Pre-Service English Teachers' Development of Critical Language Awareness for Teaching

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This paperexamines English Language Arts (ELA) pre-service teachers' (PSTs') development of sociolinguistic perspectives on dialect diversity and linguistic prejudice over a four-week, online "mini-course" on language variation. Though linguists have increasinglydisseminatedsociolinguistically informed information to teachers,educational research suggests content knowledge alone is insufficient for preparing teachers to teach well; teachers must also develop *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) – knowledge about how to explain, frame, assess, and develop content knowledge for diverse learners (Ball & Bass, 2000; Shulman, 1986).

The mini-course promoted four foundational sociolinguistic principles essential for supporting literacy learning for all students: (1) English has various dialects that are equally valid and grammatical, (2) language varies in different contexts and communities in systematic ways, (3) language use reflects identity, and (4) language is often the basis for judgments about people (Adger, et al., 2007). The course drew from research on Critical Language Pedagogy (Godley &Minicci, 2008), an approach that guides students to critical examinations of the ideologies surrounding language and dialects, the power relations such ideologies uphold, and ways to change these ideologies.

Although literacy scholars and ELA organizations have long called for English teachers to be equipped with sociolinguistically informed PCK (Delpit, 1988; Godley, et al., 2006; CCCC/NCTE, 1974), little research has examined the critical linguistic knowledges most useful to ELA teachers' instructional practices and how teachers develop them.In this paper, we analyze three related dimensions of PSTs' development of critical perspectives on language *for teaching*: (a) the effectiveness of various elements of the pedagogical design of the mini-course; (b) PSTs' developmental trajectories, as seen through their postings to online discussions; and (c) changes to PSTs' critical language awareness for teaching as evidenced by pre-post assessments. Twenty-five secondary English PSTs participated in our study. Participants completed pre- and post-tests in which they responded to seven hypothetical teaching scenarios focused on language ideologies. They also engaged in eleven online discussions about specific aspects of dialect diversity and language ideology.

In addition to sharing design aspects of the mini-courseand assessment tools created for this project, we analyze the PSTs' online discussions and pre-post surveys offering insights for linguists working to improve literacy instruction. Our findings suggest that PSTs found pedagogical cases—particularly video representations of various approaches to addressing critical language awareness in secondary English classes—to be the most helpful component of the mini-course. PSTs were not resistant to evidence that language ideologies and linguistic prejudices upheld and increased social inequalities. However, although PSTs' critical language awareness increased, they noted ways in which its application to their own teaching would be challenging, including issues of instructional time, the pressure to de-politicize ELA classrooms, and confusion over how to engage students in praxis – applying their new knowledge of language ideologies to change/combat them. Our findings suggest that teaching critical language

awareness to PSTs is most effective when it is grounded in pedagogical scenarios and dilemmas and when it helps PSTs articulate their own goals and approaches for praxis.

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