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Authors

Gardner, Kathleen

Liu, Roseanne

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Claiming Their Voice: Sociolinguistic Factors Affecting Immigrant Workers' Ability to Speak Up

Immigrants' multiple identities are sources of contention as they strive in the English-speaking workplace, where they need to meet job demands and demands from employers who expect them to conform to the culture of the management (Harper, Peirce, & Burnaby, 1996; Jacobson, 2003; Katz, 2000). With California having a significant immigrant worker population, this study investigated how many of these workers navigate multiple identity and cultural issues while attempting to use their learned English to claim their voice. In an adult ESL classroom, first qualitative data were collected from students' responses about a workplace scenario. Then, 3 individuals from the class were chosen for in-depth interviews to determine factors that contribute to or hinder their ability to stake their claim in the workplace and speak up for themselves. The study results showed that several sociolinguistic factors influence whether or not workers chose to speak up and that these factors are as pertinent as workers' linguistic proficiency and the types of employers and coworkers they have. The authors discuss pedagogical implications with the goal of empowering immigrants to claim their voice at the workplace.

Introduction

Immigrant English language learners are often perceived to be lacking, to be in a deficit position, because they do not have a command of the English language. Not only is this a perception held by some native English speakers, but it is often a perception held by the language learners themselves. These learners often possess negative self-images and often they find themselves on the bottom rung of society, and they do not think that they can question or critique their position in life. Partly because of this, many of these language learners start at low-paying jobs in the American workplace, and they remain in these positions because they lack the linguistic and cultural knowledge for advancement. Issues of identity can also be problematic, especially if the American emphasis on individuality is different from the sense of self cultivated in the workers' native cultures (Katz, 2000). In addition, a lack of acceptance by coworkers or staff because of ignorance, prejudice, or a sense of superiority can also cause the immigrant language learner to be silent at work.

Immigrant workers need more than the linguistic rules of the English language; they need to understand the expectations, power dynamics, and sociolinguistic elements occurring in the workplace (e.g., Dávila, 2008; Harper, Peirce, & Burnaby, 1996; Jacobson, 2003; Katz, 2000; Li, 2000). Lack of this cultural knowledge can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and dead-end jobs. It is our conviction that with informed teaching practices taking these paralinguistic factors into consideration, ESL teachers not only can promote workers' acquisition of English, but they can also help the workers claim their right to speak in the workplace. The purpose of this study is to explore factors that impede workers from finding, in addition to factors that help them find, their voice at work, and to suggest pedagogical methods that ESL teachers can use to give workers the tools they need to navigate their way to improved job circumstances.

In this study we will first discuss the literature that examines reasons behind immigrants' not speaking up at work, particularly not speaking up in the ways expected by the general American social construct in the workplace. Then we will report findings from a class discussion based on a scripted workplace scenario and three in-depth qualitative interviews with ESL students who hold jobs in various industries in the Los Angeles area. The findings will describe at length the factors that help immigrants speak up at work for what they want and need and the factors that hinder them from doing so. Finally, in the discussion section, we will relate the findings to the literature review and discuss correlations between salient issues raised by both the literature review authors and our study participants. The discussion section is followed by pedagogical implications for ESL teachers.

Cultural and Paralinguistic Differences Causing Communication and Identity Conflict

Misunderstandings in the workplace often occur as a result of differences in the paralinguistic aspects of communication (Katz, 2000; Li, 2000). Katz (2000) made it clear that "language and literacy training involves much more than simply acquiring language skills" (p. 162). Language is not neutral; it reflects people's roles, relations, and identities. Katz observed a workplace literacy lesson at Cableco, a cable manufacturing plant in Silicon Valley, where management is primarily made up of white males and the worker population is 90% Spanish-speaking immigrants. After transcribing the workers' responses to the lesson and having an interview with the manufacturing manager after the lesson, Katz concluded there were two different value systems at work, which created conflict: American employers valued an "individualistic conception of self, an autonomous, free-speaking sort of self, whereas the employees wished to maintain a collectivistic notion of self which is more connected to family, community and/or work group" (p. 158). The American manager wanted the workers to change their sense of self that stemmed from their native culture and to adopt a "more American" sense of self, one that emphasized individuality, outspokenness, and directness. However, the workers did not want to lose their sense of cultural identity, nor did they wish to create conflict with their

American manager, so they chose to remain silent as the safe alternative.

Similarly, Li (2000) found conflicting value systems at work in her study of a Chinese immigrant worker, Ming, and her work experience in an American medical office. Whereas Ming was raised in a culture that valued indirect communication, the management at her office valued direct communication and expected Ming to adopt this communication style. Li examined the pragmatics involved when immigrant workers such as Ming attempted to make requests at their jobs in the US. Making a request can be a high-risk behavior for workers who are uncertain of the cultural aspects involved in doing so; the repercussions can be costly. Therefore, it is important to “consider ways of improving lines of communication and resolving areas of conflict among speakers who may not share the same social, linguistic, and cultural points of reference” (p. 59). As Ming began to recognize the types of behaviors expected in the U.S. workplace, she had to grapple with issues of identity and the extent to which she was willing to change to be successful at work. Because of her young age and a belief that her future lay in the US, Ming was open to adjusting some of her behaviors.

