Funds of Linguistic Knowledge in MEXTESOL: Considering Local and Transnational Language Resources[1]

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Summary

The profile of English speakers in Mexico is increasingly varied. As language educators, we seek to raise learner proficiency by improving language curriculum, materials, and teaching. But the effects of unplanned input, resulting from transnational migration and contact with English in non-instructional settings, may be even greater. The linguistic resources held by these non-traditional learners and speakers are considerable, yet they are often invisible and even denigrated in schools and classrooms. This paper presents the notion of Funds of Linguistic Knowledge (FOLK) as a conceptual tool for thinking about the nature and sources of language input and use in English language learning and teaching. Following examples of FOLK projects in bilingual classrooms in the U.S. and first language literacy learning in Mexico, I suggest ways that MEXTESOL educators in folk (*popular*) and elite bilingual contexts can develop teaching practices that harness language differences as resources for language learning.

Preface

This paper was conceived and first delivered as a plenary address at the National MEXTESOL convention in Morelia in October 2004, where I was pleased to speak about the use and non-use of local language resources in language teaching. As I describe in the paper, Funds of Linguistic Knowledge offers a theoretical justification for incorporating the English language resources held by transnational migrants into Mexican ELT classrooms. I also offer some practical recommendations for how this could be done. I admit to being less sure about these, and would very much like to see teachers experiment with and improve upon them in their own classrooms. I should note at the outset that the paper is rooted in the belief that the field of English language teaching can be advanced by a deeper consideration of sociocultural context than we typically see in practice. In addition to being good for language learning and teaching, a Funds of Linguistic Knowledge approach offers the potential for language teaching to contribute to positive social change. If this sounds a bit grand, think of it this way: if educators want to be taken seriously as leaders and as stakeholders in a society—and I think we have a lot to offer--then our concerns cannot stop at the classroom door.

Since the MEXTESOL convention, I have had the opportunity to think about these ideas further with graduate students, some of whom may be English

[1] This is an invited article

language teachers one day. Like several teachers in the plenary audience, the students remarked that many teachers have no forum for talking about and making sense of what linguistically marked social issues mean for language teaching and vice versa. If I understand their remarks correctly, what these teachers and future teachers are saying is that their schools don't have a space or a regular time in which teachers can consider these issues face to face. I was reminded (again!) that learning new tools for thinking about and practicing teaching through our most prized academic formats—classrooms, conferences, and journals-- is only one part of coming to understand them. To deeply understand educational innovations like the one I am proposing here, educators also need to insist upon—to create if necessary--spaces for reflection and practice. I hope the ideas in this paper are useful for those who wish to do so, and I am grateful to the Editors for inviting me to share them with readers of the *MEXTESOL Journal*.

Introduction

Let me outline what I want to try to do in this paper. I'll begin by looking at how the profile of English speakers in Mexico has changed. I am going to make the case that language gains resulting from transnational migration and contact with English in non-instructional settings is probably just as important as formal language instruction and perhaps even more important. I will argue that although the linguistic resources held by these non-traditional learners and speakers are considerable, they are typically invisible and often even denigrated in schools and classrooms. I'll describe Funds of Linguistic Knowledge (FOLK) as a conceptual tool for thinking about how to tap these under-utilized language resources in English language learning and teaching. We'll take a look at FOLK projects in bilingual classrooms in the U.S. and first language (L1) literacy learning in Mexico, and then look more closely at how MEXTESOL educators—whether we work in folk (*popular*) or elite bilingual contexts--can develop teaching practices that use these language differences as resources for language learning.

In this paper I frame FOLK as an example of what Alastair Pennycook (2001) has described as "critical applied linguistics", that is "not about developing a set of skills that will make the doing of applied linguistics more rigorous or more objective, but rather is about making applied linguistics more politically accountable," and "critical here means social inequality and social transformation as central to one's work" (Pennycook, p. 6, 7). Being critical applied linguists then, requires that English language teachers, no matter the ages or proficiency levels of our students, see ourselves as language professionals whose beliefs, decisions, and practices have important effects on and are affected by conditions beyond the language classroom. Teachers who see themselves as critical applied linguists understand that the students, materials, lessons, and other aspects of language teaching that come together in our classrooms are not neutral ingredients that just happen to be there by accident, but that they are the products/results of decisions and language ideologies—some explicit and others implicit. One of the challenges for critical language professionals then, is to see language teaching in terms of connections to the larger society beyond our classrooms and schools, to move beyond conceiving instruction as a set of skills to seeing it as connected to a set of

existing (and potential) social practices (Resnick, 1990/2000). Although this notion hasn't been a major focus of MEXTESOL as an organization, I am arguing here that it ought to be.

