



“A Good Start”: A New Approach to Gauging Preservice Teachers’ Critical Language Awareness

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ABSTRACT

This study reports findings from a discursive analysis, informed by discursive psychology (DP), of 43 preservice teachers’ 685 written reflections related to critical language awareness (CLA). The findings highlight the discursive features preservice teachers employed to construct their CLA. Three major patterns of discursive changes were unearthed which make the development of preservice teachers’ CLA visible: change from generic statements to deeper scrutiny; change from broad suggestions to specific recommendations; and change from claiming the known to the curiosity of exploring the unknown. The findings of this study offer insights for teacher educators to make sense of preservice teachers’ discursive changes and features in the process of developing CLA and to create stage-appropriate inductive questions to help preservice teachers engage in continuous critiques through written self-reflections.

KEYWORDS

Critical language awareness; discursive psychology; self-reflection

Introduction

Demographic studies document a rapid increase in cultural and linguistic diversity among K-12 students in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), bringing to the classroom a “variety of cultural backgrounds, language proficiencies, academic experiences, and cognitive processes” (Perez & Holmes, 2010, p. 40). This growing linguistic and ethnic complexity of classrooms (Ball, 2009) demands that K-12 teachers develop or gain teacher language awareness (TLA) (Andrews, 2007; Thornbury, 1997)—the knowledge of the underlying system of languages—in order to understand how language works (Edge, 1988), why students struggle with language, and how to explore and generate discussions about language (Wright, 2002). From a sociolinguistics perspective, language is not only viewed as a means of communication but also as a way of understanding social, political and ideological aspects of linguistic variation, and discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, a teacher’s knowledge base should not only contain the knowledge of how languages are acquired and taught but also awareness of language ideologies. This is because “a combination of ideologies and awareness may guide many pedagogical decisions” (Lindahl & Henderson, 2019, p. 44). As critical language awareness (CLA) (Fairclough, 1992) highlights how language conventions and language practices are “invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of” (p. 7), preservice teachers are expected to develop an in-depth CLA to ensure that they can teach in a way that recognizes and engages the multilingualism and multiculturalism in students’ lives and in society. A critical view of language and multilingualism also helps teachers to “engage all students in developing a consciousness of language as social practice and a voicing of their own multilingual experiences” (García, 2017, p. 268).

In the United States, CLA for preservice teachers is often addressed in programs, classes, or workshops that focus on language variation, intercultural communication, or multilingualism.

A great number of studies have examined the importance and the difficulties of developing preservice teachers' CLA through such classes or workshops (e.g., Alfouaim, 2012; Carpenter et al., 2015; Clark et al., 1990; Endo, 2015; Godley et al., 2015). Other studies have focused on the strategies that teacher educators can use to enhance preservice teachers' CLA (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Godley et al., 2006). Some studies have pointed out that while gaining knowledge of language variation and multilingualism is an important step for preservice teachers, knowledge alone is insufficient. This is because conceptual knowledge will help preservice teachers only to theorize the importance of language diversity and multilingualism (e.g., Alim, 2010; Godley et al., 2015). However, in order to engage this knowledge in their teaching practice, preservice teachers need to develop in-depth CLA, which enables them not only to celebrate and contemplate the diversity of languages, dialects and multilingualism, but also to be aware of and to critically examine the problems of existing systems in schools, communities, and society, and thus take the initiative to make changes in educational systems (Godley et al., 2015). In order to help preservice teachers develop in-depth CLA, it is important for teacher educators to understand the trajectory of the development of preservice teachers' CLA and the process preservice teachers go through when they construct and reconstruct their critical thinking about language diversity and multilingual education. Teacher educators can then strategically guide their students in moving toward an in-depth CLA.

Although cognition is difficult to study directly, through language-in-use, we can observe evidence of people's changing mental states and development (Wetherell, 2007). In this paper, we argue that, through the discursive changes in preservice teachers' writing reflections, we can observe how they construct their CLA discursively. CLA includes a wide range of factors such as language acquisition and variation, as well as belief and aspects of identity (DeStefano & Rentel, 1975). The present study focuses tightly on preservice teachers' view of language diversity, language ideology, and language pedagogy. In this paper, we have adapted discourse psychology (DP) as both a theoretical framework and an analytical tool to analyze 685 writing reflections from a semester-long course on language variation and multilingualism in elementary classrooms. As the CLA of 43 preservice teachers developed over the semester, the DP framework allowed us to explore the discursive features and patterns of discursive changes in preservice teachers' written reflections during development. These findings can serve as cues for teacher educators to observe their students' development of CLA through the examination of their discursive practices. We also suggest that our findings can help teacher educators to create stage-appropriate inductive questions to engage preservice teachers in a continuous critique using written self-reflections.