Soldatenko (1999) expanded on this idea of identity with his study on Latina workers in the Los Angeles garment industry. Because of competitive labor practices, these Latina women hailing from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries were often set against one another, as interethnic and intraethnic conflict was encouraged to promote competition. Soldatenko suggested that for these women “survival in the U.S. depended on the formation of another type of transnational identity” (p. 328). This new identity could possibly pave the way for the women to find ways of uniting against the exploitive nature of the garment industry.

Harper et al. (1996) questioned the merits of “English in the workplace programs (EWPs) and whether or not they were meeting the expectations of the employers to empower workers to participate in the decision-making processes and structures in the company by increasing workers’ proficiency with English” (p. 16). At the conclusion of an EWP held at a Levi Strauss plant, workers affirmed that their comprehension of oral and written English had improved. However, Harper et al. argued that despite an increase in “social talk” from the workers, the original mission of the EWP had not been achieved because the workers “were *not* becoming substantially more active in committee meetings, task forces or other related activities in the plant” (p. 16). The workers, who were all women, did not use their improved English skills in such activities because the English used in meetings and committees was considered the “language of power” and the women did not identify with it. Moreover, using “power” English seemed boastful to the women, and anyone doing so was likely to become an outsider to their group. The workers’ desire to maintain solidarity and native cultural identity with each other was considered the highest priority. Though management had anticipated increased participation of the workers on task forces and in decision-making groups because of their improved English skills, the workers did not rise to these expectations because they had no experience or knowledge of speaking English in such public spheres. Starfield

(1997) observed the same behavior in Goldstein's study (1999) of Portuguese workers in Toronto. These workers believed that "the social costs of abandoning Portuguese outweigh the economic benefits of using English, that using Portuguese symbolizes group solidarity and provides access to friendship and assistance on the production line" (p. 648).

Social Barriers

Social barriers imposed by native speakers because of their positions of power can disenfranchise and discourage immigrant workers. Native speakers' criticism of workers' accents, and their insensitivity toward the workers' learning process, can create much frustration for the workers (Dávila, 2008; Goldstein, 1999; Norton, 1997; Peirce, 1995). In Dávila's (2008) case studies, she interviewed four Latina immigrants who were taking ESL classes at a community college in North Carolina. These interviews indicated that the Latinas believed that "their experiences as immigrants and minorities are conditioned by a keen understanding of the relationship between language, social mobility and negative stereotypes confronted in their daily lives" (Dávila, 2008, p. 368). Lippi-Green (as cited in Goldstein, 1999) asserted that accent discrimination is but "a litmus test for exclusion" (Goldstein, 1999, p. 599) and that nonstandard varieties of English are devalued. In addition, immigrants find it difficult to forge relationships with native speakers both on the job and elsewhere (Dávila, 2008; Jacobson, 2003). Jacobson further stated that the immigrants' geographical environment itself (often limited to certain neighborhoods) can be a social barrier as it separates and prevents students from accessing the environments using the forms of English that would grant the workers upward mobility.

This literature review shows that the socialization and inclusion of immigrant workers goes beyond language learning simply from an academic point of view. Since language can reproduce ideology, we think that it is important for language teachers to make the invisible visible (e.g., power relations, discrimination, social class issues, gender differences) for students who are acculturating to American workplaces (Katz, 2000). By analyzing sources of workplace conflicts experienced by immigrant workers, we will recommend appropriate pedagogical methods that will address these issues.

Methodology

This study explores factors that contribute to explaining why many immigrant employees still struggle to speak up for themselves after years of working in American companies, and how their native identities and the circumstances to which they are subjected at work play a role in this struggle. We will examine a workplace scenario (adapted from Katz, 2000; see Appendix A) and the follow-up discussion (see Appendix B) with a classroom of students in an intermediate-high adult ESL classroom, and we will look at the interviews with 3 case study participants (see Appendices C, D, and E) who also provided feedback on the workplace scenario. The intermediate-high ESL class observed in this study consisted of 32 adult students, 35% male and 65% female. The majority of students were employed in part-time or full-time jobs, mostly in

the service/hospitality sector: housekeepers, maids, restaurant workers, factory workers, bakers, salespeople, hair stylists, and caregivers. Because of the relatively small sample size, we encourage other teachers and researchers to add to this study by gathering their own data. These instruments shed light on the experiences and struggles of immigrant workers in English-speaking work environments where employers are of various ethnicities, oftentimes different from those of the workers.

Case Study Participants

Names of the case study participants have been changed to protect their anonymity. The first participant is a 27-year-old Korean woman named Rena who came to the US in 2007 to pursue higher education. She supports herself with three part-time jobs: as a salesperson at a clothing store in a mall where the majority of the shoppers are Korean, Armenian, and Israeli; as a front-desk assistant at a private ESL school where she interacts with international adult students; and as a server in a Japanese restaurant. At her job in the mall and in the restaurant, Rena has a Korean supervisor and a Korean American supervisor, respectively, and at the language school she has three supervisors, who are Japanese American, Taiwanese, and Caucasian American.

The second participant is a 32-year-old Mexican named Marco who came to the US in 2003 to find a job. He was a janitor in his native country, but now he is a cook in a restaurant. He has been studying ESL for several years, and he would eventually like to study law as his brother is doing in Mexico. He has had three Caucasian American bosses at the restaurant, where English is the means of communication.

