INTRODUCTION

Like other oppressed and marginalized language minorities around the world, Zulu-speaking students in South Africa and Quechua-speaking students in Peru have long experienced schooling through the medium of a language not their own. While such a circumstance is so common worldwide that it is taken for granted, it undeniably poses a challenge to both teacher and pupil in accomplishing the teaching and learning tasks of education. This chapter takes a close look at language practices in two classrooms, a first-second grade for Quechua-speaking pupils in Puno, Peru, and a seventh grade for Zulu-speakers in Durban, South Africa, seeking to understand how teachers and pupils confront this challenge and what kind of learning appears to take place.

Our analyses of lessons in these two classrooms suggest that they are exemplars of what Chick has termed safetalk (Chick 1996), in which teachers and students preserve their dignity by hiding the fact that little
or no learning is taking place. We argue in the course of the chapter that the origins of this particular type of classroom interaction lie in the social and policy context of language minority education in these countries (we use minority here in the sense of nondominant and not necessarily in the numerical sense), that is, in the systematic discrimination Zulu- and Quechua-speaking students and teachers experience in their respective educational systems and societies at large. We outline some of the salient features of the Peruvian and South African contexts that lead to schools being arranged such that children and teachers can get through without getting caught "not knowing," that is, so that there can be safetime. We argue that the principal interest of the safetalk evident in the lessons analyzed is that it illustrates the process through which the victims of oppression interactivityachieve safetime. In both Peru and South Africa, new language-related pedagogies with the potential to radically alter the picture of traditional classroom interaction described here have been introduced either preceding or accompanying changes in national language education policy. After outlining these changes and their impact on interactional and instructional practices in these two societies, we conclude with speculations outlining these changes and their impact on interactional and instructional practices in these two societies.

In order to investigate the language practices of teachers and students from marginalized communities and how these facilitate or inhibit learning, we examined lessons displaying "typical" interaction in two classrooms located in very different parts of the world. In the Peruvian case, we considered a representative, audiotaped lesson from among many observed and recorded in the course of a two-year ethnographic study; in the South African case, we analyzed a videotaped lesson that the participants and informants identified as a "typical" lesson. Next we present selected episodes from those lessons. (Following Tannen 1984, we define episodes as interactional sequences bounded by change of activity or topic.)

NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF TALK IN TWO CLASSROOMS

In order to investigate the language practices of teachers and students from marginalized communities and how these facilitate or inhibit learning, we examined lessons displaying "typical" interaction in two classrooms located in very different parts of the world. In the Peruvian case, we considered a representative, audiotaped lesson from among many observed and recorded in the course of a two-year ethnographic study; in the South African case, we analyzed a videotaped lesson that the participants and informants identified as a "typical" lesson. Next we present selected episodes from those lessons. (Following Tannen 1984, we define episodes as interactional sequences bounded by change of activity or topic.)

A South African Math Lesson

We examined a math lesson taught through the medium of English by a native Zulu-speaking teacher to a seventh-grade class of 38 students, also all native Zulu-speakers. The average age of the class was fourteen years. In the lesson analyzed here, which took place in 1985, their teacher, whom we shall refer to as Mrs. Gumbi, conducted the entire lesson from the front of the classroom, making considerable use of the chalkboard. The students were crowded into multiple-seat wooden desks (five or six pupils to a desk), arranged in rows facing the board.

As the transcript of the following episode shows (Extract 1), the focus of the lesson was "elements which form the union set." At the start of the lesson Mrs. Gumbi had introduced the notion of elements of a union set and had written elements on the chalkboard and pointed to common elements. She asked one student to name one of the elements she had written on the board. The few subsequent student contributions took the form of teacher-initiated group chorusing. The lesson continued as follows:

Extract 1

(T = teacher; Ss = students, in chorus; S = individual student)  
1 T: but I know that these two elements are common because  
2 they are found in set B as well as in set C do you get that Ss: yes  
3 T: now now a let us form the universal set the  
4 universe I mean sorry union set the union set is the  
5 set which has the elements of both sets get it B and *C Ss: *C  
6 T: collect the elements of those two sets and  
7 write them together all them they will form union *set Ss: *set  
8 T: can you try to to list the elements of the union set Ss: two three  
9 T: that is two Ss: three  
10 T: three Ss: four  
11 T: four Ss: five  
12 T: five Ss: six  
13 T: six Ss: seven  
14 T: seven Ss: eight  
15 T: eight and eight...  
16 what type of set is this now...it is a *union set Ss: *union set  
17 it is a union set because we have been listing now  
18 the elements of set B together with the elements of set C Ss: *C  
19 to form one set which called what...a union *set Ss: *set  
20 T: but remember when you list the union set the elements Ss: for the union set do not repeat those elements which are  
21 written twice do you get that Ss: yes  
22 T: do not repeat them list them once O.K. Ss: yes  
23 T: do you understand this Ss: yes  
24 T: do you understand this Ss: yes  
25 T: do you understand this Ss: yes
Most people who viewed the recording of this lesson found two characteristics noteworthy: the coincidence of teacher volubility with student taciturnity, and the rhythmically coordinated chorusing behavior (cf. Watson-Gegeo 1992, 59, who comments on the special prosodic characteristics of teachers’ English in Kwaara‘æ: exaggerated pitch, excessive stress, and chant-like rhythm).

