, do have to adapt their writing. I don't know how you'd say it. They, you… they do, unfortunately, have to adapt it to write more White, I guess” (Sean). Showing a similar attitude as those teachers who expressed discomfort with “code-switching,” Marielle stated definitively, “Yes, it's racist for someone to expect you to conform your language to a White standard.” However, her comment led into another central raciolinguistic tension, namely, the perceived necessity of teaching this “White” way with words.
For teachers, there is tension in simultaneously understanding academic language as necessary for students to learn; helpful curriculum as that which reflects the “real world”; and themselves as powerful White people representing the state\(^8\) in some way. Indeed, it was in reference to state testing and power that the teachers most frequently raised the dilemma of both recognizing the racism of requiring students to “conform” their language “to a White standard,” and teaching them to do so, out of a belief in the necessity of this practice. For example, Marielle followed her statement above, with, “But… it's racist, and you want to get into a good high school.” This comment has striking similarity with the titular words of Daniel’s 2018 analysis, “There’s no way this isn’t racist”: White women teachers and the raciolinguistic ideologies of teaching code-switching. Like Marielle, the teachers in Daniels’ study were critically aware of the racism of requiring students to code-switch to Standard English, but were deeply concerned with helping students “ascend to a place in power” (p. 166) and continued to teach code-switching as a means to this end.

Other teachers also connected this tension directly to state testing: “There is a disconnect between the way the students talk and then the way that, say, the state will judge their writing… [on] like, the [state-specific standardized tests]” (Sean). Will also held his class discussions about language variation and the language practices of “White dominant American society” in the context of “that state test” and its “silly text-dependent analysis.” The teacher’s understandings of themselves as representatives of the state and mediators between the state and students contributed to the tension they felt and made it more personal. Conflict between what they knew to be racist and the expectations of the state became internalized and personalized into conflict between what they knew to be racist and themselves/their own teaching. Given this, it makes

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\(^8\) Here, I use “the state” to refer not to a literal governmental entity, such as “New York State,” but to a dispersed set of political and legal practices and institutions. Some teacher quotes utilize the former meaning.
sense that this tension felt so challenging to the teachers, as evidenced by their repeated “I don’t know”s.

**Pedagogical and school-level tensions**

In addition to the raciolinguistic tensions experienced by the teachers, other dilemmas regarding race and language emerged out of pedagogical and school-level challenges, including lack of instructional time, lack of language and skill necessary to address racial issues, competing demands for teacher professional development time, and restricted teacher autonomy. These pedagogical tensions can be understood as layering onto the raciolinguistic tensions described previously, compounding these deeper dilemmas with logistical challenges.

Even as the teachers recognized the complexity of racial issues, they experienced difficulty in finding sufficient instructional time to address race in the curriculum in meaningful ways. Though not specifically in connection to language and race, Kate provided an example of this difficulty: “Sometimes [students ask] questions like, ‘Oh, why are Black people all in prison?’ You know what I mean? [mind blown hand gesture]... Well, that's a super complex question, man! I can't answer that in the middle of math small group!” Samantha, a special education teacher, had similar difficulty with the quantity of instructional time. For her, this was compounded by the fact that, because of scheduling issues, some of her students who were “dual identified,” or recognized as both English Language Learners and students with disabilities, received instructional support for only one of those needs, rather than the two that they would typically receive.

Related to these time constraints were the teachers’ concerns about being able to explain racial issues, including those related to language, in linguistically and developmentally appropriate ways. Even when they knew “that young kids have a developed racial identity”
(Samantha) and thus did not need to be shielded from learning about race, it was difficult to approach racial issues in the curriculum. Sean, who was accustomed to working with the upper elementary grades, struggled to describe how he would teach about slavery to kindergardeners: “So I think it's... I would just tell, at least the younger kids... I don't know how you would approach it… I don't know how. I don't know how to approach it.” This uncertainty was particularly acute for those working with emergent bilingual students: “How do I explain this in my second language? How do I explain this to children?… And then sometimes it all comes to a head, and you have to decide in one moment!” (Kate).

This “moment,” which Will called “the instance when I'm teaching [when] there's 20,000 other things that are happening,” resonates with McBee Orzulak’s language ideological dilemmas (LIDs), instructional moments that are difficult to navigate for even the most linguistically-informed and well-intentioned teachers (McBee Orzulak, 2015). McBee Orzulak recommends that teacher education programs pay special attention to preparing pre-service teachers for these busy classroom moments, when their attention may be split between competing needs and ideas (2015). Indeed, lack of training and comfort was another commonly cited tension for the teachers I interviewed, who spoke of a need for “racial sensitivity trainings” as well as teachers to learn that so-called non-Standard language practices are “not wrong” (Sean).