The third participant is a 24-year-old Salvadoran named Juan who came to the US in 2004 to get a job because he could not find work in his home country. He works at two jobs: as a food server at a restaurant and as an assistant for a caterer. One boss is Iranian, and the other is Mexican, so Juan speaks English or Spanish at work.

Data Collection Process

Case study participants were chosen mainly based on their linguistic proficiency, so as to be able to communicate with researchers, and on their schedule availability. The workplace scenario (Appendix A) was discussed in the safety and confidentiality of an ESL classroom where no employers could access feedback given by students in response (Appendix B) to this hypothetical work scenario. The materials used to collect data from the case study participants consisted of a short questionnaire that included the previously mentioned situational story at work (Appendix A). In addition to the classwide discussion, one-on-one interview sessions lasting approximately 1 hour were held with each of the 3 chosen individual students (case studies), and summaries were written of each participant's responses to guided questions (refer to summaries of these interviews in Appendices C, D, and E). The interviews and any written text were analyzed to uncover ideologies framing the participants' mind-sets, and similar incidents and sentiments were categorized. We paid particular at-

tention to the words and terms that our participants used, because as Fairclough (as cited by Golombek & Jordan, 2005) pointed out, “Words are a powerful tool for characterizing, sanitizing, or intensifying a categorization or interaction” (p. 519). The responses from the participants shed light on why they feel able or unable to claim their voices in English-speaking workplaces where employers’ agendas conflicted with the participants’ goals. Through uncovering these reasons, we hope, as educators, to discover possible pedagogical tools that we may use to help empower our students as they navigate work issues entrenched in identity and power.

Findings

We will discuss pertinent issues and themes about workplace socialization and communication based on a class discussion held in an intermediate-high adult ESL class and personal interviews with 3 participants. Through the participants’ discourse, we identified factors that enable workers to speak up at work and factors that hinder this ability.

Factors That Help Workers to Speak Up

One of the salient factors enabling the participants in our study to speak up at their workplaces is a shared cultural, ethnic, or linguistic background with bosses and coworkers. For example, case study participant Juan feels most comfortable with bosses who speak Spanish, which is his native language; even though they may not be from the same Latin American country, there is a shared cultural and linguistic background. Similarly, the second case study participant, Rena, feels most comfortable with her two bosses who are Korean like herself and speak Korean at work with her. Rena said:

Because almost all of my bosses are Asian, like me, I feel pretty comfortable about asking them questions, asking for help. And with one of my bosses, she’s not only Korean like me, she’s also my cousin so I feel comfortable talking with her in Korean at work. (personal communication, November, 2008)

A second factor enabling workers to speak up is the amount of time in the US and exposure to seeing how the American system works. Marco, the third case study participant, initially needed a Spanish-English-speaking coworker to help as a translator to communicate with his boss, but now familiarity and acculturation to the American workplace have occurred, and in addition to having a higher linguistic proficiency, he has learned how to speak up. He now knows it is better to say, “I don’t understand” and seek clarification than to stay silent, which could worsen a situation with the boss. “I asked the boss a question when I didn’t understand, because if I don’t ask, the problem will be bigger,” Marco said (personal communication, November, 2008).

Third, Rena and Juan noted that it is very beneficial for the workers when coworkers and bosses have undergone similar second language acquisition processes, because these coworkers and bosses can provide support and understanding. Rena noted:

Some of my bosses and many of my co-workers learned English [as a second language], so they are very open and friendly in helping me learn more English ... like American expressions or idioms ... at work. They don't make fun of me if I don't understand [some meanings] ... they're patient in explaining things to me. (personal communication, November, 2008)

Juan feels this same kind of support from his Spanish-speaking boss, who has established a life here in the US. Juan said, "I can talk to this boss because he understands me and why I am here in America" (personal communication, November, 2008). Another factor is having good role models at the workplace who show coworkers that it is accepted to speak up at work and that one can reap the benefits from doing so. For instance, Marco has seen some of his coworkers at the restaurant negotiate with the manager for salary increases, which gives him motivation and a model to follow. "I see other worker go to the boss and ask for raise, and I think I can do that," he said (personal communication, November, 2008). Finally, Marco said that ESL classroom role-playing practice for workplace scenarios has provided the vocabulary and confidence for him to speak up at work.

Factors That Prevent Workers From Speaking Up

Workers hesitate to speak up at work when they are challenged by insensitive speakers who make fun of their grammar or accent. First, Marco noted that his native English-speaking coworkers would sometimes ridicule his efforts to speak English. Regarding the waiters and waitresses he works with, Marco said, "Different people do different things, sometimes they laugh at me, so I just am quiet" (personal communication, November, 2008). This discourages him from communicating with them more than absolutely necessary. Second, Rena stated that sometimes at her job at the mall she has to contend with native-speaking customers who question why she works there when she does not speak English fluently. Whereas her confident personality enables her to deal with this negative response in a positive manner, she is not as successful in dealing with coworkers who speak their own native language at her restaurant job, which causes her to feel alienated. Rena mentioned:

Sometimes it makes me uncomfortable when my co-workers at the restaurant speak in their own language in front of me. Even though they have become my friends at work and even though I know they feel most comfortable talking in their own language, it still makes me feel not completely included in their conversation or their circle. (personal communication, November, 2008)

Third, Juan believes that it is difficult to speak with his Iranian boss not for lack of English proficiency but because of the lack of familiarity with each other's culture. Juan said, "I talk English with this boss, but we don't talk much because we are so different; we just talk about the work and that's it" (personal communication, November, 2008). Last, workers prefer not to upset the status

quo by voicing concerns or complaints that could possibly create more conflicts. When Juan asked his boss for a personal day off, his boss responded, "Sure, take the whole week." This was the boss's way of intimidating Juan out of his request because the boss wanted Juan to know that taking 1 day off would cost him 1 week's worth of wages.

