Book Review

Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race: Raciolinguistic ideologies and the learning of Latinidad[1]

Reviewed by Cristhian Fallas Escobar[2], University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas, USA

Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race: Raciolinguistic ideologies and the learning of Latinidad. Jonathan Rosa (2019). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.

The result of arduous and committed ethnographic work, Rosa's book examines the co-construction of language and race: a key feature of modern governance saturating individuals with contradictory narratives around language and race. With regard to social and institutional expectations for individuals to *look like a language*, Rosa argues that Latinxs' phenotypic, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity becomes erased by racializing ideologies that homogenize them as racial *Others*. This erasure, he maintains, is rooted in spectrum-based White supremacist logics of Indigenous erasure and anti-Blackness, in which brown bodies become more desirable as they stand between Blackness and Whiteness. Regarding social and institutional expectations for individuals to *sound like a race*, Rosa demonstrates how Latinx's linguistic practices are constructed as deficient by privileged White perceiving subjects. Throughout his book, Rosa problematizes how particular linguistic practices are construed as emblematic of certain racial categories, and how certain racial categories are constructed as representative of stereotypical linguistic practices.

The book is anchored on a raciolinguistic perspective (Rosa & Flores, 2017), comprised of five components. The first references the racialization of subjects and the ranking of languages to justify the imposition of European epistemology. The second points to Whites as privileged subjects that perceive *others* as different and thus inferior. The third references the reified nature of named languages and racial categories, which allows for the study of how language and race are perceived and experienced in relation to one another. The fourth points to the need to unveil how categories of language and race are intersectionally assembled and discursively co-constructed. Finally, the fifth component centers on the dismantling of White supremacy as a form of struggle for social change. Given that this perspective examines complex phenomena and aims at de-centering and challenging regimented processes, a multi-sited ethnographic research approach that provides thick descriptions proves to be the most fitting. That is, the complexity of Rosa's research enterprise justifies his choice of ethnography as the lens through which he analyzes racializing ideologies and how these were met with resistance at the research site.

The ethnographic work described in this book was conducted between 2007 and 2010 at a newly founded public high school on the Near Northwest Side of Chicago. The student population in New Northwest High School (NNHS) was classified as nearly 90% Mexican and Puerto Rican and 10% African American. Within this high school, the principal created an administrative project that redressed racial/class exclusion and intersectional forms of gender/sexual discrimination, which often reflected but also resisted the notions of assimilation to normative American Whiteness and maintenance of cultural authenticity. Overall, students at NNHS often had to learn to showcase their racial and linguistic differences (their Puerto Ricanness and Mexicanness) without overstepping what is tolerable racial and linguistic difference in the US, thereby revealing schools' role in (re)producing legitimate US citizen-subjects.

Besides the introductory and conclusion chapters, the book is composed of two parts. In Part I**, "**Looking like a Language: Latinx Ethnoracial Category-Making"**,** the author includes three chapters*.* In Chapter One, Rosa discusses how NNHS principal's goal of transforming students from 'gangbangers and hoes' into 'young Latino professionals' reflected broader social anxieties anchored on stereotypes about Latino

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[2] cristhian.fallasescobar@utsa.edu

criminality and Latina promiscuity. The overarching purpose of the project was to allow students to gain access to social mobility while at the same time maintaining their Latinx identity. This project resulted in the creation of a uniform policy (professionalization of Latino students) and firm opposition to academic tracking (access to future social mobility), both of which were met with resistance and complications stemming from competing ideas about Latinidad and unstraightforward ways of performing the 'young Latino professional' identity. In fact, the co-construction of these figures constituted a double-bind in which the recognition of the figure of 'young Latino professional' also constituted the acceptance of the figure of 'gangbangers and hoes', which resulted in teachers, administrators and students' enactment of ambivalent and shifting roles.

In Chapter Two, Rosa addresses how this transformation project required the erasure of Mexican-Puerto Rican difference. The naturalization of Latinx panethnicity through institutional mechanisms, however, was met with students' competing embodiments of their Latinx identity, as such Latinx panethnicity did not align with how students at NNHS experienced the categories of Mexican and Puerto Rican. The chapter unearths the contradictory ways in which the categories of race and ethnicity are conceptualized within NNHS and how these contradictions stem from broader ambivalences surrounding processes of racialization and ethnicization. Rosa illustrates how students countered the erasure of Mexican-Puerto Rican difference by engaging in practices of ethnoracial contortions such as twisting and turning the ethnoracial categories of 'gangbanger and hoes'and 'young Latino professional,' comprising the 'Latino threat' and the 'Latino spin' discussed in the following chapter.

In Chapter Three, Rosa tracks the emblematizing, embodying and enacting of Latinidad. He examines how processes of qualia connected to objects, practices and bodies become interrelated in the molding of Latinx identities, which he calls the historical, political, and economic mattering of Latinidad. Building upon the previous chapter's examination of narratives of Mexican and Puerto Rican difference, Rosa shows how Mexican and Puerto Rican models of personhood provide repertoires that enter in dialogue with discourses of 'the Latino threat' and 'the Latino Spin.' In the context of NNHS, the 'Latino threat' corresponded to the figures of 'gangbangers and hoes' and the 'Latino Spin' was linked to the figure of 'young Latino professional.' As much as NHHS students tried to contest the bounded contours of these figures, they did not fully escape their stigmatizing ideologies. As Rosa maintains, the principal's attempts at transforming students from 'gangbangers and hoes' into 'young Latino professionals' and the students' enactment of their Mexican and Puerto Rican identities resulted in qualia of 'ghettoness' and 'lameness.' That is, for students, the category of 'gangbangers and hoes' carried the stigma of 'ghettoness' while the category of 'young Latino professional' was connected to 'uncoolness/lameness.'