The potential source(s) of this support and training stood out as another central tension. The teachers described a web of competing interests- including those of the teachers themselves, their fellow educators, students, parents/guardians, school administrators, and “the state”- that was difficult to navigate. One body of scholarship explores specific program structures, such as types of bilingual education programs, in relation to (racio)linguistic ideologies (eg. Allard et al.,
2014; Pacheco et al., 2019). Although some of the teachers I interviewed were ESL teachers, the structure of their bilingual education programs did not itself emerge as a significant factor bearing on issues of language race.

One factor that did relate to this, however, was the degree of autonomy that the teachers experienced in designing and implementing curricula. They noted that autonomy- as well as oversight- over curriculum varied significantly from year to year and school to school, for those who had taught at multiple sites. As a result, the teachers were not always able to teach language in the ways they thought were best. Describing a shift towards a less exploratory curriculum, Kate said, “I would say right now the shift that we're moving towards is not the kind of writing that I would love my students to do… It's just… this new curriculum.” Though she did not indicate the specific source of this change, other places in the interview- in addition to the other four interviews- indicated that school administrations and their relationships with parents were critical in shaping curriculum. Samantha spoke of the slow speed for approving new curricula, particularly those addressing race; citing administrators’ concerns about teachers’ competence in handling the material:

But they [administrators] are like, basically, then, when a teacher screws it up, then they have to field the calls from the parents. So, at least, they want to know that they tried to teach the teacher well. And I get that. So what’s the mechanism within the school system to help people learn how to teach things better…?

As several teachers described it, that “mechanism” did not clearly exist, and diverse pedagogical and political perspectives within the school community could make change even more difficult. The “politics of the school” (Samantha) could be both internally inconsistent and in opposition to external (eg. “state”) pressures, thus increasing the tension felt by the teachers.
The strategies

This section answers my second research question: How do the teachers act on their understandings of race, language, and their own role as raced people teaching language? Particular combinations of understandings of race, language, and self create deep raciolinguistic tensions for teachers. These tensions can be internal, in the form of discomfort or inner turmoil; however, the tensions also surface externally as teachers attempt to navigate challenging situations in the form of LIDs (McBee Orzulak, 2015). In this section, I explore the strategies teachers use as manifestations-in-action of their conflicting understandings.

I intentionally consider both pedagogical and discursive strategies to be actions. I also consider omission - of race or race labels, explicit classroom discussions, etc.- to be active strategies (Picower 2021). In popular usage, the word “strategy” has connotations of intentionality, or at least conscious awareness, of what one is doing. I do not necessarily use the word in this way, instead distinguishing “strategies” from “understandings” as things that teachers do rather than believe. Because I understand ideology to often operate at a level below conscious (ie. articulable) awareness, I do not think that resolution of ideological dilemmas is something that must occur on a conscious level. However, solely considering ideology and understanding as implicit assumptions does not leave much space for agency. In addition, as argued by Lewis, simply “correcting” errant “beliefs” about language and race is not a way to “confront material and institutionalized racism directly” (Lewis, 2018, p. 325). I hope that my focus on strategies is able to connect the teachers’ key discursive and pedagogical moves to broader discourses of the co-constitution of language and race (Rosa, 2019). While they may not be explicitly intentional, strategies are not coincidental. They do work on the world. On whose behalf, and to what ends?
This chapter examines two categories of strategies, the discursive and the pedagogical, that teachers used in order to manage raciolinguistic tensions and dilemmas. Discursive strategies, including locating a benchmark of Whiteness around which to position themselves and minimizing the relevance of race for language practices/evaluation, served to distance teachers from what they knew was harmful; thereby reducing their discomfort. Pedagogical strategies - such as being explicit about expectations and accepting, but adding to, instruction centered on “academic” English - were ways to reduce the harm experienced by students, even if underlying racial and power dynamics were not challenged. These are the ways that the teachers attempted to make the best of “the garbage” (Marielle)\(^9\) they had access to within their limited contexts. Each strategy allows teachers to enact their complex understandings of race, language, and self within systems that limit the moves available to them.

**Discursive strategies**

Language involves *doing* and *being* (ie. changing the social scene and rejecting/claiming identities, respectively) as well as *saying*, or asserting content (Gee, 2014, p. 2). The ways that the teachers discursively navigated our conversations about race, language, and self-identity can be seen as important strategies for navigating raciolinguistic ideological dilemmas. In particular, teachers used two strategies: 1) locating a benchmark of Whiteness and positioning themselves in relation to this point, and 2) shifting race’s relevance to language practice and evaluation. Both of these strategies serve to create distance between the teachers and a White listener/reader with unexamined raciolinguistic ideologies privileging White language.

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\(^9\) All teacher names are pseudonyms.
Locating a benchmark of Whiteness.