Workplace Scenario—Participants' Feedback

A workplace scenario (Appendix A), adapted from Katz's study (2000), was presented to the previously mentioned intermediate-high adult ESL class as well as to the 3 participants of the case studies. In the scenario, a factory manager wants to select one of two employees to promote: Jessica, the quiet, diligent employee who helps her coworkers when the boss is not present and who has worked there for 2 years; or Susanna, who has been there for only 1 year but who has learned quickly and is eager to inform the manager that she knows what she is doing and is capable of helping her coworkers.

Two different perspectives emerged from the classroom discussion and from the interviews with the 3 case study participants. The majority of respondents in the ESL class argued that they would promote Jessica because they thought that Susanna was helping herself to get ahead whereas Jessica was helping the company overall (ESL class, personal communication, November, 2008). These respondents in the class considered Susanna a "show-off" and "selfish" despite the fact that the scenario stated that Susanna was always helping others in the group. On the other hand, Jessica was viewed as "honest, patient, and a good worker" and most of the respondents said bosses in their native countries would also promote Jessica because they value the qualities she represented (quiet, humble worker bee who helped out behind the scenes). However, all respondents stated that they believed that American bosses would promote Susanna because her qualities matched what American bosses want from workers. Even though the respondents realized which qualities lead to success in the American workplace, they still expressed different degrees of willingness to adopt those qualities.

On the other hand, a few classroom students polled for the workplace scenario and Rena, the female case study participant, indicated they would promote Susanna because they have acquired the value system of the American workplace and appreciated the communicative and leadership skills that Susanna exemplified. Rena provided an example from her own life that mirrored this opinion. One of Rena's supervisors (one of her former ESL teachers) at the language school where she works told her that she had been selected for her job because she exhibited qualities in the classroom that would be beneficial in the work setting (e.g., speaking up in class, asking for clarifications, stating her opinions, and voluntarily helping less proficient classmates).

Discussion

Our findings have uncovered factors that enable English learners to speak up freely at their workplaces, as well as factors that hinder this ability. In-depth interviews with all 3 participants corroborated claims by some researchers

(Harper et al., 1996; Katz, 2000; Li, 2000) that suggested that when immigrant workers and their native English-speaking managers and coworkers do not share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, workers find it challenging to voice their needs or concerns. However, when workers and their managers and/or coworkers share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as is the case with our case study participants Rena (with her Korean bosses) and Juan (with his Mexican boss), the workers are more comfortable interacting with them. Asking for clarification or making requests is easier because their shared cultural backgrounds give them the knowledge and confidence that they are performing these functions properly. On the other hand, Juan had difficulty making requests of his Iranian boss because their cultural differences did not allow for easy communication. This was likewise seen with Ming, Li's (2000) case study participant, who was willing only after much practice and reflection to make a direct request from her American boss, something she was not able to do when she first started her job.

The scenario featuring Jessica and Susanna, two workers being considered for a promotion, elicited strong responses from the students of the ESL class used in our study. The vast majority of the ESL classroom students polled for this study said that if they were the manager, they would promote Jessica, the quiet, more experienced employee who helped her coworkers when the boss was not around. These students share the same cultural background (Latino) as the workers in the EWP program of Katz's study (2000), who also supported promoting Jessica when they were presented with this same scenario. Both groups acknowledged that even though they knew American bosses would more than likely promote Susanna (the outspoken but less experienced employee), they still would not want to model their behavior after hers. Such behavior included speaking up and catching the manager's attention to get ahead, actions that many students felt were self-serving and self-promoting. As Harper et al. (1996) and Katz's (2000) studies pointed out, conflicting cultural and value paradigms between managers and nonnative workers can lead to different expectations on the job and different interpretations of actions performed there. This leads to misunderstandings and frustrations by one or both parties.

When asked which employee the bosses from their native countries would likely promote, most of the ESL class students polled for this study and all 3 individual case study participants agreed that Jessica, the quiet worker, would be the one receiving the promotion. This is because the bosses from their native countries (Latino and Asian) place the most value on hard-working, humble workers who have experience at work, which is evidenced by their length of service and seniority at the company. Students noted that even though Susanna is a quick learner and can do everything that Jessica can do, Susanna's outspoken persona makes her seem "boastful" and "dishonest," two unattractive qualities, according to the students. Thus, we see a conflict between immigrant workers' native cultural identity and the valued identity being promoted in the American workplace. This conflict stems from the fact that not all workers necessarily want to give up their native sociocultural identities to acclimate to American workplace expectations.