In that spirit, I want to state explicitly my belief that the goal of MEXTESOL is (or ought to be) fostering additive bi- or multilingualism in Mexico. That is, in addition to promoting English language learning, we commit ourselves to supporting the development of Spanish and/or the indigenous and other languages our students already speak when they enter our classrooms. That is the philosophy behind the 2003 Special Issue of the *MEXTESOL Journal*, organized around the themes of folk and elite bilingualism. Here's the main idea:

> *...Two different understandings of bilingualism have traditionally been separated in Mexico. Suzanne Romaine's (1999) distinction between "elite" and "folk" routes to child simultaneous bilingualism is useful here. According to Romaine (1999, p. 61) most of what we know about the development of childhood bilingualism is based on studies of "middle-class" and "relatively privileged populations." In such elite contexts, bilingualism generally involves at least one European language of wider communication (such as English or Spanish), and bilingual education is typically undertaken voluntarily by families who recognize the prestige of bilingualism and are able and willing to devote considerable financial resources to raising bilingual children. In contrast, we know relatively little about how the majority of the world's children become bilingual. In 'folk' contexts, including Mexico's indigenous and immigrant communities, children do not enjoy the same financial or educational resources. Their home language is typically not the prestige language of the community and, in most cases, their acquisition of another (generally European) language is a matter of economic and even physical survival. For these young bilinguals, their home language is underdeveloped and frequently ignored completely in school. Thus, education becomes a subtractive process in which they may lose competence in one language while attempting to gain competence in another.*
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> Smith, P.H. (2003, p. 9)

Changes in the Profile of Mexican Speakers of English

Let's look at some of the changes in the profile of Mexican speakers of English in this country. Consider the growth in the number of regional chapters of MEXTESOL (nine chapters in 1995 and 17 chapters in 2004) and increases in the national membership. With greater regional diversity, the socio-economic status of the membership has also broadened, along with the mission of the Association. When I began attending national conventions in 1991, my sense was that they were organized primarily to serve the professional interests of educators at private schools and institutes, with less participation by public school teachers. Things have changed since then. Holding the national

conventions in regional capitals, like Morelia, instead of only at beach resorts has enabled more local teachers, presumably with fewer resources, to attend. There has been greater outreach and attempts to attract SEP teachers to MEXTESOL membership and events, including the granting of *valor curricular* to academic events and reduced membership fees for SEP employees. The National Office estimates that 60 or 70 percent of MEXTESOL members work in SEP schools at least part-time (personal communication, Leobardo Romero Rosas, September 21, 2004). The National Office also estimates that the attendance at the national conventions is more balanced than it used to be—more like 50 percent private school and 50 percent public school teachers.

Changes in the Concerns and Direction of MEXTESOL?

What can we learn from these changes in the membership? What does the increased presence of a folk bilingual audience (the students we teach) mean for changes in the nature or direction of the organization? Does having more learners in public schools make a difference in the professional interests of MEXTESOL members? To find out, I did a quick survey of the titles and abstracts presented at the last three national conferences. I also checked the contents of the Journal and the Newsletter over the past few years. With some exceptions, it appears that our concerns, at least in these forums, have remained focused primarily on teaching the four skills, classroom activities, and materials that Christopher Hall (2000) detailed in a summary of recent trends in the articles published in the *MEXTESOL Journal*. In other words, while the organization continues to focus on issues inside the classroom—with an overrepresentation of elite classrooms, I would say--less attention is being paid to issues around the demographic changes that are now creating a very different profile of English language learners in Mexico.

Transnational Migration

Nelly Stromquist (2002), a U.S.-based researcher who compares education systems in different countries writes the following about the effects of globalization on education in the northern and southern hemispheres:

> *"As the migration of people accelerates, the South is coming to the North. This makes it necessary to understand the dynamics of both regions. Educators in the North...need to learn the background of students, their cultural norms, their cognitive patterns, and the nature of their school systems of origin, and to determine how the North must adjust to new pressing conditions rather than demand full assimilation.... Educators in the South need to become familiar with educational reforms going on in core countries in the North (and that will reach developing countries in the very near future) to demystify their content and promise."*

I should say that there is very much in Stromquist's position that I agree with. As a native of the U.S., I agree with her assessment that teaching in the North must change to reflect the new linguistic and cultural composition of schools

there. As a language educator in Mexico, I also like the idea of critically evaluating ideas, curriculum, and materials rather than blindly accepting them just because they are being promoted by international publishers. But Stromquist's statement leaves out a point that is fundamentally important to the purposes of our discussion. That is, if the South is moving to the North, it is also returning home to the South in the form of transnational migration.

As the Mexican sociologist Rodolfo Tuirán (2001, p. 16) notes, we can distinguish between two groups of Mexican migrants: *settlers*, with fixed or stable residence in the U.S., and sojourners, who move more frequently between the two countries. In recent years, the amount of back and forth migration has increased so much—it is estimated that each year one million people born in Mexico enter the U.S. to work and return to Mexico in the same year--that researchers trying to understand the phenomenon have begun to describe it as **transnational** migration. We also need to recognize that a person doesn't actually have to cross the border to be a participant in this new sense of transnationalism. Last year, one in five Mexican families received *remesas*, dollars sent by family members or friends working in the United States. And of those people who received *remesas* in 2003, some 25% say that they too are considering emigrating to the U.S. or Canada to work (Suro, 2003). Transnational migration then is characterized by dense social networks of families whose lives are lived—physically, emotionally, and virtually--on both sides of the international border (Binford & D'Aubeterre, 2000).