It is quite a dilemma to understand both code-switching to a “White standard” (Marielle) as racist and to understand one’s (White) self as needing to teach this. A strategy the teachers used to navigate this dilemma is establishing a “benchmark of Whiteness” (Sean) and positioning themselves in relation to this benchmark. In essence, this strategy discursively points at Whiteness- to locate it in the world- in order to make sense of oneself and one’s practices. The teachers “found” Whiteness in various places both near and far from themselves. An example of the latter comes from Sean, who explained a pedagogical strategy of having students elaborate on their writing if he determined that “some guy in [the state capital],” ie. a grader of standardized tests, wouldn’t be able to understand students’ meaning. Although Flores and Rosa (2015) note explicitly that the white listening subject is not an individual person, but an “ideological position and mode of perception” (p. 151), for Sean, this position is embodied by the very real figure of a test grader.

I asked Sean how he would be able to determine what a grader would understand. Did he use his own understanding as a proxy for theirs? In other places in the interview, Sean had spoken of his extensive familiarity with- and even own use of- students’ language varieties; this indicated to me that Sean experienced himself as understanding students’ language to a great extent. Based on this, I anticipated that he might not rely on his own understanding here, since he might expect himself to know more of students’ verbiage than would White people who didn’t spend so much time with students of this demographic. Indeed, the strategy that he articulated located the White listener outside of himself. Sean explained:

I go, so... I have family that are teachers. So I will say, ‘I understand what this means. Would my, would my family understand this if they read it?’ You know, my, my parents
are old. So, would they understand it? I kind of use them as the benchmark of Whiteness ‘cause they’re super White.

Sean’s description of his “super White” parents as a “benchmark of Whiteness” (and his invocation of their age, which will be discussed in the following section) gives this strategy its name. As noted earlier, Sean understood himself as taking on some of the state’s power and mediating between the state and students. In locating Whiteness with his parents, Sean introduces another mediator, in the form of an imagined third “reader” of students’ writing, and effectively distances himself from the state and its evaluative practices. This reduces the tension of representing a state whose mandate of “academic” language Sean understands to be problematic.

Other teachers located Whiteness closer to themselves, and thus did not experience this strategy as directly minimizing tension; instead, it provided a way to grapple with and concretize what felt irreconcilable. Marielle described multiple instances of coming into an awareness of her own Whiteness, often as a result of interactions with students and families. The first, mentioned above, was the situation that she named when I asked Marielle about when she began to understand her own race as a White person. This occurred when a student, who was Black, called another Black student “White” as an insult. Marielle described the rest of the encounter:

And I was like… ‘That's not a bad thing. Don’t call her that name. I’m White!’ And this little third grade girl, [student name], I’ll never forget. She puts her hand on my arm, like you would do with an older person when you're trying to reassure them. And she goes, [gently] ‘You're not White. You're light-skinned.’ And I was like, [mind blown gesture]... I realized that for them... Whiteness was about proximity, not about skin color. Right? Like, White people were the ones on TV, White people were the ones in the book, but this
teacher who clearly cared about them, even though she was totally inept, was
light-skinned.

In this formative experience, Marielle learned that her students located Whiteness far
from themselves, almost by definition. Whiteness was whatever, or at least *wherever*, the
students and their almost exclusively Black community were not. For the students, Marielle, who
was interior to the school community, could not possibly be White. This understanding arrived at
an interesting time for Marielle, as she also was becoming aware that some pedagogical
strategies relied on students and teacher having a shared racial identity:

[The literacy coordinator] used to tell me things to do to get control of my class that
didn't work for me. Because I was not a 107 [year-old], 250-pound Black woman... She
literally told me once, ‘Just stand, you know, with your, with your ruler.’ [slaps ruler on
palm] I tried it once, I was like, ‘Maybe it'll work!’ I'm threatening violence on these
children? It works if your *grandma* is threatening violence on you, because you
understand that as a Black kid in this neighborhood in [city]. When this [gestures at self]
woman is doing it, you're like, ‘Why is she crazy? Why is our teacher nuts?’

Even if, for her students, Marielle was not White per se, her light-skinned-ness was still
highly salient. What did this visible race mean, particularly for language teaching? Future
interactions complicated the picture for Marielle, and her discussion of her most recent
experiences of salient Whiteness shows how locating Whiteness helped her make sense of
raciolinguistic tensions. In the following example, Marielle again finds Whiteness on television,
but, this time, also locates it in her own body- she is visibly different from her students. This has
implications that are difficult to reconcile.

A lot of my parents through the years... are super excited that I'm a White woman who
only speaks English and has blond hair… A lot of parents are like, ‘We don't want our
kids learning from someone who's [air-quotes] “not American.”’ Right, but I am
[touching hair] what they see on TV as American. And how, I can use that to my
advantage for their children, but also how that’s really messed up. I, I don't know what to
do about that, other than make a place where everybody can be... American. And, but it's
definitely something I've encountered as a privilege that I didn't even know existed in that
particular realm of, ‘English language teachers need to be blond White people.’ That's a
stereotype, and I benefit from that. And, what do I do, other than refute it, you know? But
I can't refute it. I'm your teacher!