The individual interviews also shed light on some social barriers at work that cause discomfort and prevent immigrant workers from using English to the extent to which they would like. As an example of the way native speakers can inhibit language learners from speaking up at work (Dávila, 2008; Goldstein, 1999; Jacobson, 2003; Peirce, 1995), both Marco and Rena reported having experienced ridicule from coworkers or customers because of their accents or lack of English proficiency. This kind of treatment causes the participants to “shut down” and limit their attempts to speak English. In situations where the staff is supportive, however, immigrant language learners are more motivated to speak English, and they can observe how Americans operate in the workplace and can use them as role models. For example, one of Rena’s job sites has native and nativelike English-speaking colleagues and a supervisor (some of whom share her ethnicity) who encourage her to ask questions and who are willing to clarify job-related topics as well as English usage for her. Marco, as another example, has role models in his coworkers at the restaurant who have shown him that it is acceptable to ask for salary raises and personal days off from work from the manager. Therefore, while it is sometimes difficult for English learners to make contact with native speakers, if they are fortunate to have supportive coworkers or management in the workplace, they can benefit both linguistically and socially from this situation. This is far better than the situation Jacobson (2003) discussed when he pointed out that many times the immigrants’ geographic environment—neighborhoods often separated far from the environments of power—prevents the language learners from accessing the type of English that would grant them upward mobility.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of our study indicate that various factors contribute to whether or not workers whose native language is not English feel they can speak up for themselves at the workplace. Because there are numerous causes that stigmatize workers for using their voice, there is a need to focus on the way English should be taught for use in the workplace in order to provide immigrant workers with the paralinguistic skills necessary for success at work. Most English programs continue to emphasize the linguistic rules of language, perhaps incorporating social talk and neutral, context-free scenarios. The English that immigrant workers *need* for the workplace is much more complex than this; they need English instruction that explicitly teaches about the issues of power and identity occurring at the work site. A teacher’s role can be to help students “recognize language ideologies at work and make conscious decisions about how to participate in the overlapping and sometimes conflicting social worlds of the workplace” (Katz, 2000, p. 167). Li (2000) also emphasized the responsibility of teachers to “ensure that their students are equipped to use language both appropriately and strategically ... in their multiple contexts of L2 use” (p. 82). Harper et al. (1996) noted that in their study at Levi Strauss, the instruction provided by the English teacher did little to promote the workers’ interests in the workplace domain, nor did it challenge the workers’ lack of power in that domain. However, by putting into place an ESL curriculum that helps the im-

migrant workers use language appropriately and that shows them how to “read” correctly a given situation, their coworkers, and bosses, teachers can begin to show language learners how to use language in other public domains in addition to that of the workplace. Jacobson (2003) asserted that ESL teachers need to be aware of the sociolinguistic impediments facing these immigrants, and they need to help the students express this knowledge, critique it, and share it. Moreover, with informed teaching practices, ESL teachers not only can promote their students’ acquisition of English, but they also can help their students claim their right to speak in the new society in which they live and work. ESL teachers need to provide classrooms that foster a safe and trusting environment in which students feel comfortable to discuss power relations and discourse pragmatics in the English-speaking society (Dávila, 2008; Goldstein, 1999; Jacobson, 2003; Starfield, 1997).

In addition to the critical role teachers play in the instruction of workplace sociolinguistics, the materials and practices used in the classroom make a significant difference. Jacobson (2003) faulted textbooks and curriculum for presenting language context free. Instead of teaching the imperative simply as a command form, he suggested it would be better to teach the imperative while simultaneously discussing the power dynamics between a demanding boss and a new immigrant worker. He stated that creating an explicit link between learning English and class consciousness “is the type of radical teaching that needs to take place in the adult education classroom” (p. 2). Jacobson adapted existing textbook entries so that students can practice how “social class issues affect face-to-face interactions” (p. 5 [electronic version]) and he encouraged role-plays that provide students with a safe medium for expressing their true feelings on power and class divisions.

Topics that should be discussed in the classroom include: blue- and white-collar workers, capitalism, forms of address between employers and employees, the different kinds of English that are needed for different kinds of jobs, and specific coping strategies to deal with prejudice against accents and nonnative-like grammar usage. For example, when our case study participant Rena faced a mall customer pointing out her accent and nonnativelike English, she quickly used the strategy of redirecting the customer’s focus by replying that despite her lack of language proficiency, she would try her best to help the customer find the product that he was looking for in her store. This and other communication strategies should be covered in the ESL classroom to help language learners assert themselves with target language speakers in order to strive for some semblance of balance in the power relations at work. Through discussion and journal writing, such as diary keeping written in English about interactions with native speakers (Peirce, 1995), students can try to “express their awareness of work and social class issues in English. This plays a key role in the process of empowerment” (Jacobson, 2003, p. 6). ESL teachers can also provide students with opportunities to practice outside the classroom in order to engage native English speakers and undertake critical learning about cultural and linguistic diversity (Dávila, 2008; Peirce, 1995). For example, surveys, questionnaires, or projects that require students to speak with or observe native speakers should

be required components of the progressive classroom. Cooperative learning and discussions on power and discourse pragmatics in a safe and open classroom environment can contribute to success at work. Peirce (1995) suggested that students engage in what she calls classroom-based social research (CBSR), which is research carried out by students in their local communities. By doing this, students can “develop their oral and literacy skills by collapsing the boundaries between their classrooms and their communities” (Peirce, 1995, p. 26) and begin to see themselves as researchers and ethnographers of language use and identity rather than as disempowered and victimized immigrants.

