Preparation FCS Professionals for a Multilingual Society: Building Community through the Experiences of Multilingual Families

As demographics in the United States shift, family and consumer sciences (FCS) professionals must be prepared to foster healthy communities that embrace multilingual families. Because hegemonic language ideologies challenge multilingual families, FCS professionals need to know how to inclusively reframe communities to honor multilingual families. Addressing FCS pre- and professional development, this paper introduces an interdisciplinary dialogue exploring the intersection of sociolinguistics and FCS. The paper offers (a) a modified ecological model reflecting linguistic communities and (b) a pedagogical framework for constructing affective learning outcomes inclusive of multilingual communities.

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A vibrant community comprises a network of families engaged in both the formation of their immediate families as well as the common good of the community itself. Often conceived as a self-sustaining unit, realistically, families regularly reach beyond themselves to seek support from and provide support to others. This paper argues that bridging the language gap is essential to fostering sustainable communities and requires an intentional effort to include multilingual families in the process. Family and consumer sciences (FCS) professionals who are working with multilingual families and communities must not only be knowledgeable about various linguistic groups, but also they must develop an appreciation for the value that these groups bring to the community as a whole.

Attending to the cultural diversity unevenly experienced across the United States, Nickols et al. (2009) articulated the important role that FCS professionals perform, and how that role continues to develop as the cultural dynamics of communities evolve. As FCS professionals address access to resources or seek to improve the quality of intergenerational relationships, their efforts warrant a more nuanced, sensitized approach when working with multilingual families. Cultural and linguistic adaptations must be reflected in FCS professional preparation.
(Nickols et al., 2009). Achieved through interdisciplinary studies, these adaptations include developing the ability to critique and challenge status quo beliefs about multilingual families. Interdisciplinarity is essential for FCS professionals whose actions contribute to the promotion of democratic practices (Brown, 1985; Nickols et al., 2009; Rehm, Allison, Darling, & Greenwood, 2002a, b).

Recent scholarship, including that surrounding the FCS Body of Knowledge, demonstrates the need for FCS professionals to examine social structures and their contextual consequences (Anderson, 2004; Duncan, 2011; Nickols et al., 2009; Rehm, Jensen, & Rowley, 2010). It is important that FCS pre-professional preparation include the study of issues affecting minority linguistic populations and likewise reframe strategies to better address FCS professionals’ work with multilingual families. To that end, this paper aims to initiate a dialogue between the disciplines of FCS and sociolinguistics, the study of language in the context of society and community. Although they may seem different, both disciplines work toward the inclusion of individuals who are often marginalized or Othered. Linguists traditionally focus more on the experiences of the individual and community. This paper asserts that by shifting the focus to multilingual experiences of families confronting the disruptive pressures of assimilation (leading to Othering), both fields consequently will inform one another, and FCS practice can be enriched.

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ASSIMILATION: A HEGEMONIC VIEWPOINT

Understanding the interplay among individuals, families, and communities is an appropriate starting point to this FCS/linguistic dialogue. Conceptualized through the human ecological model, these relationships are situated in a complex physical-biological, human-built, social-cultural environment (Buboltz & Sontag, 1993). Central to the social-cultural environment is the network of broadening social systems, including the micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Taking a compound perspective of family as ecosystem (Hook & Paolucci, 1970) and family in an ecosystem provides a lens for exploring how “intrafamilial processes are affected by extrafamilial conditions” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 723). With a values-based, holistic interest to understand the interaction between people and the environment, the ecological model “is especially well suited to examine issues of inequity and deprivation among groups in society with respect to resources, justice, power, and freedom” (Buboltz & Sontag, 1993, p. 427).

For FCS, the ecological model permits the examination of how families are affected by the broader community, for better or for worse, and can help FCS identify how dominant, hegemonic beliefs are maintained or challenged. From an ecological perspective, direct work with families typically occurs in social institutions that are found in the mesosystem and exosystem (including labor, politics, and the economy), concepts that are key for understanding linguistic communities, especially ethnic minority groups. To better understand the experiences of multilingual families, a modified ecological model is offered, whereby the minority family is part of an ethnolinguistic community, which in turn is part of the broader linguistic community (see Figure 1). In many ways, the ethnolinguistic community might be understood as a mesosystem, and the broader linguistic community can be compared to an exosystem-macrosystem complex, often the source of hegemonic beliefs. Under this modified approach, it is children—in their role as language learners—who are primarily affected by the broader linguistic community, which affects the dynamics of immigrant and ethnic minority families.