Transnationalism and Education

What does transnational migration mean for education? Unfortunately for us, most of the research trying to answer that question has been done from the perspective of the so-called "receiving countries" in the North. In the U.S., for example, the issue of whether and how to restructure public education to better serve immigrant children receives a great deal of attention in areas such as child and family identity (González, 2001; Guerra, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez Orozco, 2001); teacher training, (Petrovic, Orozco, González & Díaz de Cossío, 1999; Riojas Clarke & Flores, 2001); and language policy (de la Garza, 2002; Pugach, 1998). Although Mexican scholars have done a very good job of describing internal migration (for example, indigenous residents of Oaxaca spending part of the year doing seasonal agricultural work in Sinaloa and other northern states), there seem to be fewer national scholars studying the effects of international or transnational migration. And regarding the effects of transnational migration on education here in Mexico, specifically on English language education, *estamos en pañales pues.*

So, how important is what I am calling a folk bilingual presence to the profile of English language speakers in Mexico? In trying to answer this question, it is first important to recognize how little we actually know about the numbers of English speakers in this country. The national Census, for example, which does include questions on home use of Spanish and indigenous languages, does not record home use or knowledge of other languages. *Ethnolog*, an excellent website for people interested in knowing more about the distribution of languages around the world, gives the figure of 350,000 first language speakers

of English in Mexico—incidentally, that's 50,000 fewer than the number of Arabic speakers, according to *Ethnolog*.

Although interesting, by themselves these figures don't tell us much about English language acquisition in the country. We don't know, for example, how many of the 350,000 speakers of English (if we accept that figure) learned to speak English. Are they native speakers, or speakers of other L1s who have added English to their linguistic repertoires? And in the latter cases, what can we say about the influences of instruction (language teaching) and non-instructional exposure (migration)? Again, although we don't have much information for the specific case of Mexico, we can look to the literature for an idea of the relative effects of instruction and migration on bilingualism around the world. On the effects of instruction we have the opinion of two well-respected second language teaching methodologists, Jack Richards and Ted Rogers:

> *"The majority of the world's population is bilingual, and formal classroom teaching has contributed only insignificantly to this statistic. Thus, it is easy to find successful language learning situations which formally possess neither syllabus, teachers, nor instructional materials" (Richards & Rogers, 1987, p. 150).*

As for the effects of migration on bilingualism, Wei and Sherman (2001, p. 378) comment that

> *"Despite the fact that indigenous children of immigrant parents are emerging as the largest new bilingual population across the world, relatively little research has been done concerning their language development."*

Let's pause here for a moment and take stock. So far, we've looked at the following ideas:

- English language teachers (as language professionals) should think of themselves as critical applied linguists
- The goal of English teachers and MEXTESOL ought to be the promotion of additive bilingualism for learners in both folk and elite bilingual contexts
- Although MEXTESOL has traditionally been focused on elite bilingualism, the nature of the students we teach is changing due to transnational migration and the students' other non-school contact with English.

Given these ideas, how should English language teachers react to these changes? In the remainder of the paper I want to talk about Funds of Linguistic Knowledge as a tool for recognizing and perhaps even harnessing these linguistic resources in ways that make sense for all English language learners—those who have lived as transnational migrants and those who have not. It is important to remember that, as I pointed out above, we simply don't have a great deal of precise information about the numbers of the transnational population or what

the phenomenon of transnationalism (as opposed to internal migrations within the physical borders of Mexico) means for education. So the following remarks are of necessity somewhat speculative in nature. Recommendations for specific practices will have to wait; what follows is a description of some of the evidence that we do have, and what I hope you will agree with me are compelling possibilities for re-orienting our thinking about language teaching.

Locating FOLK within Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory provides an important lens for viewing complex processes in settings where language-minority and language-majority speakers interact. Analyses of the historical, social, and cultural dimensions of schooling reveal that the meanings of "shared" concepts such as language, literacy, learning, and teaching in a given context are in fact constructed by actors in response to unique and dynamic local conditions, like migration. Using conceptual tools derived from the work of Vygotsky, educational researchers working from a sociocultural perspective examine what actors do and say in and out of the classroom and school in order to understand "how interactions within a social instructional network are responsible for an individual's cognitive and linguistic development" (Donato, 2000, p. 46). Comparison of patterns of school and home language use and discourse reveals that language varieties used in working-class and language- minority homes are often viewed pejoratively in schools (Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999). Ohta (2000, pp. 51-52) summarizes one of the most important notions sociocultural theory offers for understanding L2 acquisition in classroom settings: "In order to better understand the role of interaction in L2 development, researchers have begun to study how native speakers or more proficient 'experts' support 'novices."

Funds of Knowledge refers to the different kinds of information that people need to 'make it' in the world, and also to who 'holds' that knowledge. Anthropologist Eric Wolfe first talked about five 'funds' that characterize all cultural groups: food, shelter, means of production and ceremonial and social relationships. Later, James Greenberg and Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez (1992) used these ideas to describe the skills and practices in poor households, as family members develop new forms of knowledge in order to survive in tough economic times. They also showed that this knowledge is very culturally specific. For example, in their research on Mexican-American households in the U.S. Southwest, Greenberg and Vélez-Ibáñez suggested that many of the things that Mexican-Americans know are 'invisible' to members of the majority culture in the U.S. and especially in schools and other public institutions.