Finally, for companies that implement EWPs (English in the workplace programs) such as Cableco, the cable manufacturing plant in Katz’s (2000) study, an ESL instructor can offer insights and suggestions to the native English-speaking managers and associates on ways to communicate better with their immigrant workforce that consists of English learners. The instructor can help employers and associates understand English-learning employees’ communication strategies that stem from their native cultures, and the instructor can explain that these employees face different degrees of difficulty (Goldstein, 1999; Harper et al., 1996; Katz, 2000) in adopting certain Americanized communication tactics (e.g., directness, outspokenness, and self-promotion). By understanding these aspects of immigrant employees’ cultures, native speakers may begin to bridge the gap in interacting with nonnative speakers. Additionally, the instructor could attempt to sensitize the native English speakers to the kinds of discriminatory attitudes about English proficiency or accents that are often directed at immigrant workers and that undermine the confidence of these workers to speak English in the workplace.

We hope that with additional critical ESL pedagogy addressing issues such as identity, cultural differences, and power dynamics, as well as endeavors to help employers better understand their immigrant workers, these language learners will be able to gain access to the linguistic codes and cultural practices that will enable them to find their voices and prosper in the workplace.

Authors

Kathleen Gardner teaches ESL with the Division of Adult and Career Education of the Los Angeles Unified School District. She has taught a variety of ESL class levels during a 20-year period at the Van Nuys Education and Career Center, and she is pursuing a master’s degree in TESOL.

Roseanne Liu has taught various ESL subjects in mainly IEP contexts to young adults with varying goals for learning English by adopting an eclectic and adaptive teaching approach. With an MA in TESOL, her research interests are course/syllabus design, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics.

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Appendix A

Workplace Scenario:

“Who Gets Recognition in the U.S. at the Workplace?”

(adapted from Katz, 2000)

Jessica was ready to be promoted. She had been working in her position for two years and she knew it backwards and forwards. She liked to troubleshoot and help people do their job, but she usually did her job quietly and helped people when the supervisor wasn’t around. Susanna had been working in the same group for just over a year. She had learned quickly and was always helping others in the group. Jessica thought Susanna was a show-off because she was always saying, “I know how to do it. I’ll show them.”

When the supervisor found out that the company needed another crew leader for a new crew, she immediately thought of Susanna.

1. Why did the supervisor think of Susanna first?
2. Who would you promote and why?
3. Who would your boss promote?

Appendix B
ESL-4 Class November 18, 2008
Instructor: First Author

Workplace Scenario

“You have just heard the story about co-workers Jessica and Susanna. Pretend you are the supervisor, and you need to promote one of them to be the leader of a new crew. Would you promote Jessica or Susanna?”

The students (in groups) wrote their reasons on strips of paper and taped them under the name of the worker they would promote. The results are as follows:

I would promote Jessica because:

She helped and taught Linda
She is friendly and quiet person, and she likes to help
She helps several times, and she has patience with Linda
She has more time working at the factory
She knows how to sew very well
She is very helpful and friendly
She knows her job backwards and forwards
She has more experience
She has more honesty
She helps the new worker and this is good for company
She has been working hard
She is honest, patient, and a good co-worker

I would promote Susanna because:

She will be able to help everyone
She helped Linda to do fast
She has good communication
She likes to help, and enjoys helping

The following excerpts were taken from the discussion that followed.

- Teacher: Okay, let's look at what you have written about Jessica. You wrote that she is friendly and patient; she is helpful, and you say that she is honest and working hard. These are very good qualities. How about Susanna? She likes to help also, and she enjoys helping.
- Nan: I don't think so because Susanna only talks to the boss to look at her for a promotion.
- Jose: It's better to do that at a job.

All: No, no.

Teacher: Why is it better?

Jose: If you don't do that at your job, never you gonna get some promotion.

Teacher: (to class) Jose says that you'll never get the promotion at work if you don't _____.

Jose: speak.

Teacher: Is that what you mean by good communication?

Jose: Yeah.

Teacher: Tell the boss, "I'm a good worker."

Marna: No, she isn't honest, because she only wants to show manager she do it for promotion.

Jose: She has to do that, because the other lady has more experience, and Susanna wants to get higher.

Malik: Susanna is kind of selfish. She thinks about only herself. She doesn't care about other people. She wants to get promoted in any way.

Teacher: But what has she offered to do? She said, "I will help her, I will show her."

Marna: She only says it.

Malik: She didn't really help Jessica improve.

Salina: Susanna is lying.

All: (laughing)

Teacher: Is she really lying?

Malik: No.

Nan: Yes.

Teacher: Susanna didn't say, "I helped her"---not the past tense. She said, "I'll show her"---future tense. Did she lie?

All: No.

Marna: Yes, but she only said to supervisor, "I will show her." Maybe she doesn't show Linda correctly how to do it. She only says to supervisor, "I know how to do it." She says it about herself.

Sam: But Susanna learned fast, so she gonna show Linda to do it fast.

Malik: I think Susanna is more smart. You have to be smart. When you work with people ... you know, working all the time when the manager is not around. But in this case, Susanna when the manager is present, she tried to show the manager that she's the one who helping the new employee.

Teacher: O.K., in your native culture, do you think that's ... not so good, not so nice?

Many: Not so nice.

Teacher: And what about American culture?

Sam: Good.

Teacher: What if you have a job with an American boss? Who is going to get promoted with an American boss?

All: Susanna.

Teacher: Why? Why do you think Susanna?
 Sam: Because she's very smart, she'll do everything fast, in the U.S. everything you have to do fast, no slowly.