Literature review

Due to its geographical and social differences, the United States is a country high in language diversity (Adger et al., 2007). In addition to widely used varieties of English such as African American English and Chicano English, over 350 languages are spoken in homes across the United States (Ryan, 2013). Clark et al. (1990) argue that despite the theoretical agreement that all languages and dialects are equal, people are often unaware of how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations, which often leads people to a deficit view of language diversity. "Teachers, like many other members of society, are not immune to the language ideologies that are part and parcel of our language socialization as Americans" (Alim, 2010, p. 224). Teacher education programs are responsible not only for fostering teacher's sensitivity to language, but also for developing in all teachers a critical understanding of how language use (such as the use of "mainstream" English plus limited occasions of multilingualism) has been naturalized (García, 2017).

Studies have shown that preservice teachers often do receive a great amount of exposure to these CLA concepts (Alim, 2010) through teacher education programs. However, a disconnect remains between preservice teachers' knowledge and the ability to operationalize their knowledge critically, hampering the transformation of preservice teachers' teaching practice into culturally-competent practice (Alim, 2005, 2010; Godley et al., 2015). One of the reasons for this disconnect is that

preservice teachers tend to attribute the deficit view of language variation and multilingualism to individual instead of institutional factors. Alim (2010) points out that “it is a social and institutional process that impacts marginalized populations, regardless of whether or not any one individual engages in racist practice” (p. 226). Sleeter (1996) also argues that, in order to develop a critical view of language variation and multilingualism, one must focus on the “concentrations of power and wealth in the hands of a small elite” (p. 173). In other words, preservice teachers should be aware of institutional and social power and be able to confront the challenges they will encounter in a larger societal and global context.

Nieto (2006) provides a multicultural education model to examine how multicultural competence develops over time (see Figure 1). While Nieto’s (2006) model focuses on multicultural education, it can also be used to examine multilingual development because “language maintenance and language reclamation have been tied to cultural integrity and survival” (Valdiviezo & Nieto, 2015, p. 92). Moreover, although this model originally focused on the characteristics of institutional operations, Endo (2015) argues that it could potentially be used to evaluate an individual’s development toward affirming cultural and linguistic diversity. According to this model, simply accepting or celebrating cultural and language diversity does not lead teachers or students to challenge existing structures of prejudice and privilege. Preservice teachers who possess in-depth CLA should be able to uncover “the policies and practices that are advantageous for some students at the expense of others” (Nieto, 2006, p. 315). In Nieto’s (2006) model, critique, which is concerned with equity and social justice, is considered the highest level of a critical view of linguistic diversity, and the most difficult level to achieve.

Research indicates the difficulty of developing an in-depth CLA, while also suggesting that teacher educators are responsible for resolving this issue. For example, teacher educators can create opportunities for preservice teachers to have contact with language minority students (Flores & Smith, 2009), or engage preservice teachers in critical research relating to popular culture (Morrell, 2004). Gay and Kirkland (2003) argue that critical racial and cultural consciousness should be coupled with self-reflection. Flores (2001) posits that teacher education programs should provide teacher candidates with opportunities to engage in critical reflection about their experiences with linguistically and ethnically diverse students to increase their awareness of potential white privilege or other hegemonic factors, such as English dominance.

One of the most common approaches in promoting critical self-reflection in preservice teachers’ classes is the reflection essay. Many studies showed how the use of reflection essays can evoke preservice teachers’ affective CLA responses (e.g., Farrell, 2011; Lin, 2004; Yazan, 2019). However, when preservice teachers are asked to write self-reflections, they tend to simply describe issues, ideas, and events, summarize academic statements made by scholars, or state factual and generic claims; they confuse self-reflection with description, evaluation, or justification for policies and actions taken, and they miss the essence of self-reflection, which is introspection and reconstruction of knowledge (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Ideally, a self-reflection of CLA should involve an examination of the writer’s own personal position on an issue such as language variation and multilingualism, the questioning of conventional explanations, and an analysis of current social and institutional policy (Gay & Kirkland,

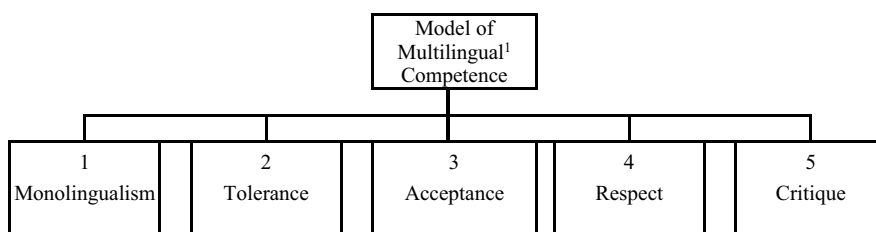


Figure 1. Conceptual model of attitudes toward linguistic diversity (adapted from Endo (2015) based on the Nieto (2006) model).

2003; Yazan, 2019). As Danielewicz (2014) states: “reflexivity . . . involves a person’s activity analysis of past situations, events, and products, with the inherent goals of critique and revision of the explicit purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior” (p. 155–156).