We considered but discarded the explanation that these behaviors could be traced to the culture of the teacher and pupils. It is true that many observers have commented (mostly unfavorably) on the teacher volubility and student taciturnity of interactions in segregated schools for black people in apartheid South Africa (see, for example, Schlemmer and Bot 1986; Thembelu 1986; and Macdonald 1988). We also considered the explanation that these behaviors could be traced to particular characteristics of third-world contexts, especially in light of the fact that they were also observed in the Peruvian case that follows. However, it is also true that studies of classroom discourse in many parts of the world, including middle-class European (see, for example, Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) and U.S. classrooms (see, for example, Mehan 1979), have shown that the unequal distribution of talk, if not universal, is very pervasive. This suggests that this feature can be traced mostly to the asymmetrical distribution of social power and knowledge between teachers and students evident in most educational institutions throughout the world.

Our examination of how Mrs. Gumbi and her students accomplished the rhythmically coordinated chorusing behavior revealed that what was critical was the provision and recognition of two kinds of contextualization cue (Gumperz 1982a). The first kind includes various yes/no questions: “do you understand this?” (lines 24 & 25); “do you get that?” (lines 2 & 22); “O.K.” (line 23); and “isn’t it?”; “do you see that?”; “can I go on?” (elsewhere in the lesson). The second kind of cue is a rising tone on accented syllables, which the teacher provided in lines 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, and 19. Further examination revealed that the chorusing prompted by both kinds of cue serves a social rather than academic function.

We considered the possibility that the chorusing elicited by the first kind of cue (the set of questions) serves the academic function of enabling Mrs. Gumbi to access the level of her students’ understanding so that she can know whether or not to recycle her explanation at a lower level of abstraction. However, we found that the chorused responses were without exception “yes.” This suggests that the questions are not really open questions and that their function is to signal participation rather than level of understanding. Similarly, we considered the possibility that the chorusing elicited by the second kind of cue (rising tone) serves the academic function of reinforcing certain key information items and, perhaps, helping the students to become more familiar with (to memorize?) technical terms (e.g., line 16). However we found that it was not new information that students were asked to chorus, but information already available to them before the lesson (e.g., in lines 7 & 19 the students were required to supply the word SET rather than the name of the set that they had learned about in the lesson). Elsewhere in the lesson the rising tone prompted them merely to complete words (e.g., irregular; we are looking for the ugKNOW); Moreover, we discovered that throughout the lesson, students, in response to both kinds of cue, provided mainly confirmative one- or two-word responses, or responses that repeated information on the board, or information that had been recycled again and again by Mrs. Gumbi. We concluded that the chorusing, here as in the Peruvian case, functions principally to give students opportunities to participate in ways that reduce the possibility of the loss of face associated with providing incorrect responses to teacher elicitations or not being able to provide responses. It is interesting to note that the chorusing was more evident at the beginning of the lesson than later on. Once responses had been well rehearsed, so that the chance of being wrong publicly was reduced, more individual responses were elicited, and at the end students were even invited to leave their desks and carry out the very public act of writing their responses on the board.

A Peruvian Language Lesson

We also examined a language lesson taught through the medium of Spanish, in a combined first-second-grade class of 36 native Quechua-speaking students ranging from six to thirteen years of age, in a rural community of Puno, Peru. The teacher, Sra. Sara, was a native Spanish speaker who also spoke Quechua, having learned it as an adult.

In the lesson analyzed here, which occurred in 1983, Sra. Sara opened with a series of questions, using objects in the classroom (e.g., chair, table, chalk, sticks, notebook, her fingers, her hand) to elicit student responses as to whether there was one or more than one item in what she was holding or indicating. The students provided choral one-word answers, as in the opening exchanges of the lesson, shown in Extract 2.

Extract 2

(T = teacher; Ss = students, in chorus; S = individual student)

1. T: ...este, tus compañeros del primer grado ¿están sentados en qué?
2. Ss: Silla, silla.
3. T: Silla, ¿y sobre qué escriben?
4. Ss: Mesa.
5. T: Mesa, ¿Cuántas mesas tenemos?
1 T Now ... your companions in the first grade, what are they sitting on?
2 Ss: Chair, chair.
3 T Chair. And what do they write on top of?
4 Ss: Table.

After several exchanges in the same vein, Sra. Sara began to use the blackboard, drawing figures to represent the sticks she had earlier held in her hand, singular and plural, and writing the name next to each one, *palo* and *palos*, respectively. At this point, she explicitly introduced the concepts of singular and plural and the letter “s” (both spoken and written) that signals plural in Spanish (Extract 3).