Here, Marielle recognizes her families’ locating Whiteness in media, but also in her own
corporeal form. This is not something that she can change or “refute” directly. Language, race,
and national identity are tightly interwoven for her students, and thus they become interwoven
for Marielle. In this case, locating Whiteness in herself- her hair- makes physical the deep
tensions of being a White ESL teacher who understands the connections between race, language,
and power. This strategy of finding Whiteness does not reduce tension so much as concretize it,
making it real in the space between Marielle and her students. Since she cannot change her own
race or that of her students, Marielle seeks to open up for students an identity category that she
perceives to be more malleable: American identity. Locating Whiteness in her own body has
served as an intermediate step towards the pedagogical/interpersonal strategy of expanding the
category of Americanness.

These examples of the teachers locating Whiteness and positioning themselves relative to
it illustrate a discursive strategy that serves to reduce raciolinguistic tensions, either directly or
indirectly. For Sean, this strategy creates distance between himself and an imagined harmful
White listener. Over her years of teaching, Marielle’s shift from finding Whiteness solely in the media to also locating it in her own body helps her make sense of her role as a White teacher. Though it is related to all three dimensions of language, race, and self, this strategy is most squarely one of (re-)making the self through discourse.

**Shifting the relevance of race.**

In addition to locating a “benchmark of Whiteness” and positioning themselves in relation to it, the teachers used discursive strategies that used non-racial language as a way of managing tensions around race and language. Doing so had the effect of reducing pressure on the teachers and their practices, particularly surrounding anti-racism, since it is easier not to attend to racism when race itself isn’t in question. A move that was common across all of the interviews was minimizing the importance of race in language practices or evaluation. This occurred in at least two ways. In the first, the teachers described students’ language practices as related to identity categories other than race. A few of the teachers emphasized the significance of “culture,” emergent bilingual status, disability, and geographic location in shaping language use, while they almost all emphasized students’ generation/age as important factors. Appealing to both geography and age, for instance, Sean discussed the “disconnect” he noticed between students’ lexicons and the vocabulary used on tests and curricular materials:

> Where I grew up, if you said what a hoe is… that’s a tool for farming. You say that in, you say that in [the major city nearby, which has a significant Black population], you're going to get a totally different response. And I think I've seen that happen on a test, it was something like that. It was one of those words, where it's like, ‘This is a relic from a different era and these kids do not understand it.’
This is a revealing example of a teacher shifting the relevance of race in language. Sean was somewhat bashful about this example, saying that he “wasn’t sure if [I] should put it down;” there is clearly a discrepancy in tone between the “totally different” meaning of ho (as opposed to hoe) and the level of formality used in the rest of the interview. Evidence suggests that the word ho to which Sean was referring is not a lexical item that is specific to the city to which Sean referred (nor is hoe, the farming instrument, something that only older generations would understand). Dictionary.com notes that ho originates “from a pronunciation of whore in African American Vernacular English, which can drop word-final Rs” (2021). That is, ho is not a city-specific word, and, even if it is no longer unique to African American English, it may have its roots in that variety. Regardless of whether Sean knew of this broader use of the word or whether he was using the name of the city to index Blackness indirectly, here he is minimizing the relevance of race for a lexical item that is, etymologically, from a racialized language variety. Positioning certain language practices as non-racial or race-neutral serves to reduce raciolinguistic tensions; evaluating language for whether it is sufficiently “academic” cannot be racist (or is, at least, less racist) if the language under question is unrelated to race in the first place. Encouraging students to change their age- or location-specific language, rather than their racialized language, may feel less problematic.

A similar discursive move made by the teachers consisted of establishing themselves in linguistic in-groups with the students; by this strategy, because the teachers were White and their students were not, race is not relevant to these shared language experiences. The teachers used this strategy especially in relation to evaluation of language. Kate described her goals for how students would speak by comparing their language practices to her own when participating in book clubs:
I take part in book clubs… with my friends, and I get really excited and we do talk kind of [air-quotes] ‘academically’ about books, but when I'm talking, I'm like, ‘Yeah! Oh my god, yes!’ I get excited like that, and I would love if my students would do that.

Here, Kate is making multiple discursive moves. On one hand, she is challenging what “counts” as academic by both using air-quotes and providing an example of enthusiastic, social language in parallel to “academic” language about books. At the same time, she is establishing a group - people who could talk in this way - that includes both herself and her students. Doing so is not necessarily wrong or harmful. Indeed, most excellent teachers would likely want their students to express enthusiasm about reading.