Like many educators, I first learned about Funds of Knowledge through the work of Luis Moll and Norma González. Moll (an educational psychologist) and González (a cultural anthropologist) have worked with teachers in the United States to make visible the special kinds of intellectual resources present in language minority families. Teaching with Funds of Knowledge means recognizing, understanding, and valuing the 'hidden' knowledge that language minority children bring to school, and then incorporating that undervalued knowledge into the curriculum that makes sense for all learners. As Carmen Mercado (2003, 1) puts it, Funds of Knowledge "is an approach that begins with the study of households rather than the study of pedagogy." By conducting

household visits, making inventories of specific practices they observe, keeping reflective journals, and through participation in teacher study groups, teacher-researchers document local and family knowledge of language, literacy and math practices they were previously unaware of (Moll, 2000).

Let's take a look at how this actually happens, in the words of a teacher. A first grade teacher working in a bilingual classroom in Tucson, Arizona wrote this about a family she visited:

> *"The living room included a bookcase of reference books in Spanish. The father had been trained in Hermosillo, Sonora as an electrical repairman. He worked on refrigerators, air conditioners, and other appliances while in Hermosillo. In Tucson, he works for a local tortilla factory delivering tortillas to grocery stores. The living room bookcase also included recipe books and craft books. The family had owned and operated a small convenience store in Hermosillo. Mrs. Estrada was in charge of managing the store, including ordering, bookkeeping, and selling. The whole family participated in some fashion by stocking, cleaning, and selling.*
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> *...What do these observations have to do with my teaching? Specifically, I used the family's knowledge about owning and managing a store to create a math unit on money. For three weeks, we explored the social issues of money, along with mathematical concepts about money. Beyond that, I used the information I learned about the home in incidental matters that color the curriculum. I knew where my student lived and who her neighbors were. I made connections in class.... "How about if you work on your science project with your classmate who lives next door to you?" (González et al., 1993, pp. 10-11).*

Most Funds of Knowledge projects have addressed content areas like math, science, and social studies. What hasn't been talked about as much is how language and literacy learning fit into Funds of Knowledge. In my research, I use the notion of Funds of Linguistic Knowledge (FOLK) to focus specifically on the ways spoken and written language are used in schools. I find it a useful tool for exploring how educators can recognize and utilize family and community knowledge and beliefs about language in order to improve language and literacy pedagogy. In the following section, I examine three examples of research using FOLK, two from the U.S.-Mexico border, and one from the state of Puebla.

In a study appropriately titled "Is the word Mexican taboo?" published in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, Nocon (1995) asked about the motivations of Anglo university students of Spanish as a second language in southern California. Specifically, she wondered about who these students were planning to communicate with in Spanish, given that Spanish is both a world language of wider communication as well as a language spoken natively or very well by millions of people in her study area. She found that these university students made no effort to tap the Funds of Linguistic Knowledge held by local Chicano or Mexican-American speakers of Spanish. Rather, the

students' identified their language models and future interlocutors as "deep" Mexicans and Spaniards. Nocon speculated that the local varieties of Spanish were seen as less prestigious, based on views about, and attitudes towards, these speakers.

Let's think about the implications of this for a minute. Nocón's findings suggest that Anglo students studying Spanish might see places like Morelia, Guadalajara, and Cuernavaca, cities well known for their Spanish as a Second Language programs, as "deep enough" in Mexico to have Spanish that they would consider legitimate, a variety worth learning. But southern California—where there are tens of thousands of speakers of Spanish from Morelia and other parts of Michoacán--doesn't qualify.

In the second example from the U.S.-Mexico border, colleagues and I looked at FOLK issues in a Spanish-English bilingual primary school in Tucson, Arizona as part of a longitudinal study of biliteracy development and language ideology in a case of dual language education (Smith, 2001a, 2001b). We focused much of our attention on children's use of Spanish because good content teaching in the minority language has traditionally been a challenge for bilingual programs. This was an exciting research context because this bilingual school has a remarkable language policy history—from nearly eighty years of English-only instruction to the present dual language model where all children study content courses in Spanish and in English. Because this school is located in the heart of one of the oldest Mexican-American barrios in Arizona, I was curious if and how bilingual educators tapped into the Spanish language resources surrounding them.

I found that the school did a good job of incorporating the FOLK held by middle-class, English-dominant bilinguals with high levels of formal education, through curriculum projects including oral histories, letter-writing, and home-visit projects. In contrast, there was considerably less outreach to the two groups of more fluent Spanish speakers, recent arrivals from Mexico and elderly bilinguals living in the Barrio. Many of these fluent speakers had limited literacy skills in Spanish--almost always as a result of limited access to education in that language. Because of their understandable insecurities about reading and writing, it was difficult for them to share their Funds of Linguistic Knowledge without encouragement and guidance from patient and experienced teachers. Thus, one of the questions to come out of this research is how teachers can become more aware of the full range of target language resources available outside schools.

A third example of FOLK research comes from a study of first language literacy that colleagues and I are doing in a small city in the state of Puebla (Smith, Jiménez & Martínez León, 2003; Smith, Jiménez & Ballesteros, in press). For the past three years we've been comparing the kinds of written language that children are exposed to at school with the kinds of written language they see and use in their homes and in the community outside the school. We find that the home and school literacies in this research site look very different. At school, students are focused mainly on reproducing teacher-provided texts rather than using written language to express themselves. The emphasis in the school-based writing is overwhelmingly on form rather than content. At home, the same children see parents and other family members engaging in a wide

range of writing practices, often for business purposes. In some of the families we are working with, children help in record keeping and production of other texts. They also read texts that seem to be more complex and longer than the texts they are required to read in school. The authors of these home-produced texts seem to be more concerned with content rather than form. Often the texts are not as polished, conventionally written, or aesthetically pleasing as those produced in schools, but they are much more likely to convey a message and to express content. Interestingly, many of these locally produced texts contain elements of English, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Example of a locally-produced text with elements of English. San Andrés Cholula, Puebla.