Extract 3

5 T Entonces, hoy día, vamos a aprender a entender las palabras y los nombres.
6 No siempre es igual. A veces hablamos solamente de uno, otras veces hablamos de varios, ¿sí o no?
7 Pero Uds. tienen la mala costumbre. “Señorita, me ha quitado mi cuaderno!” dicen a veces, cuando les ha quitado todo. O+ les ha quitado un lapicito, y “señorita, me ha quitado mis lapices!” dicen.
8 Cuando se les está quitando uno...
9 ¿Qué estamos viendo? [T. levanta un palo.]
10 ¿Ahora?
11 T Cuando yo digo eso, ¿qué cosa estoy diciendo?
12 Cuando yo hablo de una cosa, ¿falto algo?
13 T Yo: Sra. Sara (calls her to attention). So, what we are talking about is, a word, is a part of language that we need to understand in order to know how to speak and to write. Lidia [T. calls her to attention]. You (all) need to realize that they are different.
14 T: Now I am holding what?
15 Ss: Stick.
16 T: Stick. And now, I am holding?
17 Ss: Sticks.
18 T: Stick.
19 T: Stick.
20 T: Stick.
21 T: Stick.
22 T: Stick.
23 T And now, I am holding?
24 Ss: Sticks, stick, stick, stick, stick.
25 Ss: Sticks, sticks.
26 T Are they written the same? Look. [T. points to words on board.]
27 T No. Why? Why isn’t it the same? What’s missing here?
28 This is the ‘s’ that you see. Look, let’s draw this stick... there.
29 Here, the other.
30 T: Hoy día esto que estamos trabajando en esta clase, se va a llamar
31 el número del sustantivo. El número puede ser... cuando yo hablo de uno.
What we are working on here today in this class, is called the number of the noun. Number means.

When we talk about just one, we are speaking of the noun, or in other words the word can be written in a different form. It’s not always the same.

Finally, she summarized the lesson once more and charged the children to copy what was on the board into their notebooks (Extract 5).

As the children proceeded to copy, there was evidence in nearly every child’s notebook that they had no idea what they were writing, as the following examples illustrate. On the board, the teacher had written:

El sustantivo singular
nombra a una sola persona, un animal o cosa.
One student copied only as much of each line as fit onto his page, one letter at a time:

Elsustantivosin
nombreanunasolape
animalocasa

Similarly, what the teacher wrote as "El sustantivo plural indica," a student copied as "Elsustantivopluralindica." It seemed that pupils were getting practice at forming the shapes of the letters, but with no understanding of any meaning in the shapes.

As in the South African lesson analyzed earlier, oral participation in this lesson is characterized by a pattern of teacher prompt and choral response. Although in this case there is less use of yes/no questions (the exception is line 7) and less evidence of rhythmic coordination, there is a notable pattern of teacher volatility and pupil taciturnity. The teacher asks a series of questions, to which the students respond in chorus, usually with one word (see lines 2–4, 12–17, 22, 24); or the teacher leaves a sentence, phrase, or word incomplete and the students fill in the missing piece, again most often in chorus and with one word (lines 33, 35) or even part of a word (lines 23, 36, 39, 42, 55), as we also saw in the South African case. As in the South African case too, this Peruvian teacher uses a rising tone on stressed syllables to prompt students to complete or repeat words (lines 23, 36, 39, 43, 44); she also uses this stressed rising tone to draw attention to a syllable or word she is introducing (lines 47, 48, 49) and to elicit students to repeat information she has just taught them (lines 33, 35). Interestingly, in Sra. Sara's case, the rising tone sometimes serves a double purpose as student prompt and teacher emphasis; in other words, the teacher uses a rising tone to prompt or invite students' response, but if a response is not forthcoming, the rising tone instead provides emphasis to what the teacher is about to say (lines 54, 56). Given these interactional practices of teacher prompt and student choral response, oral interaction in this lesson creates space for the students to participate, but without necessarily much real understanding.

Since schools are about literacy and since literacies are embedded in talk, it should come as no surprise that reading and writing practices in this lesson also allow students to participate while not necessarily learning academic content. Reading in this lesson consisted of repeating aloud what the teacher read from the board (not shown here). In most cases, pupils were not even looking at the words they were reading. Writing consisted of pupils being asked to copy from the board (see lines 59-60). Unfortunately, the nature of copying is such that pupils can copy into their notebooks without understanding what they are copying, which is what appeared to be happening in this classroom. Pupils could look and feel busy, yet little learning was going on since there was little understanding.