There is additional strategic work occurring here, however. By aligning herself with her students in this way, Kate minimizes the role that race might play in both the use of these language practices in the first place and in their evaluation. For instance, people of different cultural and racial identities may vary in the extent to which they find it appropriate to use overlapping speech, physical gesture, or emotional tone of voice (Elliott et al., 2016) such as Kate’s “Yeah! Oh my god, yes!” In addition, a raciolinguistic perspective emphasizes that these linguistic practices are not heard in the same way depending on who speaks them, despite the fact that a “constructed distinction between appropriate ‘academic’ and ‘social’ language obscures the ways that ‘academic’ language is effectively used outside of formal school contexts and ‘social’ language is effectively used in conventional classroom settings.” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 159). Thus, the white listening subject may “hear” the enthusiasm that Kate expresses in book club as disrespectful, inappropriate, or excessively rowdy when it is instead expressed by, for instance, a young Black boy. Even - and perhaps especially - in spaces with explicit support
for linguistic diversity, individuals may not think that evaluation of language will vary based on the race of the speaker; still, these spaces are not inherently divorced from the white listening subject. Henderson (2017) describes a similar example of a White teacher, Michael, whose support for, and use of, code-switching may be made possible by his race. Henderson writes that:

    Michael’s subject positioning was central in his ability to [engage in non-standard language practices] without any stigmatization or pushback from students, parents, colleagues or administrators. Michael’s position as a native-English speaking, white, male afforded him agency to make language choices for which teachers of color would potentially be discriminated or penalized. (p. 30)

Much of Henderson’s analysis focuses on comparing this White teacher to a Latinx teacher at the same school, while the present analysis compares Kate to her own students. If Michael’s race offered him affordances in relation to his adult colleagues, it is likely that Kate would benefit from even greater affordances in relation to her students, who hold less power within the school. These raciolinguistic benefits matter in concrete ways, so downplaying them does important strategic work for Kate.

    Aligning herself with students as part of a group that could use certain language practices enables Kate to minimize the role that race plays in the shaping and evaluation of those language practices. This shrinks a raciolinguistic tension to become just a linguistic one, thereby reducing teacher discomfort. A similar strategy was used by Will, who aligned himself with students as part of a group of people who take standardized tests. The following quote came after Will’s description of “playing the game,” included above.

    I do share this [taking tests] is an important thing to also know in life, ‘cause there are going to be times we need to play the game. And I give them the example of I got
certified, National Board Certified. And it was very much a ‘this is how you play the game’ sort of thing, like, they have these series of questions. They expect you to answer these series of questions in this way, using this stuff. And that's what you do! And if you don't do it that way, you don't get certified… There are many times when you kind of have to learn how to play the game.

In this example, Will establishes his language practices- and their evaluation- as similar to those of students. This is also a move made by the White teachers in Daniels (2018), one of whom stated that she “was the same as” the students in being asked to code-switch (p. 167). Analyzing this claim and challenging it, Daniels writes that “the shift in language [the teacher] was asked to make… was limited and did not require a shift in the power-laden and racialized ways that she was perceived or received by the world” (p. 168) In other words, because of the power and racial dynamics involved, the White teacher’s experience with code-switching is not comparable to the experiences of her students. Similarly, issues of race and the white listening subject, power, and other important contexts (such as optional National Board certification versus mandatory high-stakes standardized testing) were glossed over in Will’s comparison. Thus, his discursive move can be understood as part of the broader strategy of shifting the relevance of race for language.

**Pedagogical strategies**

Minimizing race’s role in shaping language practice and evaluation, as well as locating a benchmark of Whiteness and placing oneself in relation to this point, are not inherently flawed or harmful strategies. They do important work in reducing tension and discomfort for well-intentioned teachers occupying difficult positions; the possibilities of which are limited by educational institutions, systems, and raciolinguistic ideologies operating in society. While the
previous sections have shown the ways in which these strategies do not account for the “power-laden and racialized dynamics” (Daniels, 2018, p. 168) of White educators teaching written and spoken language to students of color, all of the strategies serve effectively as techniques for the teachers to alleviate raciolinguistic tensions and reduce their own discomfort. Indeed, given the understandings of language, race, and self described in section 1, these discursive tools serve an important function for the teachers. Teachers’ dilemma-generating understandings do not emerge solely from their own minds, but instead are presented, legitimized, and ultimately reified in discourses from education policy, the teachers’ own educational experiences, popular media, mandated curricula, and district- and school-level practices. Even if teachers understand the racism of, for instance, requiring students to code-switch, they still operate within these discourses and structures. As Marielle put it, “I'm giving them garbage. But… this is the garbage I’ve got.”

This is not to say that the teachers, or their students, entirely lack agency in navigating raciolinguistic tension. Rather, the set of tools available to them is limited. Several of the teachers in this study are involved in critical activist work, hoping to enact changes that will open up new subject positions and understandings for educators. In the meantime, how they use the tools they have is up to them. Beyond the discursive strategies they used to distance themselves from tension, the teachers utilized pedagogical strategies that aimed to reduce the harm experienced by students. This section explores these strategies in order to understand how they are made possible, their affordances, and how they may be made more critical in order to do deeper ideological work with the potential for linguistic liberation.

Adding to “the garbage.”