Although we do not know the specific details of the production of this hand-painted text, we speculate that it may have been written by a folk bilingual, perhaps a writer with transnational experiences and knowledge of English.

In addition to documenting differences in home and school literacies, we are exploring what, if any, connections the participants make between them. Specifically, we are interested in knowing whether teachers recognize the forms and purposes of the writing and reading students do at home, and whether they make any attempt to employ them in school. We are also looking at whether

parents recognize the ways that home literacy might support literacy in school. In this ongoing study we have gathered evidence showing that parents accept and promote school forms of literacy at home in different ways, including helping their children with homework and emulating forms associated with school literacy, as illustrated nicely in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Parent-produced letter chart to support child's literacy development. San Andrés Cholula, Puebla.

Thus far we have seen much less evidence that teachers or parents view home literacy practices as a support for schooling, particularly in the case of transnational and indigenous heritage families (Murillo, 2005).

These three examples show the potential of FOLK ideas, but what about applications to English teaching here in Mexico? Here I want to return to the notion of elite and folk bilingualism or *bilinguismo popular*. What we have seen across several studies is that the FOLK that learners bring to elite bilingual contexts seem to be almost automatically recognized and accepted by English educators. For example, in a recent study of English teaching in a private bilingual primary school in Xalapa, Veracruz researchers found that teachers integrated English language music, videos, the Internet, magazines, as well as contact with native speakers of English, into a traditional materials-based curriculum (Mora Pablo, Hernández Páez, & Teague 2003). Furthermore, they found that teachers, students, and parents in this elite bilingual context believed that the use of non-traditional materials was motivational. This finding was gratifying for several reasons. First, the authors were graduate students of

mine, and it is always rewarding to see former students being professionally active. More importantly, this was exactly what I have proposed English teachers should be doing. In a paper I presented at the MEXTESOL national convention in 1994, called "Standard vs. non-standard varieties of English: Which English do we teach?," I argued that teachers needed to learn more about the non-standard varieties of English that students were experiencing through expressions of popular culture. I also argued that the motivational and fluency-enhancing benefits of incorporating such forms of expression into the curriculum should outweigh prescriptivist concerns about teaching only standard or conventional linguistic forms. So the Mora Pablo, Hernández Páez & Teague (2003) study that I've just described seems to confirm a pattern reflected in the contents of the program of the 31st National Convention (2005): MEXTESOL teachers now seem to have embraced the notion that elite speakers of English bring valuable L2 experiences to the classroom. Furthermore, it seems to be recognized that this knowledge needn't be shut out, but should rather be acknowledged and even built upon. One example of these elite funds of knowledge is the new magazine and companion CD for English language readers, *English 2 Go,* which convention-goers received with their registration materials. Thus, in the cover story, "J. Lo Speaks Up," learners can listen to and read about the bilingualism of the singer/actress Jennifer López (Davidson, 2004). Like her singing and acting, López' language proficiency is presented as a marketable good, a commodity that helps sell magazines.

But what about the FOLK of non-elite or folk bilinguals? When transnational migrants return with some level of English proficiency from stays or schooling in the U.S. or Canada, do teachers recognize and value their linguistic resources as readily? Remember the lessons we drew from Nocon's study, in which university students learning Spanish in Southern California specifically did not view local forms of Spanish as legitimate models? And the bilingual school in Arizona I described, in which teachers viewed only the elite speakers as legitimate interlocutors for children learning Spanish? With English fluency so highly prized in Mexico, are the children and families who return—most of whom have little access to Spanish language instruction in the U.S.—viewed as potential language resources by Mexican English teachers? To what extent are these English-fluent, even English-dominant, students regarded as holding FOLK to be tapped in instruction involving their non-migrant peers? Are they sought out as linguistic resources or, in the words of Paolo Freire, are "the syntax, orthography, semantics, and accent of the kind spoken by these lower class children" rejected as legitimate linguistic models (Freire, 1998, p. 73)?

What I want to do in the remainder of this paper is to explore the possibilities for using FOLK in folk (popular) contexts. Although we know very little about if and how this is being done here in Mexico, the potential is enormous. For example, during the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years, the SEP, through the Programa Binacional de Educación Migrante (PROBEM) (see Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2004a), registered 40,000 Mexican students who used to study in U.S. schools and have now returned to study in Mexico. From Michoacán, approximately 10,000 children between the ages of 5 and 14 spend part of each year in the United States (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 2000). Since the SEP has no system for recording the English proficiency level of returning students, we have no way to be sure what this all means for teaching (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2004b). But some

connections are being made. According to the National Coordinator of English programs for the SEP, there are now 450 schools in 19 states working with English in the primary grades, and some 450,000 students are working with 700 teachers in this program (Elsa Patricia Jiménez, personal communication, October 7, 2004). To find out what was happening with transnational children in classes taught by MEXTESOL teachers, I emailed a short survey to the chapter presidents. (See the Appendix) Unfortunately, I think some of the contact information given on the Association webpage is out of date. Probably at least some of the chapters never received my questionnaire. But several chapters did report an increased presence of immigrant families in their schools. Thanks to Ana María Grajales de la Vega (personal communication, September 20, 2004) I learned that in Colima "some teachers use them (transnational students) as monitors in the English classroom."