On the whole, characteristics of the oral interaction, reading, and writing in this lesson point to a failure in the learning of academic content in this class (and in others of which it is representative). It is our contention that the emphasis on copying as writing, on repetition (and correct pronunciation) as reading, and on teacher prompt–choral response as interaction, are all practices that have arisen over time in an attempt to create a learning atmosphere against great odds produced by, among other unfavorable contextual circumstances, the gap between the language of instruction (Spanish) and the language the children speak and understand (Quechua). In this regard, it is not purely coincidental that Sra. Sara switches into Quechua in order to explain the essence of the concept of singular and plural at a crucial point in the lesson (lines 33–35). As has been shown in other multilingual settings around the world, this is a case of "the use of codeswitching to scaffold knowledge building, or, to put it differently, to bridge the gap between the knowledge acquired by students through the medium of their first language(s) and the knowledge of the school mediated through . . . the language of instruction" (Martin-Jones and Heller 1996, 9).

It is often said that Quechua children—and indigenous or marginalized children in many parts of the world, for that matter—are naturally shy and reticent and that that is why they rarely speak in school; therefore, we should not interfere with their cultural practices by encouraging them to speak out more. In light of observations such as those just outlined here, however, we think we should ask ourselves whether at least some of that reticence is due to the fact that the school language in many of these cases is a language entirely foreign to the child. Of course, more may be involved than language per se; at issue too may be culturally or institutionally specific language practices. In some parts of the world, children are shy in school even though the home language and the school language are the same. Philips (1983) has shown that, for the case of the Native American children at Warm Springs, who speak English at home and at school, it is in fact classroom language practices that are key to the children's participation. Given participation structures and language practices that are more congruent with their own cultural practices, Warm Springs children do participate more in school. Participation structures and language practices may also be a factor in the case of Quechua children. Nevertheless, an even more fundamental issue seems to be language itself. Who, after all, can speak out in a language that they do not know?
being wrong "publicly" in the classroom; while in the Peruvian case, teacher prompt–choral response as oral interaction, reading consisting of repeating after the teacher, and writing consisting of copying from circumstances, participants often resort to safetalk, which is classroom discourse that affords few opportunities for displays of academic incompetence. In other words, through engaging in safetalk practices, they co-construct school safetime.

Our thinking about the function of safetalk was strongly influenced by two studies that attempt to trace the relationship between the form classroom discourse takes and the social and policy contexts in which it occurs. In the first of these studies, Collins (1987) argues that the ideology of ability grouping promoted in school systems in the United States leads students in low-ability groups and their teachers to socialize one another into systematic departures from the normative model of classroom interaction, which, though hierarchical, allows opportunities for reading practice. Since these departures provide less opportunity for practice, low-ability groups tend to fall progressively further behind high-ability groups in their acquisition of literacies valued in the school system.

In the second of these studies, McDermott and Tylbor (1987) analyze an episode in which teachers and students, in response to the institutional requirement that students’ reading ability be constantly evaluated, do interactional work to make the illiteracy of one of the students, Rosa, not noticeable. They show that while evaluation is constantly taking place, teachers and students collude in evaluating overtly only when the evaluation is positive. This means that students like Rosa are continuously denied reading practice, that is, opportunities to acquire schooled literacies.

These two studies show how wider social and policy contexts constrain what takes place at a microlevel of classroom interaction. They show participants working together to socialize one another into sets of sociolinguistic norms that enable them to preserve their dignity in the face of oppressive discriminatory policies, structures, and practices, but with unfortunate consequences for their learning. As Collins (1987, 313) puts it, “Institutional ideologies and bureaucratic organization forms do not entirely constrain participants; people still strive to make sense of their situation, to avoid or resist that which is demeaning or oppressive. But the solutions achieved to local problems may have unfortunate consequences which are quite damaging.”

These insights suggest that safetalk is an interactional practice that minority groups socialize one another into as a means of coping with the overwhelming odds they face in social and policy contexts such as the two we describe here, that is, contexts of long-term oppression and marginalization where children are taught through the medium of a language not their own. They suggest, further, that, through safetalk, the impotent collude with their oppressors in reinforcing the inequalities that led to widespread use of such practices in the first place.
These insights apply to other means of co-constructing school safetime as well, that is, the ways in which schooltime and classtime are organized so that very little schooltime is devoted to the academic learning that school is supposed to be about. We refer here not to inroads into schooltime resulting from explicit student or teacher resistance to conditions of oppression and inequality. One such example, a response to the repressive structures of South African apartheid society that cannot be characterized as an instance of co-construction of school safetime but one that drastically eroded teaching time and undermined the morale of teachers, was the recruitment of students by liberation forces to engage in protest and other political activities. This sometimes took the form of attacks on the persons and property of teachers and the destruction of school property. In the latter years of the apartheid regime the academic program was further disrupted by chalkdowns by teachers, expressing their frustration of being caught between the authoritarian bureaucracy of the educational system and the anger of their students about the inadequacy of the education offered to them. Such direct and intentional disruptions of schooltime are not the focus of our attention here.