A strategy four of the teachers used when experiencing raciolinguistic tensions that
surfaced pedagogically is adding to existing curricula- some of what Marielle called “the garbage.” Each of the teachers described this problematic instruction differently, but, across the interviews, it was clear that it included both content and methods of teaching. In the former category, Kate spoke of a “new curriculum” that focused too narrowly on “academic” English: “The problem is there's no time in the day, really, left to, to add in these other more, I think, fun ways of writing. These ways that are... really make kids love writing and see it as something that is expressive and joyous.” In line with Flores and Rosa’s (2015) note not to stop teaching “academic” English entirely (p. 167), Kate continues to do so but seeks to “add in” other ways with words, such as having students observe various authors’ literary techniques and mimicking them or translating poetry with attention to audience and style.

Relatedly taking issue with a narrow curricular focus, Samantha emphasized the importance of “un-expectation-full” time, particularly for her students with disabilities:

I think it's okay to have explicit expectations, if they're- only if there's enough space for... un-expectation-full time… only if there's time for real freedom of communication. Yes, it's fine if you want to teach a kid This is the protocol for how we're sharing today.’ … Are there other opportunities for them to communicate how they want to communicate? If not, then it's a major problem if you only let them talk in the way that you demand they talk.

Samantha does not identify scripted protocols for sharing as a problem to the same extent that Marielle did. While both educators have students who are designated as ELLs, Samantha works exclusively with students with disabilities, many of whom she described as not engaging in much “typically recognizable language expression.” Highly structured speaking prompts might then play a necessarily greater role in Samantha’s teaching practice. Nevertheless, she identifies “time
for real freedom of communication” as an essential adjunct to such protocols. Standard(ized) language practice(s) can play an important role in students’ learning, as long as the teacher is able to see their utility as not all-encompassing- and to have the time and resources to “diverge and emerge” (Marielle) from established curricula.

In addition to adding to their instruction, more than one of the teachers described a strategy of having their students add to their own work, particularly when it utilized language that, for example, Sean thought his family or “some guy in [the state capital] [grading standardized tests]” would not understand. For Will, Samantha, and Sean, the goal was to preserve students’ “voice” and “ideas,” even if those ideas needed to be expanded upon or further explained in order to be understood by a White listener/reader. With this strategy, it is not the curriculum or students’ writing itself that is “garbage.” Rather, students must add to their work in order to meet expectations that are; they are adding to reach the garbage. Sean said:

I would just say, ‘Explain what that means in your writing.’ So you don't want to... You don't want to mess with the kid’s writing too much, but if you just get them to explain their thinking a little more, you’re at least keeping the original idea intact… the main point is you don't want to- I don't think you want to mess with the, the children's original idea too much. Unless they- if you could get them to add to it, that's great, but I don't think you want to take out.

Elsewhere in the interview, Sean said that, if he didn’t know the meaning of a lexical item used by a student, he would “rather hear it [the meaning] from a kid” instead of “look[ing] it up.”

Across these examples, Sean encouraged students to add meaning and explanation to their work. This strategy is complex. On the one hand, it requires students of color to do significant explanatory (and possibly emotional) labor that White students would not have to do.
On the other hand, it is fundamentally asset-based and positions students as experts on their own language, which is the goal of many critical language pedagogies (e.g. translanguaging, citizen sociolinguistics). Thus, even though this pedagogical strategy does not challenge the underlying power dynamics that structure the white listening subject, it does seem to recognize and value students’ linguistic competence.

** Explicitness. 

Another harm-reducing pedagogical strategy is alluded to in the quote above from Samantha. Although in that place in her interview, I asked about explicitness directly, several other teachers brought up this strategy themselves, sharing examples of when they discussed language in a “meta” way and provided clear, direct expectations to students. Will’s whole-class discussion about “playing the game,” for example, relied on explicitness about expectations. As Lisa Deplit argues, “If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier” (1988, p. 282). For some of the teachers, such as Kate and Marielle, rubrics that were shared with students provided these explicit expectations. Others relied more heavily on class discussions, especially when they had the curricular and instructional freedom to do so.

Largely absent from explicit discussions, at least as the teachers reported them, was exploration of racial dynamics. This is a striking, though perhaps not entirely surprising, omission for a group of teachers who universally expressed the belief that race and racial issues do belong in the curriculum, and who were intentional about including these topics in other ways, such as through read-alouds and service learning. *Not* including discussion of race while speaking with students about a “language of power,” or including it only in passing, may have the effect of naturalizing the power of this [White] language, since students may not have the
tools to understand how racialized power comes to operate through language. Sean, who did provide an example of explicitness about race and language, noted this on a small scale:

Students want authenticity from a teacher. So… if you come from a super White area, just tell them. If you don't understand something, you could just say, ‘I don't know what this word means,’ or I would say to my kids, and it gets, the joke gets funnier every year, but I would be like, ‘I'm a White person from... and I'm 30 years old. I don't know what this means.’