A Case of Transnational Bilingualism between the New York Metropolitan Area and Puebla, Mexico

I want to share the story of Juan Carlos, a young transnational bilingual from Atlixco, Puebla who lived for most of his teenage years in Greenwich, Connecticut and attended high school there. He's an English teacher these days, and his story illustrates very well some of the points we have been considering here. Before I tell his story though, let me give some background information for those not familiar with Puebla or Greenwich[2].

Puebla is one of the states with the highest levels of migration to the U.S; out of a population of slightly more than five million residents, it is thought that perhaps one million people—nearly one in five—spend some part of each year in the U.S. (Martínez, 2002). Atlixco, the town that Juan Carlos was born in, is interesting linguistically because many residents have undergone language shift (from Nahuatl to Spanish) only a few generations ago, an all-but complete process that was carried out by and, in many cases initiated by the onset of. formal schooling.

The migration stream between Puebla and the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut region is fairly recent compared to migration from Michoacán or Oaxaca (Grimes, 1998). One of the most interesting ways to gauge the importance of migration in Mexican communities is to ask local taxi drivers if they have family members living and working in the U.S. or Canada. For example, when I arrived in Morelia, the driver who took me from the bus terminal to my hotel, a man in his forties, told me he couldn't remember a time when people here weren't talking about migrating to the U.S. In contrast, migration from Puebla to the U.S. began in the 1970s, and has accelerated considerably since the early 1990s. Today, approximately 50% of the Mexicans living in New York City--perhaps as many as 200,000 people--are from Atlixco and other communities in Puebla (Consulado General de Mexico en Nueva York, 2000).[2] Indeed, *Poblanos* (residents of the state of Puebla) have become such an important presence in New York City that Spanish-language television channels carry local Puebla news on weekends and there are radio stations with regular programming from the region. Although the migrant population continues to be dominated by unmarried males, a growing number of *poblano* women and families with children live in the greater New York area. Return rates, typically

higher for families (Cortés, 2001), have understandably increased since the events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent economic downturn in the U.S.

But back to Juan Carlos. At the age of 14 he leaves Atlixco and goes to the U.S. without papers to live with his sister and her husband in Greenwich, Connecticut, a very wealthy, predominantly Anglo community with few Mexicans at that time, 1995. He takes ESL classes in the local high school and likes it okay. But it's really working in a restaurant that helps him learn English, he says:

> "Algunos amigos me invitaron: "sabes que mira estamos ya en la High School" y todos ellos trabajaban en un restaurante en las tardes, me dicen: "¿No quieres venir a ayudarnos?" Digo "bueno pues, sí" y fui, a mí me gustaba porque todo el tiempo pues tenía yo que aprender inglés y todo estando yo con la gente empecé a aprender más."

Juan Carlos graduates from high school in Greenwich and goes to work for his brother-in-law as a landscaper. He continues to work in the restaurant too. It's good money for a kid just out of high school, but he starts to find the work really boring. To his sister's great unhappiness, Juan Carlos takes his savings and goes on a bus tour of the United States. He sees the Grand Canyon, California, Niagara Falls, New York City, Florida, and other places with many more Mexicans than he ever saw in Connecticut! Back home in Greenwich, he buys a truck and drives home to Atlixco for the Christmas holidays. At this point Juan Carlos is 19 years old and he hasn't been home in more than four years. One night he goes to a party with some old friends and maybe you can guess what happens next. He meets somebody and falls in love. He wasn't planning to stay in Atlixco this time, but his sweetheart's family, being from Atlixco, has relatives living in New York. The U.S is no place for a young girl, they say. She can't go.

So, being in love, Juan Carlos decides to stay in Atlixco for a while and look for work. What do you think he does? That's right, he becomes an English teacher! Actually, he gets two teaching jobs, one at a local primary school where the parents—many of them *retornados* (returnees) themselves—have convinced the director that their kids need English classes starting in first grade. The families pay Juan Carlos 3 pesos per kid, per class. (Or at least that's what they were paying him in the spring of 2003; his rates might have gone up by now.) Anyway, with 40 kids per class, that's 120 pesos an hour. Not too bad, except that it's only 6 hours a week. In this situation, Juan Carlos gets no materials except what he can create himself. So he uses songs, games, and stories he learned in the U.S. And he speaks English the way he learned to talk at the restaurant back in Greenwich.

Juan Carlos's afternoon job is at an English Training Center, a private institute where people pay as much as 1000 pesos per month to study English. The classes are small, with five or six students each, and last for two hours. Juan Carlos teaches adults there briefly, but the director recognizes that he seems to have a special talent for working with young children, and pretty soon he's the main teacher of the children's classes. In contrast to his morning job, none of these students come from transnational families. It's an easy job he says,

because all the material is provided for him by the school. The lesson plans are written out in advance, so it's more like following a plan. The other big difference is that this institute sells "pure" English, in this case British English (whatever that is). Juan Carlos says that he is very careful not to show his transnational English self here. His co-teachers don't even know that he attended high school in Greenwich and has traveled all over the U.S.!