Instead, what we are highlighting here are the more hidden ways in which teachers and students may co-construct practices that erode academic learning time at school. In the South African case, even when schools were operating “normally,” classroom time was severely reduced by chronic student and teacher absenteeism; by sports meetings organized during school hours; and by extended study breaks for staff engaged in upgrading their qualifications, during which classes were left to their own devices. In the Puno case, only about 6% of schooltime was devoted to academic learning time4; overall schooltime was reduced because of pupil absences to attend to family agricultural or childcare needs and teacher absences due to problems with transportation or living accommodations, emergency family situations, conflicting districtwide and “functional group” meetings, and teacher reassignments or strikes; classtime was reduced because of abundant nonclassroom duties and activities such as working in the school garden, preparing for special events, extended recess periods, or school-parent meetings held during school hours; and finally, academic learning time in class was reduced by hours of busywork or by an emphasis on behavioral as opposed to intellectual development. Seen in this light, safetalk in the classroom appears to be but one piece of a larger picture of school safetime, in which schools themselves appear to be arranged to help children and teachers get through school without getting caught “not knowing” (Hornberger 1987b).

CHANGING CONTEXTS AND NEW PEDAGOGIES

In both Peru and South Africa there have been marked changes in the social and policy contexts that teachers and students responded to by engaging in safetalk and other means of co-constructing school safetime. The nature and direction of change has in many ways been different in each case. However, in both societies such change has been preceded or accompanied by the introduction of new language-related pedagogies with the potential to change traditional classroom interactional practices. Accordingly, we concluded that we could learn more about the relationship between social and policy contexts and classroom interactional practices and especially about the role and limitation of innovative pedagogies by comparing the changes that have occurred in the two societies and how these have had an impact on learning.

The Rise and Fall of Official Bilingual Education in Peru

In Peru, the role of the school in Quechua communities has been highly ambiguous, beginning from early in this century when schools were first introduced in the communities and continuing up to the present. Quechua-speaking communities have survived through centuries of exploitation and dominance by developing strategies of internal cohesion and exclusion of the larger, Spanish-speaking society; historically, they have not been inclined to easily permit within their midst an institution (the school) representing that larger society. Only when they have perceived that Spanish literacy might be to their advantage in maintaining themselves against the abuses of the larger society have they sought to have schools. Thus, from the point of view of Quechua community members, the role of the school is to confer Spanish literacy and with it a possible avenue to social mobility.

In this context, the Experimental Bilingual Education Project of Puno (PEEB) introduced and implemented Quechua as medium of instruction in selected classrooms and schools of Puno throughout the decade of the 1980s. What became clear as a result of PEEB is that safetalk and other means of co-constructing school safetime could be contested and interrupted when the pupils’ own language was used in the classroom. In PEEB classrooms, teachers still used copying from the board as a pedagogical technique; but there, it more often occurred as a reinforcement at the conclusion of a lesson, rather than as a substitute for a lesson. In PEEB classrooms, pupils could read, and read with understanding. For example, pupils in first grade read words from the board, obviously associating pictures above the word with what they were saying, rather than simply memorizing the sounds in order and
“reading” them without even looking at the board, as so often happened in traditional non-PEEB classrooms. In contrast to non-PEEB classes, the PEEB teachers often asked summary-and-review questions about what the children were reading and got appropriate responses. Finally, in PEEB classrooms, the traditional teacher volubility and student taciturnity were interrupted; in other words, when pupils were encouraged to speak Quechua instead of Spanish, they usually said more and said it with more variety of expression (see Hornberger 1988a for more detail).

Nevertheless, despite the successes of the PEEB in changing interactional practices within PEEB classrooms, the larger social and policy context in Peru at the close of the 1980s was such that not only the PEEB but also official bilingual education more generally was eventually dismantled (see van Lier 1996, 385–386, on the PEEB as yet one more ghost of projects past). On the one hand, the PEEB suffered at the local level from having been introduced in a top-down manner, which meant that it occasionally ran into resistance from Quechua-speaking communities for the very reason just outlined (instruction in Quechua was incongruent with the perceived role of the school as conferring literacy in Spanish); on the other, it suffered from a shifting policy climate and a deteriorating economy at the national level (see also Hornberger 1987a).

The PEEB had arisen out of a socially progressive policy context that included the 1972 National Educational Reform and the 1975 Officialization of Quechua. Ironically, as the PEEB moved during the 1980s from a language-as-problem toward a language-as-right orientation (Ruiz 1984) and the concomitant maintenance model of bilingual education (Hornberger 1991), official language policy in Peru moved in the opposite direction, away from the understanding of language-as-resource that had been evident in the 1975 Quechua Officialization, back toward a view of language-as-problem (Ruiz 1984; Hornberger 1988b). By the end of the 1980s, referred to by social scientists as the “lost decade” because of the economic failure and social decomposition Peru experienced under the APRA government of Alan Garcia (von Gleich 1992, 60), the official climate for bilingual education had steadily worsened and PEEB was eventually dismantled in 1990.