Another obstacle for effective self-reflections is that preservice teachers may commit to embracing language diversity and educational equity in their self-reflections, yet fail to move beyond that commitment, ensuring their teaching practice responds to the newly found awareness (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). To transform preservice teachers into change agents (Ball, 2006), teacher educators need to pay attention to the discursive features that preservice teachers are employing to construct and reconstruct their CLA. Teacher educators also need to make sense of changes in preservice teachers’ discursive practices because discourse does not exist outside the construction of cognition and belief (Edwards & Potter, 1992). With this goal in mind, the present study uses the lens of discursive psychology, which treats the writing of self-reflections as a process of constructing a belief, to analyze discursive features and changes in preservice teachers’ written reflections as their CLA develops.

Discursive psychology

Discursive Psychology (DP) offers an ideal framework to discover how psychological themes and issues of knowledge and belief, fact and error, truth and explanation, are dealt with in discourse (Edwards, 1993; Edwards & Potter, 1992). DP rests on the idea that neither cognition nor language is static. In DP, thoughts are “unfinished, agentic and so continually in the process of construction and reconstruction” (Wetherell, 2007, p. 672). DP then stands in contrast to the perspective of cognitive psycholinguistics, which presumes that there is a fixed cognitive product behind the use of a particular linguistic construction (Billig, 2006). DP scholars frame people’s thoughts and emotions at the cognitive level as real but raw and dynamic psychological entities, not as a fixed and ready product waiting to be delivered by language (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Peoples’ attitudes and beliefs about an event are produced during the construction of participants’ accounts of the world around them. These accounts are flexibly constructed and negotiated through peoples’ available lexicons (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

According to Edwards and Potter (1992), DP always deals with naturally occurring talk and text that are particularly related to cognitive issues of belief, attitude, truth, and explanation. DP is concerned with the rhetorical organization of naturally occurring talk and text rather than linguistic organization, such as grammar, cohesion or other factors in conversations. DP questions the assumption that discourse can only serve as a pathway to cognition, because it treats discourse as a situated, action oriented, and constructive process. Speakers construct various versions of accounts of facts according to different interactional contexts (Potter, 2003; Potter & Edwards, 2001). The variation in accounts reveals the situated and functional character of discourse. In other words, “the epistemologies of our everyday discourse are organized around adequacy and usefulness rather than validity and correctness” (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 16). Therefore, discourse cannot be just “a transparent medium to convey pre-existing knowledge” (Seymour-Smith, 2016, p. 309). Instead, without negating the existence of people’s inner experiences and thoughts, DP sees discourse as primary. Cognition is made “visible” through an individual’s discursive practice (Potter & Edwards, 1999).

Talk and text cannot be “directly mapped onto underlying cognitive representations of knowledge and reasoning” (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 15), as people’s inner experiences and cognition are fleeting and fragmentary (Billig, 2006). Hence the goal of DP analysis is not to describe the world, facts, and mental states, but to study “how participants in an interaction construct their accounts and formulate versions of events, including formulation of their own and others’ psychological states” (Wetherell, 2007, p. 671). Edwards and Potter (1992) argue that through the lens of DP, the truth of a fact equals the discursive practices that reasoning people bring to a conversation, and how these practices are marshaled within rhetorical organization.

We argue that DP is an appropriate theoretical and methodological framework for our study because the purpose of this study is to explore the discursive features and changes preservice teachers

implement to construct and reconstruct their critical thinking toward in-depth CLA. We believe that preservice teachers' CLA is a matter that is being managed, produced, and made relevant in discourse, rather than "something sitting outside the discourse" (Edwards & Potter, 2005, p. 242). We also believe that the discursive features and the patterns of discursive changes that emerge in preservice teachers' written reflections both represent reality and constitute it (Kramsch, 2003), thus they can be used by teacher educators to understand and gauge preservice teachers' development of CLA.

Since the introduction of a discursive research approach to the field of Applied Linguistics to examine learners' beliefs in the late 1990s (Garrett & Cots, 2018), an increasing number of studies have used DP, or combined DP with other approaches, to focus on psychological constructs of learning (Lester & Paulus, 2011; Paulus & Lester, 2013), identity (McLean, 2012; Roulston, 2001), knowledge (Barwell, 2013), and attitudes (Kaasila et al., 2012). Some studies in teacher education have also adopted DP as an approach to exploring teacher beliefs (Barker & Rossi, 2012; Kalaja, 2016; Oreshkina & Lester, 2015; Speer, 2005; Warren, 2016).

This study contributes to the body of DP and CLA literature by integrating the concepts of DP and CLA. We analyzed the discursive features and changes in preservice teachers' written reflections in relation to CLA. Specifically, through the lens of DP, we ask: While preservice teachers are developing an in-depth CLA (a) what patterns of discursive changes, if any, emerge in the preservice teachers' written reflections? and (b) what discursive features did the preservice teachers employ in the process of constructing their CLA?

