Raciolinguistic Discrimination in the Classroom

Raciolinguistic discrimination is racism based on accent, dialect, and speech patterns (Dobinson & Mercieca, 2020). It leads to the unfair treatment of individuals based on how their language practices intersect with their racial or ethnic identity, privileging standardized varieties and perpetuating racial prejudice in educational and social contexts (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Standard Academic English is the form of English used in academic writing and speaking. It is often portrayed as the "proper" or "legitimate" form of communication and is associated with authority, intelligence, and academic success (Trudgill & Hannah, 2008). However, it is not the only way to express academic ideas. The imposition of Standard English in academic settings is a form of racial discrimination that does not reflect the diverse linguistic reality (Kinyon, 2024).

Effects of Raciolinguistic Discrimination on Students

Raciolinguistic discrimination can affect students personally. They may feel a decreased sense of belonging, "othered" by instructors or peers, and overall unwelcome in the classroom (Cushing, 2023). They may adopt "survival strategies" like code-switching, self-censorship, or mimicry of dominant norms to fit in at the expense of their authenticity (Lachini, 2024).

Raciolinguistic discrimination also affects students' academic progress. It can reduce students' classroom participation due to pressure, embarrassment, and fear of being disregarded or "othered" (Page, 2023). Prejudice from peers can also limit students' participation in academic activities, presentations, or study groups (McDonough et al., 2022) and cause them to become overall unmotivated (Vanegas Rojas et al., 2016).

Recognizing Raciolinguistic Discrimination in the Classroom

Raciolinguistic discrimination can occur explicitly or implicitly. One common form it takes is assessment rubrics that penalize non-standard linguistic features, such as writing assessments that emphasize grammar and oral assessments that stress performance-based criteria (Kinyon, 2024).

It can also manifest through inappropriate comments on students' language use. Comments on students' language proficiency, such as "your English is so good," may seem innocent, inquisitive, or complimentary but can be insulting, embarrassing, and "further accentuate raciolinguistic Otherness" (Kubota et al., 2023, p. 758).

Addressing Raciolinguistic Discrimination in the Classroom

One way to address raciolinguistic discrimination is to create a welcoming classroom environment by making it clear that linguistic variety is the norm and is accepted in classroom discourse (Chaudhuri & Stouck, 2024). This can be stated in the syllabus and/or orally on the first day of class.

Assessment focus can also be shifted from surface-level and performative aspects of writing and speaking to center meaning making instead (Chaudhuri & Stouck, 2024). The CaRS model (Swales, 1990) offers a good starting point for identifying student success in research storytelling based on their ability to engage with current research, identify a gap, and provide an original contribution.

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