As a result, official bilingual education in Peru was severely affected, since the public sector did not have either the financial resources or the professional personnel and expertise to go on with bilingual education experiments. In 1992, the national Bilingual Education Directorate, which in 1988 had succeeded the Bilingual Education Unit created in 1973, was dismantled under the restructuring of the Ministry of Education. This occurred in spite of the fact that a year earlier a new and thoroughly updated Bilingual Education Policy, which to a large extent reflected PEEB’s orientation and influence, had been approved. A new institutional transformation of the Ministry of Education in 1996 reestablished a Bilingual Education Unit as part of the National Directorate of Primary Education, implying that intercultural bilingual education should restrict itself to primary education. Gone are the days when Peruvian academicians thought bilingual education could become an important cross-sectional component of the Peruvian educational system and permeate all levels and modalities of Peruvian education. PEEB’s admirable record of success in overcoming numerous technical challenges to present a panorama of new possibilities in indigenous bilingual education was not enough to overcome the weight of political failure (Hornberger 1987a).

At the same time, however, more than a dozen bilingual education projects have arisen in southern Andean Peru out of private initiative: and as a result of the involvement of both local and international nongovernmental organizations and foundations. The new project, emerged both in Puno and in other Quechua-speaking areas, such as Apurimac, Cuzco, and Huancavelica. Although of minor scope and coverage, such initiatives have generated more local attention and have to a certain extent offered better and more realistic possibilities for the development of bilingual education in the Quechua-speaking areas of Peru. A major bilingual education initiative has also become incorporate in Bolivia’s National Education Reform of 1994 (see Hornberger and López 1998 for more detail) and, as of 1997, a renewed effort has become evident in Peru’s Ministry as well. These new projects draw on the experience and knowledge accumulated and generated by the PEEB. The Puno legacy has been a key determinant for the present and future of bilingual education in Peru (and beyond) and may yet prove to have been a wedge for dislodging school safetalk and safetime practices in indigenous Andean contexts.

The Advent of Nonracial Democracy and Multilingual Language Policy in South Africa

In South Africa, school safetalk and safetime are set against the backdrop of systematic discrimination under the apartheid policy implemented by the Nationalist Party beginning in 1948 (and lasting until the defeat of the Nationalists by the African National Congress in the early 1990s)—a massive program of social engineering based on the rigid segregation of black, white, Indian, and colored populations. In education, the apartheid system was evident in the differentiated per capita expenditure on education for the different groups; in differentiated teacher-pupil ratios; in differentiated levels of professional qualification of teachers; and in a medium of instruction policy...
that black people perceived as promoting division among them and as limiting their life chances. Before Nationalist rule, the medium in senior primary schools and beyond had been English, but “Bantu education” dictated mother-tongue instruction throughout the primary school (thus setting apart speakers of Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, and other indigenous African languages). It also required Afrikaans and English as media of instruction in secondary school on a fifty-fifty basis, thus dramatically reducing the opportunity of black students to become proficient in English, the language widely perceived, then as now, as the key to social mobility and economic advancement.

The 1976 Soweto uprising, sparked by resistance to the policy of Afrikaans as medium of instruction in high schools, marked a watershed in South Africa’s sociopolitical history. It led to the regime’s making a number of concessions, one of which was to grant black communities their choice of medium of instruction. The result was an abrupt return to the practice of using exclusively English as medium after the first three years of schooling. The uprising also prompted the setting up of a range of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Together these NGOs constituted a civil society in waiting, offering, as they did, a range of services to black communities to compensate for the injustices and discrimination they had received at the hand of the apartheid regime. One example was the intervention by NGOs when the state instituted no special measures to assist primary teachers, most of whom were ill-equipped linguistically and pedagogically, when they had to make the abrupt shift in 1979 from teaching all subjects through one of the indigenous languages, to teaching through English. Initially the main focus of their intervention was inducting teachers into the pedagogy of communicative language teaching (CLT). CLT appealed to these NGOs and to the applied linguists who assisted them because of the respect CLT shows for the linguistic resources they bring to the classrooms. As Holliday (1994, 167) explains, the genesis of CLT can be traced to the revolutionary realization within the notion of communicative competence that the language learners, rather than having a deficit, already have “certain competences, either in the mother tongue or other tongues, or in the experience they [have] already gained of the target language, which must be capitalized or built upon.” This is, of course, particularly true of learners from marginalized groups in South Africa, many of whom enter the classroom already competent in a number of languages and varieties. Not least, CLT appealed to NGOs because its emphasis on group work and learner choice challenged traditional classroom interactional practices.