Method

Background

The data for this study come from a mandatory course of an elementary education program at a large, public East Coast university in the United States. The course explores dimensions of language variation across a wide range of social, economic, regional, and ethnic groups, and issues in multilingualism. It is designed to help teacher candidates to examine assumptions about language differences, to think critically about the relationships among language, power, and educational policy, and to equip educators to teach children from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The course requires preservice teachers, who are working as teaching interns during that semester, to write one or two reading reflections each week, using the experiences in their placements as resources for their written reflections. Of the 48 preservice teachers who were invited to participate in this study when the course started, 43 agreed to take part and submitted their signed consent forms. The authors of this study were instructors of the course. Both of authors are bilingual speakers.

Data collection and analysis

The data for this study consists of 685 reflections written by 43 students in response to assigned readings over the course of a semester. When conducting our data analysis, we treated the whole group of participants as one case rather than many individual cases because we wanted to show the commonality of the findings across various individuals and the variety of discursive strategies. We coded the data and conducted a three-step data analysis together. First, since the goal of this study is to explore the discursive features and patterns of change displayed by preservice teachers as they develop an in-depth CLA, it is critical to first confirm that preservice teachers' CLA has indeed developed over the course of the semester before undertaking a discourse analysis. Therefore, we repeatedly read the data in order to familiarize ourselves with the content of preservice teachers' written reflections in order to then use the adapted Nieto (2006) model to code the data (see explanation under Figure 2). Since preservice teachers' written reflections were produced within the context of a course explicitly aiming to develop students' CLA, we were satisfied to find that preservice teachers' CLA showed improvements in their development of CLA.

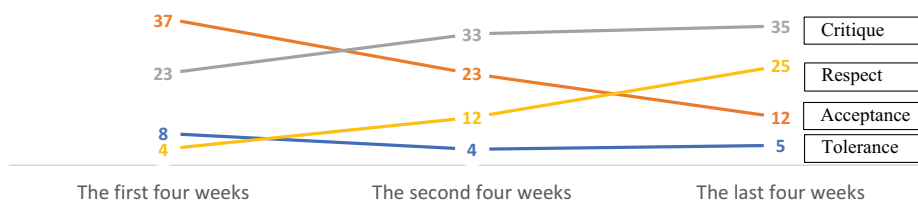


Figure 2. The numbers of codings of four stages of CLA.

* The first stage of the Nieto (2006) model is not included because we did not find evidence of any preservice teachers showing Monoculturalism/monolingualism in their written reflections.

* Based on the adapted Nieto (2006) Model of Multicultural Competence (see the appendix), the content of preservice teachers' written reflections was coded using NVivo 11, and classified into four categories (e.g., tolerance, acceptance, respect, critique) in order to see if there was an observable development of students' CLA. Overall, 221 codes were identified. We then calculated the frequencies of the various codes in each category and compared them across three periods of time: the first four weeks, the second four weeks, and the last four weeks. The result shows that at the beginning of the semester, preservice teachers showed general tolerance and acceptance of language variation and multilingualism. Gradually, their reflections contained increasing numbers of statements of respect and critique and decreasing numbers of tolerance and acceptance, which indicates preservice teachers went beyond merely accepting and tolerating the existence of language varieties to viewing the whole concept from a critical perspective. These changes represent attainment of the highest level of CLA.

Analysis of the development of students' CLA was not the aim of this study; rather, the aim was to provide sufficient justification for conducting data analysis through a DP lens. The second step of data analysis then focused on categorizing and identifying the patterns of discursive changes in preservice teachers' written reflections. Guided by the research questions, we engaged in reading the data again to familiarize ourselves with participants' discursive choices and to create analytic categories. We then discussed and refined our analytical categories and created a codebook. The codes included various categories of preservice teachers' discursive choices (e.g., "making generic statements," and "providing detailed recommendations"). Then we identified three discursive patterns, which were marked by changes of preservice teachers' discursive choices. These patterns emerged repeatedly across the data, which we will introduce in the findings. The last step of the data analysis was to find discursive features, i.e. the rhetorical organizations in the written reflections within each category; for example, under the category "making generic statements," we identified discursive features such as "using personal point of view disclaimers" and "making factual claims." Below we introduce the patterns of discursive changes that emerged during data analysis. Under each pattern, we highlighted the common discursive features that preservice teachers displayed in their written reflections including nine illustrative excerpts accompanied with a corresponding analysis.

Findings

Our aim in this qualitative study was to "describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The research design of this study focuses on the emerging patterns and meanings through rich descriptions and, as such, the findings do not lend themselves to a quasi-statistical interpretation of the data. In other words, the focus here is on the quality of the discursive changes, and not on the data's quantified frequency or validity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), although the clear patterns that emerged from the data enabled us to describe tendencies like majorities (e.g., many students) or minorities (e.g., few students).

Across the data, three larger patterns emerged from preservice teachers' written reflections, paralleling the development of CLA: preservice teachers' discursive choices changed from making

generic statements to undertaking closer scrutiny; from making broad suggestions to making specific recommendations; and from claiming the known to showing the curiosity of exploring the unknown. In the following section, we present nine excerpts which were written by different preservice teachers to highlight and explain the discursive patterns in their reflections.