In Part II, "Sounding like a Race: Latinx Raciolinguistic Enregisterment", the author includes three more chapters. In the first of these, the author explores ideologies of language standardization and languageless-ness: ideologies construing Latinx bilinguals as incapable of speaking either acceptable Spanish or English. In the context of NHHS, students were socialized into ideologies of ideal and less than ideal language practices, the people who employ them, and the sites in which these are employed. Interestingly, Rosa finds out that NNHS students' linguistic practices were marginalized regardless of the extent to which these abide by standardized forms of language and bilingual students were labeled English Language Learners. In other words, bilingual skills were framed as a problem to be managed and measured in connection to students' lack of proficiency in English, thereby creating pressures for the students to acquire Standard English as quickly as possible. These pressures, however, were countered by the omnipresence of Spanish and constant displays of bilingualism within the school, which also co-existed with the need to speak unaccented English to avoid being labeled an English Language Learner.

Chapter Five revolves around one creative way in which NNHS students challenged the marginalizing ideologies discussed in the previous chapter, which questioned Latinx's English and Spanish language practices. Rosa thoroughly discusses *inverted Spanglish* as one of the ways through which students countered social and institutional pressures to assimilate to US English while also maintaining their cultural and linguistic heritage. By way of *inverted Spanglish*, students were able to speak Spanish in English so that they were not perceived as having an accent and thus avoid stigmatization. Such a strategy allowed students to underscore their Latinx identity while at the same time claim Americanness. In the context of NNHS, students' use of *inverted Spanglish* also served as a satirical way to refer to the contradictions that comprise the figure of 'young Latino professional,' as they parodied speech associated

with professionals. Rosa also clarifies that *inverted Spanglish* did not allow NNHS students to escape the double stigmatization mapped onto their linguistic practices.

In Chapter Six, Rosa touches on outlawed literacies and criminalized intertextualities. In NNHS, signs that were connected to gang-activity were linked to conceptions of standardized and nonstandardized literacies and were deemed mutually exclusive. However, for NNHS students, social and institutional demands required that they signal alignment with and opposition to the school project of transforming them into 'young Latino professionals'. As Rosa sustains, NNHS students' literacies were not only devalued but also criminalized. Their ways of writing were outlawed from the school context, as these were connected to truancy and drug use and the figure of 'street kid', the message being that not all writing is literacy. Often, NNHS students would experience incidents of reprimanding for writing graffiti at the same time as they were told they were unable to write. Similarly, students' other literacy practices were seen as impediments rather than skills or learning opportunities, given that they were not connected to standardized reading and writing. Likewise, students' preferred books were not institutionally appreciated, the message being that not all reading is literacy. Not only were their preferred books excluded from the school curriculum, students themselves argued that the books they read did not count as books.

All in all, Rosa's argument points to recent theorizations of shame in English language teaching: the shame of one's own first language or the shame of using a powerful second language, which can be disempowering for multilinguals (Liyanage & Canagarajah, 2018). By the same token, social and institutional expectations and pressures for bilingual students in US schools to *look like a language* and *sound like a race* may cause them to develop shame in their linguistic repertoire, their own cultural heritage, and their ethnoracial identity at large. Thus, raciolinguistic research that unveils how racializing ideologies operate to marginalize bilingual learners and current theorizations of shame have the potential to point to pathways toward countering marginalizing forces and imagining more equitable ways to do language education in neoliberal times, where almost every aspect of human life has been commodified (Block, Gray & Holborow, 2012).

Rosa's book provides a comprehensive, detailed and systematic account of the co-construction of language and race. Understanding such co-construction is pivotal, given that it uncovers ideologies that delegitimize personhood altogether, by defining illegitimate uses of language in terms of the speakers' race. By and large, if these raciolinguistic assessments continue to be made without referencing race, racializing discourses will continue to be propagated, thereby reproducing racism and narratives about the alleged colorblind and post-racial society that we live in. Put differently, if racializing ideologies are left unchallenged, (a) bilingualism will continue to be constructed as a handicap, (b) accented language usage will continue to be framed as a source of shame, (c) multilingual communities will continue to be depicted as problematic, and (d) minoritized communities' societal exclusion will continue to be justified as individual choice rather than as a result of systemic structures of marginalization.

Overall, a raciolinguistic lens promises to shed light on the racializing ideologies upon which transitional, dual language, second/foreign language programs are built. Likewise, it has the potential to reveal why learners develop positive or negative attitudes towards the languages comprising their linguistic repertoire and how they grapple with racially charged ideologies. This line of research could unearth assumptions we hold about the bodies, language, and literacy practices of students of color in our language programs and thus make way for a humanizing pedagogy in language education. This is a timely and urgent endeavor in face of the hyper-racial society we live in, causing social and institutional anxieties about transracial subjects, whose ethnoracial ambiguity challenges the hegemonic racial hierarchy of the West (Alim, Rickford & Ball, 2016).

To conclude, Rosa's book is a must-read for educators and researchers interested in understanding the mapping of race onto language and in imagining ways to counter racializing structures within the schooling system and beyond. As Rosa clearly stated, a raciolinguistic perspective does not depict Latinx communities as helpless victims of a ruthless system of oppression nor does it construct them as agents in total control of their lives. Rather, this perspective constitutes a pathway towards better understanding how marginalized communities are expected to *look like a language* and *sound like a race* and how such communities and education institutions resist or accommodate to such expectations. Rosa's work invites us to continue to do research through a raciolinguistic perspective on already well-established fields such as culture, literacy and language, with a critical eye on the intersectionality of race, language and power.

References

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