

Aggravating children: Doing disagreement in a dual language immersion program

Holly R. Cashman
Arizona State University

While a great deal of attention has been paid to the linguistic behavior of Chicano youth in terms of language maintenance and shift issues, comparatively little is known about the construction and negotiation of identity of Chicano youth in spontaneous conversation among peers. And, while researchers such as Galindo (1992, 1999), Mendoza-Denton (1996), Gonzales Velásquez (1999) and Galindo and Gonzales Velásquez (1992) have challenged the stereotypical assumptions about Chicana/Latina adult and adolescent women in conversation, little work has been done on the interaction patterns of Chicano/Latino pre-adolescents (Goodwin 1999 is a notable exception). Finally, while Goodwin (1999) has investigated the interaction patterns of Chicana/Latina pre-adolescent girls, her analysis focused primarily on same-sex interaction and it did not consider the use of code-switching as a resource in the interaction. In this paper I examine the language practices of Chicano youth in spontaneous conversation, focusing on the management of disagreement and the role of codeswitching. I take a conversation analytic approach in examining the role of aggravated disagreement and codeswitching in the management of dispute in a spontaneous cross-sex interaction among Mexican American (or Chicano) children. The qualitative, turn-by-turn analysis considers each utterance in the context of the previous utterance. In analyzing the interaction, I pose the following research questions: (1) How do the participants manage disagreement? (2) How do the participants use stereotypical male or female strategies? and (3) What role, if any, does code-switching play in the management of the interaction?

The data analyzed here is a corpus of 25 hours of spontaneous interaction in a second grade classroom in a central Phoenix dual language immersion elementary school. I find, just as Goodwin (1999) found in her Maple Street data, that the children tend to aggravate their disagreement moves, producing them without delay, often with increased volume and polarity terms (“no”), and occasionally with insult terms. Second, I find that while stereotypically male and female strategies are used in this interaction, they are not always used by boys and girls respectively. Finally, I find that codeswitching is an important interactional resource for these bilingual children in the management of disagreement.

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