From making generic statements to deeper scrutiny

At the beginning of the course, preservice teachers' written reflections consisted of many generic belief statements. At first glance, these generic statements might be assumed to reveal an understanding of language variation and multilingual education, because the content of these statements are all positive reflections of CLA. However, from a DP perspective, we found that preservice teachers tended to use three types of discursive features to make these generic statements: Summaries or descriptions of readings, factual claims, and disclaimers of personal point of view. Despite the CLA-based content, these discursive features indicated preservice teachers' beginning-level stage of the development of CLA. The three excerpts below are examples of these three types of discursive features.

Excerpt 1 (CLA level: Acceptance)

I think this concept [from the reading] is extremely important to keep in mind because it tells us that just because you speak a certain dialect that doesn't mean you are inherently inferior, or superior either. This article includes this quote: "..."

Excerpt 1 was drawn from a preservice teacher's Week Two reflection. In this generic statement, the preservice teacher summarized the content of the reading, showing his or her understanding of language equality: There is no inferior or superior language. However, instead of going into a deeper analysis, this preservice teacher continued with a direct quote from the assigned paper. Using summary or description is a typical discursive strategy that preservice teachers use to reach consensus (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Preservice teachers do so not only because it is the easiest way to get the writing assignment done, but also because this kind of summary can hardly ever "go wrong" as a course assignment (Oreshkina & Lester, 2015).

Excerpt 2 (CLA level: Acceptance)

This class, at only two weeks in, has already changed my perspective on language immensely. This quote gives me much more in-depth information about language variation than I ever thought of before. It is definitely a new thought for me to ... recognize that each student comes from a different background, family, etc. so they will have a different way of speaking.

Here, this preservice teacher presented acceptance regarding language variation in Week 3. By stating that each language belongs to a different speech community, the student intended to use factual claims to emphasize acknowledgment of the importance and legitimacy of language variation. Factual claims are frequently presented as "just telling it how it is" (Potter & Edwards, 2001, p. 3) without supportive information. While factual claims make statements sound authentic, they also work to make certain descriptions of reality difficult to challenge (Edwards & Potter, 1992). From our DP perspective, we contend that without supportive information following the factual claim, this discursive feature in the preservice teacher's written reflection was used to cover up what they do not know and to position the writer as not necessarily responsible for the claims (Lester & Paulus, 2011).

Excerpt 3 (CLA level: Acceptance)

I think it is important as a teacher to use all dialects of your students and not shut any down or say one is correct over the other. ... I believe that a change should be made. I believe that in schools, we should always be welcome[ing] and excited about our students' curiosity and desire to ask questions (in their dialects).

Like many of the other early reflections we analyzed, this excerpt shows another way that preservice teachers tend to make generic statements: personal point of view disclaimers, such as "I think," "I

believe,” and “in my opinion.” As Oreshkina and Lester (2015) argue, “In DP literature, the use of personal point of view disclaimers is described as the means by which to take up the position of a novice in a conversation, serving to minimize responsibility for what is being said” (p. 429). Based on our data analysis, we argue that whether or not the use of personal point of view disclaimers represents the position of a novice depends on what follows; if it is followed by thoughtful explanation or reasoned justification, it may represent deeper analysis. However, Excerpt 3 shows that in Week Three, the preservice teacher used “I think” and “I believe” three times to express the same idea without justification of why and how students should be allowed to use their dialects, why some teachers do the opposite, or what challenges teachers might encounter if they allowed students to use their dialect. As such, from a DP perspective, we conclude that this repetition and lack of engagement represents the novice position.

These excerpts show preservice teachers at the beginning stage of development of their CLA, as the novices tend to use personal point of view disclaimers to repeatedly emphasize their attitudes without reflecting on what responsibility they may have to challenge the assumptions they purport to oppose. Later, as their critical thinking develops to a higher level, these preservice teachers tend to follow up their personal point of view disclaimers with further articulation or justification about why they think or believe what they do (see later excerpts for comparison).

Excerpts 1–3 show preservice teachers using generic statements to illustrate their general tolerance and acceptance of language variation and multilingualism in the first couple of weeks of the semester. Gay (2010) argues that unless people can raise questions, “their own self-reflection and critical consciousness about racism, ethnicity, and cultural diversity in education are not accomplished” (p. 183).

Excerpt 4 was written at the end of the semester (during Week 12, the last week of the course), and reveals a shift from generic statements to deeper scrutiny through questioning.

Excerpt 4 (CLA level: Critique)

Being aware of each other’s dialect is a good start on learning how to accept others dialect. However, if there is no large-scale program how will we be able to convince school districts to implement it?

Going beyond merely claiming the importance and benefit of studying dialects, the excerpt above shows that the preservice teacher looked at the reality and questioned the possibility of carrying out progressive ideas. The question construct “how to” indicates that the student realizes the potential conflicts and problems that may arise in the process of implementation while also being aware that language equality is not an individual issue between teachers and students but also an institutional and societal issue (Alim, 2010). The acknowledgment by preservice teachers that dialect awareness is “a good start” but not in itself sufficient for large-scale change is precisely what we had hoped our course might accomplish.