Teacher: Why did Linda improve? Because of Jessica or Susanna?
 All: Jessica.
 Teacher: But Jessica's very quiet. Did she tell the boss, "I taught her [Linda]"? Did she say anything?
 All: No.
 Marna: But maybe Linda say some day when boss asks her, "Oh, you're doing very well," she say Jessica help me.

Teacher: That would be a good idea. But this is Jessica's *job*. Should she just wait and hope that Linda says something?
 All: No, no.
 Teacher: What about in your country? Who would the boss promote?
 Lola: Jessica.
 Teacher: Where are you from?
 Lola: Mexico. Because she [Jessica] is longer working with the company.

Teacher: And it doesn't matter how good a worker she is?
 Lola: Yes, it matters, but Jessica is good.
 Malik: It depends on the boss.
 Teacher: O.K. How many of you have jobs now? Which one would your current boss promote?

Juanita: Jessica. (Boss is from Chile.)
 Malik: Jessica. (Boss is from Armenia.)
 Angela: Jessica. (Boss is from Colombia.)
 Rosa: Susanna. (Boss is from El Salvador.)
 Anabella: Jessica. (Boss is from Mexico.)
 Teacher: If you had an American boss, who do you think the boss would promote?
 All: Susanna.
 Teacher: In America, do you think it is okay to tell your supervisor you are a good worker?
 All: Yes.
 Malik: Manager can understand from way you work.
 Teacher: But every time Jessica helped, the supervisor was out of the room. What advice would you give Jessica?
 Malik: She has to let supervisor know that she's helping.
 Teacher: How would she do that?
 Malik: Same like Susanna did.
 All: (laughing)
 Teacher: The next time Jessica sees her boss, what could she say?
 Grace: (playing role of Jessica): "I was helping to Linda with her job. I think she is doing better, I was helping her all the time."
 Teacher: Do you think it's important to do this?
 All: Yes.

Marna: At this time it's important.
 Teacher: So if you work with an American boss, do you feel you must change?
 Marna: Yes.
 Teacher: In what way?
 Marna: You must show the manager.
 Teacher: Should you change? Yes or no?
 Catalina: Yes.
 Nan: I think it depends on the person and the supervisor, too. If they don't have good communication, I think it's better to move to another job.

Excerpts from Students' Written Responses

Susanna is a show-off. The boss will promote Jessica because she is honest, good to work in a crew; Susanna is individual. (Nan)

[The supervisor thinks of Susanna first] because she had learned quickly and good communication. (Mary)

Susanna should be promoted because she is faster and smart. (Sam)

Because she [Susanna] is communicative, she will be able to help. (Maritza)

Because Susanna talks too much ... she got the supervisor's attention. (Marie)

I think my boss promote Susanna because she has personality. (Lilly)

My boss ... would promote who is more sexy and beautiful. (Jane)

Appendix C
Interview With Case-Study Participant

Participant: Rena Lee
 Age: 27
 Nationality: Korean
 Time in US: 2.5 years
 Reason for Coming: Pursue a bachelor's degree in fashion textiling and start a career in L.A. or New York in this field
 Educational Background: Bachelor's in fashion merchandising from Ko-rean college
 Employment Background: Three concurrent part-time jobs (see detailed in-formation on next page)

1. Server at a Japanese restaurant
Speaks Korean with Korean boss, speaks English with coworkers who are other Asian ethnicities and English with customers. Coworkers speak slightly better English than Rena, but she gets along really well with boss and coworkers, with whom she has a rapport mostly due to shared ethnicity (Asian) and shared experience of having to learn English as L2.
2. Sales clerk at a clothing kiosk inside a mall
Speaks Korean with her boss who's also her cousin. Speaks English with neighboring sales clerks at adjacent kiosks and with customers who are of Hispanic and Armenian base. It's relatively easy for her to understand most customers whose English is also their L2 and they are not perfectly fluent either, which does not intimidate Rena.
3. Front desk assistant at an ESL school
Speaks English with everyone she interacts with, including a Taiwanese officer manager-boss, a Japanese American senior assistant, a Taiwanese coworker, and a Caucasian American program coordinator. Although Rena feels a little embarrassed making mistakes speaking English with her coworkers and her boss, she respects them highly because of their English fluency and the way they treat her, with respect and understanding that she's still learning the language and the American culture. Rena feels comfortable asking for explanations when she does not understand something that is mentioned, and even though she does not share the same ethnicity or culture as the Caucasian American program coordinator, she appreciates his patience and understanding in explaining things to her and talking to her as an equal.

Factors That Help Her Feel Comfortable to Speak Up at Work:

1. For all the jobs, it helps that Rena *shares the same ethnicity and culture* as her boss and some of her coworkers. Whether her bosses and coworkers are Americanized Asians or not, they share a foundational understanding and respect for their shared Asian culture, which entails a diligent work ethic and respect for authority and those with experience.
2. Rena feels a *good amount of support and understanding* from all her bosses and coworkers for that fact that she's still learning and acculturating to English and American culture. *Having some coworkers and bosses who had gone through the same language acquisition process helps* in garnering her this support and mutual understanding.

Factors That Make Her Uncomfortable to Speak Up at Work:

1. Sometimes coworkers who share the same nationality (but not Korean) would speak their native language to each other, which makes Rena feel a little alienated and left out, even though she is sure that her coworkers do not do it intentionally to hurt her, but that speaking the same native language helps them to bond and understand one another in the best way possible (even though they all speak English, but not as well as they can speak their L1).