Though this example is not one that delves into power dynamics, it represents what may serve as a starting point for more critical exploration, in line with approaches like critical language awareness (CLA), which “educates linguistically profiled and marginalized students about how language is used and, importantly, how language can be used against them… CLA… [moves] toward social and political consciousness-raising and action” (Alim, 2010, pp. 214-215). Making language and its racialization the object of study has the potential to more fundamentally challenge ideologies that uphold linguistic racism. Students might learn about the ways that their language varieties do have power- as the language of much popular media, of protest, and of resistance.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing my main points, including their relationship to major concepts and scholarship in the field. I then offer some implications for both theory and practice, and link these to future directions for research.

Summary

This thesis began with a glimpse at scholarship on language ideologies and an observation that, although White educators teaching students of color is a disproportionate demographic combination in the United States, there is little scholarship that explicitly investigates the intersections of raciolinguistic ideologies and teacher racial identity. I then introduced some fundamental concepts about language and linguistic diversity; critical perspectives on race, racism, and Whiteness; and my approach to language as *saying, doing, being*. Next, a literature review on (racio)linguistic ideologies developed three themes: the discourse of “appropriateness” within which code-switching-focused pedagogies operate, the complex and contradictory nature of language ideologies, and ideology operating at levels beyond the classroom.

These are themes that provide key anchor points for my analysis, presented after a discussion of my qualitative research methods. In Chapter 5, I show how particular combinations of understandings of race, language, and self produce raciolinguistic and pedagogical tensions; these include knowing that the concept of “academic language” is racialized and power-laden while also believing that this “way with words” is necessary for students to learn, and the practical challenges associated with implementing critical pedagogies. Even as some of the teachers explicitly rejected discourses of appropriateness and code-switching-as-necessary, the
raciolinguistic ideologies circulating in state policy and the broader society produced intense
dilemmas for them as White educators committed to antiracism. As a result, the teachers used
strategies to discursively manage 1) their distance from Whiteness and 2) race’s relevance to
language, thus mitigating some of the raciolinguistic tensions. In addition, the teachers’
pedagogical strategies reduced the immediate harm of White supremacist raciolinguistic
ideologies, but left the ideologies themselves unexamined and unchanged.

In the remainder of this conclusion, I discuss some implications for theory and practice
that emerge from my research, including future directions for scholarship.

Implications

Many of the teachers in this study were engaged in ongoing antiracist work, and all
understood the classroom as a political space with possibility for social reproduction or social
change. The teachers used strategies available to them within the constraints of the education
system. How can other, more transformative strategies be made available and utilized both
effectively and consistently? The next two sections offer some implications for theory and
practice that may begin to provide avenues for answering this question, as well as others that
arise from my analysis.

Implications for theory

Both in this thesis and in social sciences more broadly, there exists a tension between
individual agency and location within systems. In this uncertain space, the teachers do important
identity work, claiming themselves to be “certainly no language police,” to be antiracist, or to be
similar to or different from their students. I have analyzed this identity work as a form of
strategic action. What is the relationship between identity, including how it changes intentionally
or in response to others, and agency? My work suggests that there may be value in further exploring this relationship. If scholars can build more robust theory in this area, those doing work on raciolinguistics in classroom practice will have some conceptual tools to navigate the agency/structure tension by considering identity. Such a project is important because it can help us to conduct meaningful research around power, responsibility, and accountability within constraining systems; it also resonates with Lewis’ call to move away from a theory of change focused on “correcting errors” in belief/ideology and towards stances of critical reflexivity, which “attempt to place… premises into question, to suspend the ‘obvious,’ to listen to alternative framings of reality and to grapple with the comparative outcomes of multiple standpoints” (Gergen, 2009, p. 12, cited in Lewis, 2010, p. 338).

Another implication of my research is methodological. My approach in this thesis has been informed by the principles of discourse analysis, but I have not utilized this methodology in a formal way. There could be great value in such an approach, whose strength lies in its granularity. Moje and Lewis write that the semiotic components examined in discourse analysis “are more directly available for analysis than the social orders they instantiate, thus allowing analysis to examine power relations as they are produced” (2007, p. 23, emphasis added). The immediacy and specificity afforded by this method would be particularly powerful for the types of questions examined in this thesis, given their focus on how power and identity are navigated during moments of dilemma and tension. In addition, discourse analysis could be particularly effective for future studies that include both interviews and classroom observations.

**Implications for practice**

In addition to suggesting the theoretical implications of the value of 1) further exploring the relationship between agency and identity and 2) using a highly granular approach like
discourse analysis, this thesis provides implications for practice in the form of both teacher education and classroom teaching.