From providing broad suggestions to specific recommendations

Preservice teachers had maintained throughout the semester that they were fully committed to practicing multilingualism, this commitment was not only manifested by making broad statements such as “I will definitely try this in my classroom,” but also by a large number of suggestions to prove “I am serious enough.” However, Gay and Kirkland (2003) argue that preservice teachers “may profess commitment or promote educational equity based on their newly found awareness, but they do not think deeply about the implications and consequences of this knowledge for changing their personal and professional behaviors” (p. 184). In other words, providing a broad suggestion without giving specific strategies about how to implement the suggestions suggests that preservice teachers struggle with operationalizing innovations effectively within a given context. Preservice teachers’ reflections reveal their difficulties in overcoming this tendency. The tendency to make broad suggestions is captured in statements, such as “we should give students the freedom to grow,” or “we should create a receptive and encouraging environment in the classroom.” They rarely make concrete

recommendations or anticipate difficulties of implementation following these sorts of suggestions. Therefore, these broad statements can be regarded as examples of insufficient analysis and reflection.

Through the lens of DP, we can examine how preservice teachers change their discursive choices in the process of providing pedagogical suggestions over time. The following three excerpts exemplify the discursive changes and some discursive features preservice teachers employed. They were taken respectively from Week Two, Week Seven, and Week Ten from different students. All three excerpts demonstrate preservice teachers' commitment and devotion to multicultural and multilingual education. However, from a DP lens, the excerpts were constructed in very different ways, reflecting different levels of CLA, and represent how preservice teachers have changed discursively from providing broad suggestions to specific recommendations.

Excerpt 5 (CLA level: Acceptance)

Every kid comes into the classroom with a wealth of knowledge on their own culture. If we can cultivate this knowledge in our class, we can help every student feel valued and make school valuable to them. . . . If we can use their language backgrounds as teaching resources, we can create a safe learning environment, especially for ELLs.

Excerpt 5 shows a preservice teacher's strong willingness to practice CLA even at this early stage of development of CLA. Through using "we can" three times, the writer not only acknowledged students' cultural and language background as an asset rather than a deficit, he or she also showed understanding of and commitment to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, we might interpret this discursive feature as a broad suggestion, since from a DP perspective, people tend to use "we" in a personal narrative to increase credibility because "something claimed by witnesses is less likely to be a fabrication than would be claims of a single witness" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 105). We might also interpret the use of "we" as acknowledging and including the writer's audience, consisting of the instructor and classmates, who are assumed to be in agreement with this perspective.

Another discursive feature preservice teachers leveraged in our data is the "if-then" structure. The preservice teacher used the "if-then" structure twice in Excerpt 5. For example, "if we can use their language backgrounds as teaching resources, we [then] can create a safe learning environment, especially for ELLs." According to DP, the "if-then" structure is a script formulation people often use to construct their belief as "factually robust" (Oreshkina & Lester, 2015). Functioning similarly to the "we can" statement, the "if-then" structure allows participants to present events as a generally agreed-upon truth (Edwards, 1997). Such claims position students as not responsible for the "truth" or the value of the suggestion, which frees them from the task of providing further justification of the claim. As expected, no detailed means of how these pedagogies could be implemented were provided in this reflection, nor were any potential challenges or difficulties.

Excerpt 6 (CLA level: Acceptance)

I think it's such a great idea that teachers encourage free writing because [ELL] students don't have to be so focused on wording, spelling, etc., but rather, they can focus on growing in expression and becoming less fearful of that. That is definitely something I try to tell my students in my placement because there are a few who are less motivated to write because they have so much fear of sounding unintelligent . . . but they don't.

Similar to excerpt 5, excerpt 6 showed another discursive feature that frequently appeared in preservice teachers' reflections, which was the repetitive use of the word "because." In excerpt 6, the preservice teacher used "because" three times to emphasize the importance of a "free writing" approach. According to DP, over-using "because" to explain the underlying rationale of a suggestion instead of going straight to the details of the suggestion indicates that the speaker does not want to be responsible for the consequences of the suggestion (Young, 1994). However, to develop an in-depth CLA, teachers should actively engage in examining their personal position and reflect on how things can be done within a certain context (Gay & Kirkland, 2003), rather than merely claiming a truth. The DP perspective suggests that although many preservice teachers claimed commitment and passion for promoting cultural and language diversity in their classrooms, the discursive features in

their pedagogical propositions or suggestions indicate that much work needs to be done to develop an in-depth CLA.

At the end of the semester, preservice teachers went beyond excerpts 5 and 6 by offering detailed recommendations and anticipating challenges through the use of a “what, why, but, how” pattern, which we rarely saw at the beginning of the semester.