One measure of the progress these NGOs made in promoting CLT is that state education authorities subsequently initiated curriculum reform, which led to communicative competence being identified as the principal goal of language teaching. However, such evidence as is available suggests that neither the efforts of NGOs nor the implementation of new core syllabi for the teaching of languages in state schools led to widespread changes in the traditional classroom interactional practices in English-language classrooms, let alone in the various content subjects. There are no doubt many reasons, including the limited resources of NGOs and teachers’ feelings of alienation, which made it difficult for them to respond to state education initiatives with enthusiasm. Our belief, though, is that one of the main reasons is that, in the absence of any fundamental change to the discriminatory social and policy context, safetalk had still too great a “payoff” for teachers and pupils for them to readily abandon it. It was still necessary for teachers and learners to use safetalk to avoid displays of academic incompetence that might jeopardize teachers’ jobs and reduce learners’ opportunities for further education and employment.

Since then there have been two developments with potential to change traditional classroom interactional practices. The first is an attempt at further innovation in English-language teaching in the form of critical language awareness (CLA) materials. This development was in part a reaction to the state’s promotion of CLT, which some critics viewed as an attempt to co-opt teachers in the maintenance of the status quo. As Peirce (1989, 411) put it, “in a society in which racism, sexism, and elitism are considered appropriate in many communities, the teaching of rules in these communities would simply perpetuate inequality.” Janks (1991) explains that CLA materials were written in response to proposals drafted by the National Education Crisis Committee for People’s English. This committee envisaged the study of English as empowering students and serving as a vehicle for liberation. CLA materials (see, for example, the series edited by Janks 1993) focus on the relationship between language and power. By focusing attention on the verbal and nonverbal choices the speakers and writers have made in constructing their discourses, they attempt to raise awareness of how those in power use language to defend the status quo. They also attempt to teach students through a process of deconstructing texts to contest the language practices that disempower them and to use language in ways that do not disempower others.

It will be apparent from this short description that the roles that CLA calls for students to take up are at odds with the social relations of power implicit in the traditional classroom interactional practices. However, the impact of CLA to date has been even less than that of CLT. Its association with the National Education Crisis Committee for People’s English means that it enjoys considerable credibility with
those African teachers aware of this association. However, partly because CLA materials in South Africa became freely available only very late in the struggle against apartheid and partly because the advocates of CLA had even fewer resources than the NGOs who promote CLT, most teachers outside the Johannesburg area are not familiar with the materials and the rationale for them. What may also be inhibiting the impact these materials make on classroom interactional practices is that teachers see CLA as having served its historical function and as being no longer relevant in the context of a democratic South Africa, that is, as having usefully served to politicize education at the height of the liberation struggle but as, now that liberation has been attained, perhaps no longer required. Not least, what may be limiting the impact of CLA materials on classroom interactional practices is that they place the burden of contesting dominant practices and discourses on the shoulders of students among whom are some of the most disempowered members of society.

However, we believe that the chief reason that CLA and CLT have not served to change traditional classroom interactional practices on any large scale is that they both focus on the teaching of English and call for a high level of proficiency in it. Further, even if they lead to the abandonment of traditional interactional practices in English classes, there is no guarantee that these will be adopted in other subjects. More telling is the fact that teachers and students with limited proficiency in English experience difficulty in negotiating the more symmetrical social relations associated with both approaches. It is because it opens up the possibility of students and teachers negotiating social relations in the classroom in their mother tongues that the third new pedagogical development is of particular interest to us.

This development is South Africa’s new multilingual language policy, which represents a dramatic shift from a language-as-problem to a language-as-right orientation (Ruiz 1984). This policy raises to official status eleven major languages, these being nine indigenous African languages and the two ex-colonial languages English and Afrikaans (N.B., there is some dispute about the status of Afrikaans, which some have argued is an indigenous African language). The section in the constitution on human rights includes clauses that ensure that all people have the right to use the language of their choice and that no person shall be discriminated against on grounds of language. It also requires the establishment of a Pan South African Language Board specifically to foster multilingualism.

This development is but one of many changes ushered in with the advent of a nonracial democracy in South Africa that, together, are beginning to constitute a social and policy context that may be less conducive to the construction of school safetalk than that which obtained before. For example, desegregated schooling has brought to an end differentiated per capita expenditure on education for different groups. However, apartheid continues to cast a long shadow. Mother-tongue instruction is still viewed with deep suspicion, and English is still the overwhelming preference for language of instruction. This is borne out by the responses of over 500 Zulu-first-language tertiary and senior high school students to a questionnaire administered in March 1996 (see Chick and Wade 1997). As many as 63% of the respondents indicated that, if they were given the choice, they would introduce English as the language of instruction and learning as early as grade one, while a further 7.2% indicated that they would introduce it as early as the pre-school level. Evidence of the continued widespread perception that English is the key to social mobility and economic advancement is that the vast majority of respondents also indicated that they anticipated using mostly English in their future professions (81%) and in interacting with public servants (68%). The elevation to high political office of speakers of indigenous languages and their growing importance as consumers has increased the economic value of proficiency in such languages. The indications, though, are that, in the short term at least, speakers of indigenous languages are unlikely to be easily persuaded that their own mother tongues should be widely used as media of instruction.