As has been emphasized throughout this document, raciolinguistic ideologies are complex and often contradictory (e.g., Palmer, 2011; McBee Orzulak, 2013; Martínez, Hikida, & Durán, 2014; Razer, 2012). When they manifest in the classroom, where many different factors compete for teachers’ attention, these contradictions become extremely challenging to navigate. As a result, teachers are likely to react in ways that may differ from how they would if they were able to give the situations more time and attention. Following McBee Orzulak (2015), this thesis suggests that teacher education programs should devote explicit time to preparing teachers to respond to LIDs in critical, informed ways. Evidence is clear that, although educating pre- (and in-)service teachers about language diversity and the connections between race, language, and power is important; doing so is not enough for deep and lasting change (Bacon, 2017; Lewis, 2018). While recommendations for state, district, or school-level language policy are beyond the scope of this thesis, one clear implication is that preparation for moments of tension, uncertainty, and dilemma is essential for teachers committed to antiracism. This preparation could come in the form of consulting about hypothetical classroom scenarios, hearing from in-service teachers about challenging situations they have faced and creating action plans for how those situations should be handled, and being offered space to reflect on and refine approaches to LIDs they face during field experiences.

One dimension of tension that merits special attention on the part of teachers and those who prepare them for service is emotion. In this thesis, teachers’ affective experiences were highly salient to the strategies they used to navigate the challenging, uncomfortable position of being White antiracist educators aware of the potential harm of their practices. Teacher
educators, as well as practicing teachers themselves, would benefit from exploring how (dis)comfort, among other emotional experiences, impact their teaching practices with regards to race and language. This is not to say that teachers must ignore or override their own emotions when addressing difficult subject matter or situations with students. Rather, they should learn to question the sources of these emotions; who is served, and in what ways, when they react to situations from an emotional place; and the role that avoiding certain emotions plays in shaping classroom practice. Having a critical awareness of these issues, including both preemptively and as emotions arise during teaching, will enable teachers to respond in ways that align with their goals of creating antiracist, linguistically just classroom spaces.
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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

TURN ON LIVE TRANSCRIPT
Do you have any questions before we get started? Do you consent to being recorded?

START RECORDING.
Pseudonyms will be used for all people and places. You don’t have to answer any questions that you don’t want to, and you can stop the interview at any time. While we’re talking, if any anecdotes or specific examples come to mind, that would be great. That’s what I’m looking for. Don’t worry about something being too “random” or “off topic.”

Content and background
1. How long have you been teaching, and how did you become interested in being a teacher?
2. How do you describe yourself? What are some of your salient identities?
   a. Follow up for race, if necessary.
   b. If appropriate: I know that my research description did specify “White” teachers, but it’s interesting that you identified yourself that way because we’re often not socialized to think of ourselves as White. When or how did you find yourself becoming more aware of your race?
3. How would you describe where you teach (school, district, etc.)? Whatever you think is most important.
4. How would you describe your students? Whatever you think is important about them.
   a. Follow up as needed to get a sense of demographics and the teacher’s understanding of deficits vs. strengths.
   b. What languages or language varieties are represented in your classroom?
5. How much freedom do you have in designing curricula for your students?
   a. What do any constraints look like?
6. What do you take into consideration when you do design your own lessons?
   a. What are your goals when designing your own lessons?
   b. In what ways do you consider the backgrounds of your students?
Language and teaching

7. Tell me about the ways your students write in the classroom. What kinds of writing do they do, and for what purpose?
   i. How does this compare with how they use written language outside of the classroom?

b. Tell me about the ways your students speak in the classroom. What kind of language do they use, and for what purposes?
   i. How does this compare with how they use oral language outside of the classroom?

8. To what extent do you have a particular goal or expectation for how students speak in your classroom?
   a. How would you describe that way of speaking?

9. What do you think a teacher’s role is in shaping the language that students use?
   a. Is your own role, personally, the same or different from this? How and why?

10. Can you tell me about a time when you felt conflicted about how to respond to a student’s use of language?
   a. What do you think it is about this anecdote that made it stick out for you?

11. Can you describe a typical writing lesson?

12. In what ways (formal or informal) do you evaluate your students’ written language?
   a. In what ways (formal or informal) do you evaluate your students’ oral language?

13. What kinds of feedback do you give students about the ways they write?
   i. How do students respond to this feedback? Can you give me an example?

   b. What kinds of feedback do you give students about the ways they speak?
   i. How do students respond to this feedback? Can you give me an example?

14. Sometimes teachers use a strategy where they repeat back to a student what the student said, but say it in a different way. To what extent do you find yourself doing that?
   a. Why do you do this?
   b. What do you think it does?

15. How often does language itself—spoken, written, or other—come up as a topic of discussion in your class? Can you give an example?
Explicit: race and language teaching

16. How much, and in what contexts, do you find yourself thinking about race in relation to your teaching?
   a. If needed, prompt: how much, and in what contexts, do you find yourself thinking about your race in relation to your teaching?

17. Can you tell me about a time when, as an educator, you were really aware of being White?
   a. What do you think it is about this anecdote that made it stick out for you?

18. (How) do you think race and language use are related to each other?
   a. How do you think you learned this?

19. How (much) do you think your race impacts the way you teach writing?
   a. How (much) do you think your race impacts the way you teach students to speak?

20. What ideas about language do you think teachers of students of color should have?

Concluding

21. Is there any question you wish I had asked?

22. What name would you like to have used for you as a pseudonym?