Excerpt 7 (CLA-level: Respect)

I also liked the idea of students having a language journal . . . and share their personal experiences and thoughts [about language issues] with the class because I think that is very important to capitalize students’ cultural and language backgrounds. [But] I can see how it can become difficult when a teacher allows for sharing time because it might become off-topic to the point that the teacher finds it hard to get the student’s attention back to instruction. I think that is why an objective should be thought of before opening up sharing time so that the students are aware of what exactly that specific sharing time is about.

In this excerpt, she first pointed out what he or she would do in the classroom (sharing a language journal) and why it was important to do so. Without denying the promising effect of the approach, the preservice teacher used “but” to address the potential difficulties and challenges (sharing might cause off-topic discussions) and then offered detailed recommendations (setting up objectives) to show how the anticipated problems could possibly be solved. According to DP, excerpt 7 showed “a form of mental processing with a purpose and/or anticipated outcome that is applied to relatively complex or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution” (Moon, 1999, p. 23). The discursive feature in excerpt 7 reveals the highest levels of reflective thinking, where the participant internalizes the personal significance and reasoning of learning (Bain et al., 1999).

From statements of the known to the curiosity of exploring the unknown

When talking about language diversity, all of the preservice teachers showed a positive attitude toward language variation and multiculturalism, even as the class began. Their reflections in the first few weeks showed that they had already accepted statements of the importance of language variation and multiculturalism. They made claims regarding their knowledge of language variation, and they summarized statements made by scholars or used their personal experiences to adjust their claims. However, analytical introspection, continuous reconstruction of knowledge, and recurring transformation of beliefs and skills are essential elements of self-reflection, when growth is the goal. These elements only occurred when the preservice teachers began to realize what they did not know and/or became curious about things that they had never thought about (Stronge, 2007). Toward the end of the course, preservice teachers started to use phrases such as “I wonder,” “I hope to learn more about,” or “I am curious about” to express the realization of the unknown in their reflections. The two major topics that emerged concerning their willingness to learn are the knowledge of students’ first language or dialect, and the knowledge of how language ideology is socially and historically formed. Excerpts 8 and 9 are examples of such expressions.

Excerpt 8 (CLA-level: Critique)

I have seen many teachers struggle to find a way to communicate a response to the way certain students speak. I have seen them restate what the student is trying to say in standard English and then have the student repeat it before answering. . . . I wonder whether the student is learning anything from this type of response. To avoid discouraging students who speak vernaculars, I hope to learn more about vernaculars that will be a part of my classroom so that I can understand how their languages are different from mine. . . . I hope there is some training on how to have extensive knowledge on so many kinds of dialects.

Written in Week 10, this excerpt, shows a preservice teacher not only claiming a factual truth about the importance of language variation and multilingualism but also critiquing the fact that some teachers correct students’ vernaculars based on standard English. This critique reveals an interest in increasing knowledge about students’ vernaculars and different kinds of dialects. In this excerpt, this

preservice teacher used “I hope” twice to express a willingness to engage the unknown and to envision how that new knowledge might affect teaching practices. This awareness shows that the preservice teacher is willing to take up the roles of language user, language analyst, and language teacher (Edge, 1988) in order to be an expert collaborator in the process of dialogic mediation (Andrews et al., 2017).

Excerpt 9 (CLA-level: Respect)

I understand that it is my responsibility to equip students with the knowledge and skill of standard English. I just wonder how the notion of standard English was created. After all, when we say something is standard, we need to know whose standard we are talking about and based on what people claim their language is standard..

This excerpt was written in Week 12. Similar to Excerpt 8, this excerpt shows a preservice teacher using “I wonder” and the question word “how” to express curiosity about the unknown, which not only indicates that the preservice teacher is willing to be adequately prepared (Lindahl, 2019), but also shows that this preservice teacher’s reflections transcended the stage of simply making factual statements or summarizing scholars’ theories. The expressed curiosity about the origin of the notion of standard English is an indication that this preservice teacher challenges the existing social perspective on language, and questions how a certain language ideology is naturalized (García, 2017). The learning process in the course is supporting the transition from theory to practice, from knowledge to belief, and from optimistically claiming the importance of CLA to a realization of the challenges that exist in real-world settings. In other words, preservice teachers’ self-reflections have entered a critical cultural consciousness and an ideological reconfiguration.

Discussion

“Biased classification of languages may have a negative impact on other languages, cultures, and identities” (Alfouaim, 2012, p. 4). To avoid preservice teachers’ maintaining or developing possible deficit views of students who speak another “variety” of English, preservice teachers should develop in-depth CLA. CLA is not merely about mastering knowledge of language variation and multilingualism, but is also about adopting the belief that all languages are equal, and being capable of implementing this belief in teaching practice. Hornberger and McKay (2010) argue that “as sociolinguists and educators, we must do more than study the relationships between language, society and power—we must do what we can do to change them” (p. 228). To overcome the difficulty of transforming preservice teachers’ knowledge about language variation and multilingualism in their teaching practice, teacher educators need to make sense of preservice teachers’ discursive choices and the discursive features they employ. They can then scaffold preservice teachers’ ability to continuously and consciously reflect on their own thoughts and experiences, and on the reality of the treatment of language variation and multilingualism in institutional settings.