To find out why such a fluent speaker of English would hide his linguistic identity on the job, we interviewed Juan Carlos' boss at the elite school. Without revealing his secret, we asked the director if it was hard to find good English teachers in Atlixco. Definitely, she said. We asked if she would think about hiring transnational migrants to teach in her school if they demonstrated a sufficiently high level of English proficiency. She told us that it was unlikely that her school would be able to hire transnational teachers because, according to her, they don't speak the right kind of English:

> The idea of American English that we all have is that it's a mix of groups, of people from all over the world, and they've deformed it. What's happened with U.S. English is that everyone just speaks like he or she wants to, right? African-Americans have their own way of speaking, their vocabulary, the Chinese-Americans have their own ways, and now, even the Mexicans! So there is no real English, no pure English.

Implications

What should we do, as English language educators and critical applied linguists, in response to the issues I have been talking about here? Perhaps some of you have been thinking during the paper that I have been sending mixed messages: on the one hand, we don't know enough yet about the English spoken by transnational migrants, and, on the other hand, this phenomenon looks important enough that we need to take some specific actions now. Because I believe strongly that such plans need to be discussed in the local contexts where they would be applied, I won't offer a formula or recipe for what to do. There are, however, some steps that I believe make sense in terms of implications for practice, policy, research, and training.

Planners and policy makers need to collect basic demographic data on the language and schooling experiences of transnational migrants. The National Census, for example, should include questions that allow us to link migration status with languages spoken in the home. The SEP's PROBEM program is a step in the right direction, but there too, we need more information about the languages children used in school in the other country. I think MEXTESOL could play an important role in this regard, perhaps through sponsorship of an electronic resource center or discussion list. One very simple place to begin would be to document the presence of transnational students in schools where MEXTESOL members work, using the survey in the Appendix.

School directors and administrators should view teacher knowledge about linguistic diversity as an important resource to be actively cultivated by the school. Meeting this challenge requires schools to develop training and to create schedules that give teachers the paid-time needed to identify which

homes to visit, to actually visit them, and to observe in the community—practices that are at the heart of teaching with Funds of Knowledge. It also means creating space within the school day for teachers to meet and discuss not only the types of knowledge they are documenting, but how it fits in with the established SEP curriculum. Importantly, it means seeking out local teachers who know the community around the school, rather than a staff made up of outsiders who travel in and out for work purposes only.

Teachers need to be able to make the connection between what children and families do with language and literacy outside school and what they are learning to do in school. As Moje et al. (2004, p. 64) put it, teachers must "mobilize" funds of knowledge by developing locally appropriate materials and curricula that bridge these two sources of knowledge. In addition to dedicating their time and energies to developing culturally relevant pedagogies, it is important for MEXTESOL educators to regard an understanding of the sociocultural aspects of schooling as part of their ongoing professional development. A great deal of recent literature on how to develop this professional knowledge is available, especially to those who, like MEXTESOL members, are proficient readers of academic English.

Parents and community members need to understand the basics of educational linguistics and multilingualism, particularly the concept of standard and non-standard varieties. Parents who wish their children to become bilingual should know something about the shaping forces of language ideologies, including the basic facts of historical and current language shift in Mexico towards Spanish and English and away from other languages. One step to support this move would be to offer workshops or classes aimed at documenting the transnational language histories of key neighborhoods and local participants. As critical applied linguists, language teachers have a leading role to play in helping spread this knowledge about languages and the social conditions in which they are learned and maintained or lost. Without such conversations, the limited research we have in this area suggests that community members will be unaware of or even resistant to pedagogy which attempts to incorporate transnational varieties of English.

Researchers have an important role to play in documenting how well transnational learners do in English language education. In addition to working with the Secretaría de Educación Pública and the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática to add questions yielding the demographic information we lack, we need ethnographic studies of local instances of transnational English. Those of us who teach in undergraduate and graduate programs in applied linguistics can encourage our students to undertake course projects and theses that focus directly on transnational families and their language practices. They don't all need to be large-scale studies; a great deal can be learned from case studies focusing on a single family or a few families living in the same community. We can also train our research students to be on the lookout for transnational issues in studies exploring other topics, for example by including time lived in the U.S. or educational experiences in an English-speaking country as variables in quantitative studies of English language acquisition.

Teacher trainers can promote action research by in-service teachers now working with transnational students. Pre-service courses can include training for home visits and basic interviewing techniques, such as those discussed in Agrosino (2002) and Roberts et al. (2001). Teachers and student teachers who are themselves transnationals should especially be encouraged to conduct research in this area. Rather than hiding their transnationalism, *retornados* like Juan Carlos from Atlixco and Greenwich should be taught to value their educational, linguistic, and life experiences (and those of their future students). Because they are already familiar with many of the issues facing transnational language learners, transnationals may be able to forego some of the home visits and interviews that other teachers will need to do. They can also serve as cultural informants for pre-service and in-service classmates who have not had transnational experiences.

