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## "Can you just speak normal?": How language summer camps affect White children's participation in the linguistically, culturally, and racially diverse United States

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"CAN YOU JUST SPEAK NORMAL?": HOW LANGUAGE SUMMER CAMPS AFFECT WHITE  
CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LINGUISTICALLY, CULTURALLY, AND RACIALLY DIVERSE  
UNITED STATES

by

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## **Abstract**

The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse country. Young children are at the best age to learn about language and race, but the way that language programs address the intersection of language and race echoes the issues present in the rest of society. Learning a language in a racially diverse environment improves racial attitudes, but the only way to get to the root of the issue of inequality among individuals who speak another language, have a different culture, or are a part of a different racial group is to discuss the topic of inequality in the United States directly.

Language summer camps are a part of the larger education system in the United States, yet they have unique advantages because of the informal, generally less curriculum-driven environment. Language summer camps claim to provide linguistic and cultural immersion. Many camps choose to focus on one or the other, with the majority placing a focus on language. However, language is intrinsically tied to culture and race. By avoiding discussing these topics, White children learn that language is just a tool and tend to view themselves as superior to their racialized bilingual peers.

## **Introduction**

All children stand to gain from learning a second language. Goldenberg & Wagner (2015) state, “interest in bilingual programs crosses lines of language background, neighborhood, and income as parents across the United States realize the social and economic value of bilingualism” (p.32). If parents wish for their children to be bilingual, they know that they should start young and that the United States language education in public schools is often too little

and too late (Macedo, 2019). Heritage parents who speak the language at home can naturally expose their children to their native language, but children of monolingual parents are not offered this opportunity. Starting their children in a second language learning program young, when parents do not know the target language, means that monolingual parents must intentionally seek out language learning opportunities, such as language summer camps.

It is important to also acknowledge the way children learn language affects a child's racial and cultural perceptions of speakers of that language in the United States and abroad. Language and culture are strongly correlated, as are concepts of race and ethnicity in the United States (Flores et al., 2020; King & Mackey, 2007). There is a much larger body of research on second language acquisition for heritage speakers, but it seems that White previously monolingual children's racial and cultural perspectives can change through learning a second language (Wright & Tropp, 2005). It also appears that racial learning is best learned early (Banks, 1995). Learning a second language and interacting collaboratively with racialized speakers has been found to increase the likelihood of White children to view children of another race as friends (Cazabon et al., 1992; Wright & Tropp, 2005).

Research states that the United States is becoming increasingly diverse and the new generation needs new skills to interact with it (King & Mackey, 2007). According to the National Center For Education Statistics (2023), from fall 2010 to fall 2021, the percentage of White, Black, and Native American elementary and secondary school students who were enrolled in public school fell, while the percentage of students enrolled who were Hispanic, Asian, or multiracial increased; these trends are expected to continue in 2031. American children will

need to have the skills to interact with a multiracial, multicultural, and multilinguistic America, so language programs should appropriately guide them through how to navigate this world.

It is worth mentioning that there are White immigrants who speak other languages in the United States and racialized monolingual speakers of English in the United States who face stigmatization. However, analysis of the views of these groups by the majority culture within the United States education system is beyond the scope of this project.

In this work, I will consider how the linguistic, cultural, and racial perceptions of White children of monolingual parents are affected by attending a language summer camp. In my research, I will frame the language summer camp as a uniquely placed tool in the United States language education programs that can be used to address not only language learning, but the inherent racial and cultural learning that comes along with it. I will argue that a focus solely on classroom performance and not cultural performance can lead to an objectification of the racialized speaker. I form this argument by answering the following questions:

1. To what extent do language summer camps provide an environment that fosters linguistic, cultural and racial learning for White monolingual American children?
2. What, if any, of these topics seems to be receiving less attention and how could this be addressed?

I will primarily answer these questions through a literature review. I will begin by exploring definitions of language summer camps, what similarities and differences can be drawn between them, and who participates in them. In the next section, I will describe how language summer camps serve as a unique environment for language learning, as well as how they differ from the language learning that happens in American schools. In the third section of my

literature review, I will describe how language and race come together in the context of the United States education system, and in the fourth section I will describe how language summer camps discuss the topic of culture. In the last section I will address how the topic of race could be further developed in language summer camps.

I will conclude my paper with a case study of my own experience working at a French immersion summer camp for elementary age students in California. Seeing the ways students of different French language proficiency interacted with the instruction and each other, as well as the attitudes of the guardians towards their children's learning inspired me to research this topic. I will tie in the conclusions I have found in my research to suggest what ideologies seemed to foster a positive linguistic and racial learning environment. I will also point out inconsistencies between what the research demonstrates fosters a positive learning environment and what the camp I participated in actually did.