Ironically, this choice may do more to prevent the mass of the people from enjoying significant social and economic advancement than to help them to achieve this goal. Samuels (1995, 80) has pointed out that “in almost all the countries of Anglophone Africa only a thin layer of between 5% and 20% of people have ever gained a passable measure of proficiency in English.” As South Africa has greater resources and a larger number of native-speaker models than many Anglophone African states, it should be more successful in developing English proficiency among its citizens. However, this strategy seems more likely to contribute to the emergence of a small English-speaking elite than to the economic and social advancement of the mass of the people.

Our examination of the relationship between unfavorable social and policy contexts and the kind of learning that takes place for marginalized language minorities (especially the handicap of having to teach and learn through a language not their own) suggests why in the South African case the overwhelming choice of English is likely to have such unfortunate consequences. Without denying the need for promoting widespread proficiency in English, we believe that this should not be accomplished primarily through making English the sole medium of instruction. If this practice continues, there is a danger that most South
African teachers and pupils, especially those most marginalized, will continue to use up too much of their academic learning time engaging in safetalk and other means of constructing school safetime.

GETTING BEYOND SAFETIME

We have provided examples of lessons in two classrooms on opposite sides of the world, and we have argued that teacher and students in these classrooms co-constructed interactional practices characterized as safetalk, talk that creates a space where teacher and students know more or less what to expect and how to behave in class, but where a high price is paid in terms of (a lack of) learning. We have suggested that in the Peruvian and South African cases, at least, safetalk is one piece of a larger co-construction of school safetime that contributes to the continuing marginalization of language minorities in social and policy contexts of long-term oppression. We have also briefly reviewed recent initiatives in both contexts that attempt to introduce new language-related pedagogies in classrooms such as those we analyzed here. We conclude now with thoughts on the potential of these (or other) new pedagogies to radically alter school safetalk and safetime practices in such contexts.

We believe that pedagogical innovation for marginalized language minorities cannot advance very far as long as the larger social and policy contexts remain unfavorable to those minorities. In the Peruvian case, we have seen that shifting language-planning orientations and bilingual education policies interrupted advances made in bilingual education for Quechua speakers in the 1980s. In the South African case, we have suggested that the lack of headway made in introducing communicative language teaching (CLT) and critical language awareness (CLA) approaches in English language teaching in the 1980s is in large part attributable to the absence of any fundamental change to the discriminatory education system and language-medium policy.

Even in favorable social and policy circumstances, moreover, we suggest that pedagogical innovation takes time, on the order of years and decades, not weeks and months. This is because true pedagogical innovation involves more than the simple introduction of a new language of instruction (e.g., bilingual education) or a new language-teaching method (e.g., CLT or CLA). We believe that the lessons we have analyzed show that safetalk language and literacy practices and participation structures are somewhat hidden and self-sustaining, anchored in larger social and policy structures and relationships. It requires more than a new method or medium of instruction to dislodge such practices. Reflecting on the impact of the PEEB, one consultant noted his realization that "the use of L1 as the medium of instruction would only bear its promised fruit if at the same time one could effect a change in basic teaching habits. It would not, automatically or easily, bring about such a change by itself" (van Lier 1996, 384). Although there were signs that such changes were underway as a result of sustained efforts in some PEEB classrooms and schools, progress was cut short when the official policy climate shifted away from the progressive social reforms that had been undertaken in the 1970s. In the South African case, the advent of a nonracial democracy and a multilingual language policy in the 1990s provides a new and promising social and policy context in which teachers and students may be able to negotiate new classroom practices and relationships. Only time will tell, however, if favorable contexts and new pedagogies can assert and sustain themselves for long enough to fundamentally alter safetalk and safetime practices in South African and Peruvian classrooms and schools.

NOTES

1. Notes on transcription conventions: Underline (_) indicates rising tone on a stressed syllable. Asterisk (*) indicates simultaneous talk by two or more speakers.
2. We use exchange here in the sense in which Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) define it, that is, as the basic unit of interaction, consisting of two or more moves, and in classrooms usually three—an initiating move, a response, and a follow-up move. This parallels Mehan’s (1979) IRE sequence: initiation—response—ulation.
4. Tikunoff and Vazquez-Faria (1982, 249; following Fisher et al. 1978) define academic learning time in terms of a combination of allocated time, student engagement, and student accuracy rate, thus using a stricter definition of academic learning time (ALT) than our use here. For our purposes, we define ALT as the portion of class-time in which students and teachers work collaboratively on an academic lesson; this encompasses allocated time, student engagement, and at least some degree of student accuracy (as monitored by the teacher). We exclude from ALT, for example, periods when pupils copy from the board or are on their own with no apparent instruction. It is possible that some academic learning occurs under these two participant structures; however, since our observations indicated that student responses were usually not accurate during these times, it seems likely that very little academic learning was going on.

REFERENCES