The present study used discursive psychology as a theoretical framework and analytical tool to highlight discursive features employed by preservice teachers as they constructed and reconstructed their beliefs and attitudes about language variation and multiculturalism. Preservice teachers’ written discourse was not treated merely as a cognitive representation; it was examined as contextualized and variable productions that perform pragmatic and rhetorical work (Edwards & Potter, 1992). We aimed to show the discursive practice of reasoning in its specific context of use. The findings suggest that the development of preservice teachers’ CLA is accompanied by changes in the discursive choices in their written reflections. The conclusions of this study are illustrated in Figure 3.

We found that over the course of the semester, preservice teachers moved “beyond general awareness toward specific instructional actions that challenge prevailing conventions” (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 184) to construct an in-depth CLA. In line with this change, preservice teachers’ discursive choices also changed. Specifically, in the beginning of the course, preservice teachers generally used discursive features such as factual claims, disclaimers of personal point of view, or if-then structure to state truths, provide broad suggestions, and emphasize what they already knew. As an in-depth CLA developed,

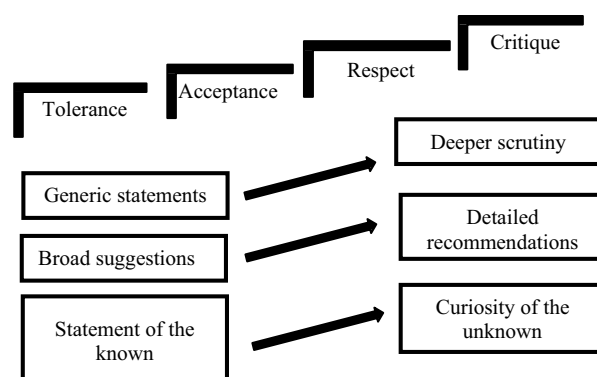


Figure 3. Conclusion: Preservice teachers' accompanied by changes in the discursive choices.

preservice teachers' discursive features shifted from merely stating what they believe or what they know to features such as the question word “how” (to express deeper scrutiny of an existing ideology or system), the use of the “what, why, but, how” pattern (to provide detailed recommendations) and the adoption of expressions like “I hope” and “I am curious about” (to present their curiosity about the unknown and about how existing social structures were formed). The analysis of discursive features under each shift exhibits how different discursive sources were marshaled and leveraged in students' written reflections.

Implications

Writing reflections is a common approach to enhancing students' academic learning and critical thinking across universities in the US. However, developing an in-depth reflection is challenging for preservice teachers. The challenges stem not only from the difficulty of mastering the complexity of writing critically; they also stem from the difficulty of employing discursive resources to construct critical thinking. Edwards and Potter (1992) argue that “psychological issues are constructed and deployed in the discourse itself” (p. 127). Thus, purposeful guidance is needed to facilitate the parallel processes of cognitive construction and discursive practice. Using DP as a theoretical and methodological perspective allowed us to explore how written discursive features and resources could be used to construct preservice teachers' CLA, and to show the discursive changes that appeared as their CLA developed. While many teacher educators struggle with helping preservice teachers to move beyond merely accepting and appreciating cultural and language diversity (Gay & Kirkland, 2003), the results of this study offer insights for teacher educators to make sense of preservice teachers' discursive changes and features in the process of developing CLA. Moreover, since language is both constructed and constructive (Potter, 2003; Potter & Edwards, 2001), teacher educators can use the findings to create stage-appropriate inductive questions to help preservice teachers engage in continuous critiques through written self-reflections.

We noticed that the shift from providing broad suggestions to offering detailed recommendations happened when the readings we assigned were related to descriptions of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. These readings offer concrete teaching strategies that preservice teachers can critique or elaborate on, and they help to ease the pressure of creating novel ideas when preservice teachers are still in the process of developing CLA. Therefore, we strongly encourage including these types of readings in language variation or multicultural education classes.

Note

1. We have substituted the term “multicultural” with the term “multilingual” to reflect our focus on the issue of critical language awareness.

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Appendix

The adapted model of Nieto (2006) (Endo, 2015, p. 209)

Level 1: Tolerance: Differences “are endured but not necessarily embraced” (Nieto, 2006, p. 21). An individual from a “non-dominant” group may be encouraged to adapt to the dominant culture’s actual or perceived communication and discourse style.

Level 2: Acceptance: Linguistic “differences are acknowledged and their importance is neither denied or belittled” (Nieto, 2006, p. 23).

Level 3: Respect: There exists ongoing affirmation and regard for all forms of diversity.

Level 4: Critique: Recognizes that conflict and disagreement about diversity are a natural part of the learning process. Members of a community critique and trouble common assumptions, expectations, and practices within a classroom or institutional setting that consciously or unconsciously marginalize diverse learners.