In this adaptation, the broader linguistic community tends to be hegemonic (exerting control and influence over others), with the effect that children are more likely to be influenced to assimilate to the broader community, but their parents may not be. Consequently, the broader community exerts ethnolinguistic hegemony, meaning that social institutions determine not only what languages are acceptable, but when and in what form as well (Silverstein,
In the U.S., English is acceptable in all situations; other languages are licensed in only limited situations. Furthermore, not all dialects of English are acceptable. Only Standard English has social capital (Bourdieu, 1991); nonstandard or foreign-accented English does not.

The hegemony of English means that it is socially dominant. Those who speak it are privileged in American society; those who do not are Othered (Howard, 2006). Understandably, social dominance creates pressure on the Other to assimilate to the dominant language. Within the linguistic community, linguistic dominance takes the form of pressure for children to learn English at the expense of their home language. This hegemonic pressure can create an environment that contributes to familial tensions (Guion, Chattaraj, & Sullivan-Lyte, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Wong Fillmore, 2005).

Problematic the Effects of Assimilation on Families
Due to cultural dominance, the U.S. has a long tradition of linguistic assimilation, seen through overt pressures from socially dominant institutions and stakeholders. These pressures were exemplified in the anti-immigration politics experienced during the Great Migration (European) in the late 19th–early 20th century. Anti-German sentiment during the World Wars also added to the pressure (Pavlenko, 2002). These politics have continued to the present day, with only the targeted Other changing. This trend may be seen in backlashes against bilingual education, as well as the English-Only movement, which aims to make English the official language of government (Wiley, 2004). Hegemonic language ideologies within social institutions yield a covert pressure as well, seen in the use of English as the default language, especially within public schools (Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007). Even as the U.S. moves demographically toward a majority-minority nation, these pressures continue and should be a concern for FCS.

Concern for linguistic pressures is not to claim that ethnic minorities should not learn the language of the broader community. Rather, FCS professionals should be concerned about the hegemonic pressure of the broader linguistic community on children and their families. Competing pressures on children and parents are problematic for the family, as noted by various scholars. Wong Fillmore (2005) found, for example, that second-generation children (of language-minority families) in English-only preschool programs had limited growth in their use of the home language. Not speaking the same language as their parents and grandparents had a predictably negative impact on family life. Indeed, students who are forced to assimilate have a lower degree of family cohesion, defined in terms of closeness, maintenance of cultural traditions, and degree of intergenerational conflict, as well as lower grades and lower self-esteem (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). These issues
can be attributed in part to having limited home language skills. If FCS pre-professional preparation were reframed to more directly respond to these concerns, students’ professional capacity and interest in strengthening multilingual families and communities could be enhanced (Guion et al., 2005).

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**REFRAMING FCS PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION FOR A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY**

Although the U.S. has always been a multilingual society, current global shifts suggest the need for FCS professionals to value and interact with the richness of cultural diversity. Savickiene (2010) stated,

> [t]he ongoing economic restructuring, globalization, development of technologies and other factors require relevant attitudes towards the change, innovations and other topicalities of life. Thorough education, including higher education, must influence the development of attitudes and values as well as encompass the affective domain together with the cognitive and psychomotor. (p. 40)

The current focus of higher education is to increase the intellectual capacity of students, evident in learning outcomes reflecting the cognitive domain. With the growing realization of the need for *soft,* or human skills, various academic disciplines are deliberately addressing affective skills through learning outcomes (Lynch, Russell, Evans, & Sutterer, 2009; Savickiene, 2010).

Because FCS is philosophically committed to strengthening families and communities in a global society, it is imperative that FCS professionals be prepared to confront and dismantle hegemonic beliefs regarding linguistic communities. This capacity lies not only in the cognitive/intellectual domain, but also in the affective domain. FCS professionals’ commitment to positively shape attitudes about minority linguistic groups and the experiences of multilingual families could be ensured through engaging FCS pre-professionals in affective learning experiences (Sweetland, 2014; Winchip, 1997).