2. It's difficult having to work with some native speaker customers who show impatience and condescension to Rena for her lack of English fluency, but despite this, she keeps her head up and tries to do her job to the best of her ability in helping the customers in whatever her capacity enables her to do. With her job operating a kiosk at a mall, she has encountered customers who challenge why Rena is working there when she does not speak English fluently, to whom Rena has responded that even though her English is not perfect, she still can try to help them in any capacity possible to help them find some item that they are looking for.
3. It's difficult to understand native speakers—customers—who speak very fast and Rena usually does not ask them to slow down. Instead, she tries to gather from context, or she'd repeat back to the customers what she thinks she heard, what the customers have requested from her.

Workplace Scenario

1. Rena believes that the supervisor thought of promoting Susanna first because she made herself noticeable, in the spotlight, of her abilities. *She knows that American bosses appreciate workers who have the bravado and knowledge to show off what they know and that they promote this kind of worker.*
2. *Rena would also promote Susanna* because if Rena were running her own business, she would want someone like Susanna as her captain because she appreciates Susanna's leadership quality and showing initiative and ambition, which are qualities that would benefit a business and the business owner.
3. Rena's bosses, because of *their different value systems*, would choose different people to promote. Both of her Korean bosses (from the restaurant and from the mall) would promote Jessica, the quiet hard worker because Koreans appreciate employees who are humble, and Koreans value the seniority in someone who has longer work experience, which is a quality that Jessica has over Susanna. However, at the language school, the value system is more Americanized even though Rena's boss is also Asian, and Rena believes it is Susanna who would be promoted at the language school. Using her own example to testify, she said that someone mentioned to her that one of the reasons she (Rena) was hired at the school is that it was obvious that when she was an ESL student at the same school, she was one of the more outspoken, outgoing, and quick learners when she was a student, and based on that observation, it was easy to hire Rena because management knew she would do well in the front desk role.

Appendix D

Interview With Case-Study Participant

Participant:	Marco Jimenez
Age:	32
Nationality:	Mexican
Time in US:	5 years
Reason for Coming:	To find a job
Educational Background:	High school diploma
Employment Background:	Janitor in native country. Marco has worked at the same Chinese restaurant since arriving in the US. He has held three positions at this restaurant (see detailed information below)

1. He started as a dishwasher; a Mexican friend recommended him for the position. During this time a coworker acted as translator between Marco and the boss. He stayed in this position for 8 months.
2. His second position was prep person. The boss personally trained Marco for this job. Marco received a raise 1½ months after starting this position, once he proved he could do it. He stayed in this position for 1 year.
3. His final and current position is cook. He has held this position for 2 years.

Factors That Help Him Feel Comfortable to Speak Up at Work:

When Marco first started working at the restaurant, a coworker translated for him when dealing with the English-speaking American boss. After several years of ESL classes, Marco now feels confident enough to speak directly to his boss. The first couple of bosses he had at the restaurant were good bosses who taught him many things. All the bosses have been native English speakers.

Factors That Make Him Uncomfortable to Speak Up at Work:

Marco's current boss is very strict and does not always keep his word, characteristics that make communication difficult. The boss is unfair (sending scheduled workers home if business is slow) and demanding (requiring work on nonscheduled days). Through role-play practice and vocabulary building in the ESL classroom, Marco has been able to speak to his boss about these issues. Sometimes the waiters/waitresses make fun of Marco's English, but he does not let this bother him too much.

Appendix E

Interview With Case-Study Participant

Participant:	Juan Martinez
Age:	25
Nationality:	Salvadoran
Time in US:	5 years
Reason for Coming:	To work and help family
Educational Background:	6 years of school; didn't graduate from high school
Employment Background:	Juan has worked at four jobs since arriving in the US (see detailed information below)

1. He started as a dishwasher in a Mexican restaurant where his boss was also Mexican.
2. His second job was at a factory where he performed various jobs. His boss was Mexican.
3. His third job was as a busboy at a restaurant, which led to his current job as a server at the same restaurant. He has been working at this location for 2 years. His boss is Iranian, so he must speak English with him.
4. Juan also works with a caterer, serving food at special events and parties. His boss is Mexican, so Juan speaks Spanish with him.

Factors That Help Him Feel Comfortable to Speak Up at Work:

Juan feels most comfortable with bosses who speak Spanish. Even though they may not be from the same country, there is a shared cultural tradition. Juan feels that these bosses understand him and his reasons for being in America.

Factors That Make Him Uncomfortable to Speak Up at Work:

Juan feels more distance between himself and his Iranian boss. They must communicate in English, which Juan says goes fairly well because they don't talk that much, just the business of work. The boss had told him that he would start as a houseman at minimum wage, but that he would eventually move up to server where he would make more money. Juan has progressed to server, but he hasn't received a raise. Juan is hesitant to ask the Iranian boss for a raise—he doesn't want to rock the boat. As it is, when Juan needs to ask for a special day off, the boss says, "Sure, but take the whole week." In other words, the boss allows him to take the day off but "punishes" him by making Juan lose his income for a week. Juan has considered asking his Mexican boss for a raise, but he only works part time and doesn't want to appear demanding. When asked if he thought he deserved a raise, Juan said yes; he is always on time, is dependable, and does a good job.