Perhaps most importantly, all adults involved in working with transnational students need to remember that we are asking **learners** to develop cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, and cross-class understandings beyond what many of us experienced as students and quite different perhaps from the messages they encounter in their lives outside of school (think of the discourses presented in movies and television shows about people who are linguistically different). Teaching English from a FOLK perspective then, means asking children to be *valiente*, brave enough--hopefully with good support from educators and parents--to question how things have come to be the way they are, and to see themselves and others as actors in progressive and linguistically responsible social change. It means transforming school or at least the English classroom into a space where instances of linguistic discrimination are not ignored in the interest of harmony, but rather made the explicit focus of analysis and interpretation by learners.

Conclusion

Although the notion of tapping existing Funds of Linguistic Knowledge to promote English language learning may seem to be a common sense idea, in practice learning to see and value these resources presents very real challenges to teachers, teacher trainers, and school administrators, and very different challenges to children and families. Are we up to these challenges? Let me begin to answer with an observation I sometimes hear from language teachers—that that what I have described as the heart of funds of knowledge-based teaching—the home visits and community observations—simply do not fit with the culture of language teaching as we know it in Mexico.[3] A colleague with a great deal of professional knowledge and experience as a teacher and language program administrator in Mexican schools has suggested—quite rightly, I think—that few schools are prepared to pay teachers to do home visits. He further suggests that families and teachers alike might see home visits and interviews as an invasion of privacy.[4] Again, I think these comments are well founded. There is no space here to respond to them, and perhaps that is a good thing, since in my experience teaching with funds of knowledge only works when it interests and makes sense to the educators involved. Readers who recognize in these remarks a language problem present in their own teaching contexts will need to go out and learn more. The reading list at the end of this article is a good place to begin. I would also add that attempts to create culturally relevant pedagogies

often encounter resistance, and not just from teachers. Rethinking our teaching to consider the local language resources that students bring to the classroom, and especially using them as the basis for instructional materials, not only implies additional work for teachers, it may also mean convincing parents accustomed to (and perhaps paying a lot of money for) commercially-prepared materials to accept the legitimacy of other kinds of texts. Obviously, this is something that will not please publishers or the owners of language institutes who design their products to be marketed to the widest possible audience—regardless of local variations in learner needs.

What I am saying is that, indeed, there are many barriers to a FOLK approach to teaching English. There are probably many schools where the conditions are not right for it, at least not now. I am convinced, however, that there are places where teachers, students, and families would be receptive to thinking about more socially responsible ways of teaching and learning, teaching contexts where, to paraphrase Delia Lerner (2001), it is possible to distinguish between what currently happens, what could happen, and what we need to make happen. As James Gee has observed, "Like it or not, English language teachers stand at the very heart of the most crucial educational, cultural, and political issues of our time (1994; cited in Pennycook, 2001, p. 23). Transnational migration is certainly one of the most important issues facing those of us who live and teach English in Mexico. Re-considering our teaching—so that the linguistic resources of transnational immigrants can serve their own continued language growth as well as that of other English learners in Mexico—is a worthy future direction for MEXTESOL.

Notes.

1. An earlier version of this paper was given as a plenary address at the 31st Annual MEXTESOL Convention in Morelia, Michoacán in October 2004. The present version retains some of the informal features of the oral text, including non-translation of some Spanish words and phrases and use of the historic present. My thanks to colleagues in Language and Applied Linguistics /Grupo de Investigación en Lingüística Aplicada at the UDLAP: to Connie Johnson and Chris Hall for encouraging me to share these thoughts with a MEXTESOL audience, and to Luz Murillo and the students in her Language Policy and Planning course for helping me think about how to write for those who did not attend the plenary.

2. The research is described in further detail in Smith & Martínez León (2003).

3. The field of Mexican ELT has never been shy about borrowing from U.S. and British language teaching traditions, and readers may understandably ask whether FOLK is another such cultural import. While much of the literature on the topic has been published in the U.S., it is worth pointing out that the notion of funds of knowledge was first developed as a response to the specific learning strengths and needs of Mexican-origin students and families.

4. I am grateful to Uli Schrader for thoughtful discussion of these issues.

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Appendix
Survey sent to MEXTESOL Regional Chapters

1. My regional chapter is _____.
(name of your regional chapter)

2. Approximately how many members currently belong to your regional chapter? _____

3. I have been involved in MEXTESOL since _____.
(year you first joined Mextesol)

4. Since you became involved in MEXTESOL has the membership of your chapter changed in terms of the number of members who work in public schools? Please choose **one** of the following responses:

   (a) More members of our regional chapter now work in public schools.
   (b) There has been no change in this regard.
   (c) Fewer members of our regional now work in public schools.

5. Please feel free to add any comments or ideas you feel are relevant to this question. For example, has your regional chapter organized events or other activities to attract or work with public school teachers? Do your regional events (Academic Saturdays, regional conventions) attract public school teachers?

6. Since you became involved in Mextesol, have you noticed any change in the number of migrant students/families who have returned to Mexico after living for a time in the U.S. or Canada ("retornados")? Please choose **one** of the following responses:

   (a) There are now more "retornado" students/families than there used to be.
   (b) There has been no change in this regard.
   (c) There are now fewer "retornado" students/families than there used to be.

7. Please add any comments or ideas you feel are relevant to teaching English to students who have lived in the U.S. or Canada. For example, can you describe the level of English proficiency of these returning students? How do they fit into the existing English programs at local schools? What do teachers say about working with these kinds of students?