To that end, this paper proposes scaffolding learning experiences that help shape multilingual competencies with activities informed by the affective domain of learning (see Table 1). This approach will better prepare FCS pre-professionals to intentionally integrate positive linguistic values and attitudes into their practice. Students’ understandings of their own positionalities regarding minority linguistic communities could be enriched through affective learning opportunities that (a) introduce pre-FCS professionals to sociolinguistic scholarship; (b) offer interactions with multilingual individuals, families, and communities; and, (c) move students to engage with the benefits and challenges of multilingual experiences (Rehm & Allison, 2006; Sweetland, 2014).

Furthermore, reflecting the human ecological model, by examining political, economic, social, and legal issues affecting multilingual families, FCS professionals could better confront the critical and moral concerns specific to the field (Arcus, 1999; Rehm et al., 2002a, b), and be prepared to act in the best interests of all families and communities. In this way, FCS professionals could come away with a stronger propensity to confront *ethnolinguistic hegemony* and its negative impact on family life and community resiliency.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The FCS profession is committed to valuing families as a social institution and to strengthening and connecting families of all types. Consequently, it is important that FCS professionals be prepared to recognize and confront examples of ethnolinguistic hegemony, and that they become acculturated to inclusively reframe a given situation to honor multilingual families. FCS and sociolinguistic perspectives should be intentionally integrated. Doing so
reflects Nickols et al.’s (2009) directive to craft a more adequate response to the changing “cultural kaleidoscope” (p. 278) by “revolutionizing” the FCS approach to both education and research. One such revolution is to augment FCS pre-professional curricula with learning activities that accommodate the affective learning domain (see Table 1). Strengthening affective learner outcomes, by intentionally scaffolding experiences about and with multilingual families, is a first step toward preparing FCS professionals to deliberately confront ethnolinguistic hegemonic practices.

FCS professionals who possess the capacity, values, and attitudes to respect and empower multilingual families and communities will (a) consciously respond to the needs of linguistically diverse audiences, (b) sensitively mediate and navigate multicultural generational differences, and (c) actively promote inclusive communities among linguistically diverse audiences. As the field of FCS strengthens its agility to work among multicultural communities, it might also become a potential career choice for individuals from diverse backgrounds, an added benefit.

Initiating an interdisciplinary dialogue between sociolinguistics and FCS creates an opportunity to consider the impact that expectations for assimilation have on multilingual families. Extending this interdisciplinary effort might include further exploring the effects of assimilation from the perspective of the family, as opposed to solely from the individual or community perspective, as is the practice of sociolinguistics. Perpetuating an interdisciplinary lens by including sociolinguistics reinforces the FCS commitment to fostering inclusive, democratic practices central to sustaining diverse families and communities.

REFERENCES


Table 1. Affective Domain and Application of Multilingual Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFFECTIVE DOMAIN COMPONENTS</th>
<th>AFFECTIVE ACTIONS FOR LEARNER OUTCOMES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF AFFECTIVE LEARNING BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>APPLICATION OF MULTILINGUAL COMPETENCIES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Receiving/attending</td>
<td>Take interest in, listen, accept, tolerate</td>
<td>Present to phenomenon</td>
<td>Students exposed to course work that questions linguistic experiences for children and families</td>
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<td>Level 2: Responding</td>
<td>Perform, answer, cooperate, discuss, contribute</td>
<td>Participatory; actively contributes</td>
<td>Students engage in dialogue about FCS efforts to support linguistic opportunities for children and families</td>
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<td>Level 3: Valuing</td>
<td>Initiate, commit, invite, choose</td>
<td>Committed to value; embraces importance of activities</td>
<td>Students begin to integrate linguistic needs of children and families into their course work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4: Organization</td>
<td>Balance, combine, group, relate</td>
<td>Integrates and prioritizes new values with previously internalized values</td>
<td>Students begin to critique status quo linguistic standards and organize schema to better address needs of children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5: Internalization/characterization</td>
<td>Exemplify, defend, solve, act</td>
<td>Consistent behavior; demonstration of new worldview</td>
<td>Students integrate newly acquired linguistic values and attitudes into practice</td>
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Note: Adapted from Savickiene (2010)