I am approaching this topic with the underlying assumption that administrators and teachers of other languages are putting on language programs because they want the United States to be a better place for speakers of other languages, as well as all members of cultural and racial groups. My hope is that by illuminating how these programs have helped and have hurt perceptions of racialized speakers, recognizing that the education of White children, as opposed to only changing racialized speakers' speech, is important to bringing true equality, current and future educators will feel compelled to perform more research into this subject area and make changes to their programs. I hope that this literature review will bring to light the potential influence of language summer camps on the long and short term impressions of children so that more specific research can be analyzed in the future.

## Background

For elementary school students, summer is a unique time of liberation from the structure of the classroom where these children spend their days during the academic year. Many parents in America choose to enroll their children in summer camps providing them with childcare, entertainment, and often, educational opportunities. For the children themselves, summer experiences may leave a lasting impression. Many adults can recall a memorable summer experience, and, needless to say, even experiences that adults have long forgotten may nevertheless play a part in who they become.

Elementary age students, ages 4-13, are at a unique stage in their language development wherein they have already acquired their first language, but they are still at a young age where it is more likely that a second language could be acquired to a high level of proficiency (Montrul, 2020). The language summer camp is one of many language learning programs in the United States that is available for elementary-aged children (Feuer, 2009). While there is significant variation in language summer camps across the United States, they are unique from the traditional language learning classroom because they generally teach language and culture in an environment that relies at least partially on implicit instruction (Feuer, 2009; Gambhir, 2011).

The context of where the language learning takes place plays an important role in its acquisition (Montrul, 2020). Despite its apparent popularity, few studies have studied summer camps as a learning context. There is also little second language acquisition research about learning contexts that include children and teenagers (Leruite, 2012). It is surprising to me that so many studies have exclusively studied language learning by university students and adults despite the potential benefits of learning a second language young (Stantat et al., 2012).

According to Goldenberg and Wagner (2015), “the Seattle area now boasts 30 bilingual pre-school options...At one of Bellevue’s Spanish-English immersion public preschools, 96 percent of the children have monolingual English-speaking parents” (p. 32). Investment and interest in bilingualism for children in the United States has grown among middle-class monolinguals since the 1980s due to an increased awareness of the cognitive, social, educational, and career benefits of learning a second language (Carr, 2015; Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015). Bilingual individuals are more creative, flexible, and tend to have higher metalinguistic awareness, recognizing that language is a system that can be manipulated. These characteristics result in bilingual children having several advantages over their monolingual peers in writing and test scores. Some of these advantages carry on to adulthood, including the opportunities for pay raises for bilingual speakers (King & Mackey, 2007).

Heritage parents often invest in language learning programs because they understand that their child will be aided with an increased understanding of their own identity. The child may be able to participate more fully in cultural activities due to their language knowledge (King & Mackey, 2007). Unfortunately, the opposite is also true. Heritage children may lose out educationally and economically from not knowing their heritage language (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015).

### **Subjects of my research**

As there is little research available, the research I have gathered references heritage learners of the language, immigrant children learning the official language of the host country, and some studies performed outside of the United States. While this research is not directly the

profile of the White monolingual child who are the primary subjects of this research, I believe these studies are nevertheless applicable to monolingual speakers learning a target language within the United States. Though the process of learning a language can be very different for different learners, previous research also compares similar learning styles across languages and cultures (Odo, 2020; Ringbom, 2002).

I am focusing my research on the impact of language summer camps for children between the ages of 5-13. While I acknowledge that elementary-age is a relatively large age range for my literature review, there is a limited amount of available research specific to language summer camps, and the majority of summer language program studies I have found are held for elementary school students (Feuer, 2009; Gambhir, 2011). In one study of differences between study abroad and domestic immersion programs in Spain, parents tended to send younger children for short time domestic immersion programs, and older children to study abroad (Leruite, 2012). Due to the shortage of studies in the field, my study is limited to exploring a larger age range.

### **What is a language summer camp?**

As an initial step to answer the question, “to what extent does the language summer camp foster linguistic growth?,” I will explore definitions of language summer camps from various researchers. Summer language camps are generally fun and can be very educational for the children involved in them. Though language summer camps vary in the number of participants, the teaching style, and the language learned, there are certain characteristics that

unite them. Far from being just a formal classroom during the summer, the language summer camp is a highly engaging different method for language learning.

### **Second language acquisition in children**

People are born with the ability to learn a language, but they rely heavily on their environment to learn that language. A child surrounded with enough meaningful input of a language acquires it, and can indeed acquire multiple if given sufficient input and meaningful interactions (Montrul, 2020). According to the critical period hypothesis for language, a child must be given significant input from a language before puberty for the language to be acquired to native level (Lenneberg, 1967). Though there is some disagreement on the precise age, the majority of researchers believe that there is a certain cut off age in childhood, beyond which a language can no longer be learned to a native level (Montrul, 2020).

Second language acquisition can happen to children who are past the age of 4-5 who have not previously been given sufficient meaningful input in that language. For second language acquisition, the earlier the language is learned, the more native-like a person's fluency will be (Montrul, 2020). In addition to it being more effective, recent research has also revealed that learning language is easier for young children (Yang, 2006).

Informal language learning, language learning that is not organized and scheduled by a teacher, is not just a useful tool for practice of a language, but also for learning new words and grammar for children (Dressman, 2020; Gambhir, 2011). The most prominent difference between adult and child language learning in informal environments is children's ability to perform statistical analysis and incorporate results in their speech. Whereas with adults, errors become fossilized, children can more easily use the language input they receive to self-correct

(Christianson & Deshaies, 2020). Perhaps with the understanding that the younger the better when it comes to language learning, many language camps serve elementary age children, ages 5-12 (Feuer, 2009; Montrul, 2020).

### **Language learning resources in the United States for children**

There are a variety of methods employed by second language learners to acquire another language. Second language and foreign language teaching research agree that the best way to learn a language is through being immersed in that language and interacting with native speakers of the target language (Doughty & Long, 2003). American linguist, Krashen, states, “language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language-- natural communication--in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding” (Krashen, 1981, p. 1). Using language in real contexts is much more helpful for language learning than drills. There is documentation of how authentic, immersive experiences, such as study abroad, have been a helpful tool for language learners (Montrul, 2020). Several summer camps also employ this language immersion strategy as a method to teach the language to a deeper level (Gambhir, 2011).

For adults and children alike, studying abroad may be unattainable because of the cost. The United States being a monolingual country, it may be difficult for language learners to gain authentic experiences in the target language and culture while staying local. Nevertheless there are a number of local language camps that seek to provide these authentic, immersive experiences for young language learners (Vines, 1985).

### **Examining definitions of language summer camps**

The language camp is a prominent tool that some parents are enrolling their children in, hoping that the children will gain language proficiency. Professor at Oregon State University, Vines, when discussing the success certain language camps in Michigan have experienced and stating the need for rapid growth of the camps, writes, “I use the term ‘language camp’ to refer to events in which: 1) take place in a setting where the target language is spoken almost continuously and used in everyday activities; 2) provide the opportunity for participants to engage in foreign culture-related activities that are not traditionally part of the classroom curriculum; 3) involve participants under the age of eighteen; 4) are nonprofit; and 5) are held in the United States” (Vines, 1985, p. 228). Another author, writing a guide to fellow educators and administrators hoping to start a summer camp states, “a language camp is a guided exploration of language and culture, focused on how students learn about the culture and perform in the target language to accomplish various real-life tasks” (Gambhir, 2011, p. 1). Both language and cultural immersion are important for administrators and teachers running language camps. Many summer camps list the target language being spoken by camp leaders in a language learning camp as a primary learning tool for children and summer camp leaders seem to see cultural experiences as a high value (Feuer, 2009). Describing a language camp for all Americans, one author points to the language camps enhancing the language classroom experience, while another, describing a camp for heritage speakers of the language, highlights the importance of the child being able to perform in the language and culture (Vines, 1985; Gambhir, 2011). I believe that language camps can aid both simultaneously.

Vines also includes a few requirements that seem outdated for the modern language camp in the list: that they are non-profit and within the United States. There does not seem to be regulation on language camps being non profit in the United States despite many language summer camps being hosted by non-profit organizations (Alliance Française Seattle, 2024). In addition, several camps have since occurred outside of the country with the above attributes demonstrated in American language camps, and I think one would be remiss, in our global context, to not consider the legitimacy and findings of these camps simply because of their location (Beller, 2014; Stanat et al., 2011; Shestakova et al., 2017). It would seem ethnocentric to exclude studies from linguistic researchers abroad, especially given the limited number of studies of language camps as learning contexts in the United States (Leruite, 2012).

### **The unique characteristics of language summer camps**

While a language camp does not necessarily occur during the summer, many do (Dreher, 1971; Shestakova et al., 2017; Gambhir, 2011; Stanat et al., 2011). There are two characteristics of language summer camps that seem to distinguish them from the broader category of language camp. Firstly, they necessarily occur for a relatively short length of time. Summer camps in the studies I have found can occur for as little as one week and as many as eight weeks (Feuer, 2009). Secondly, language summer camps take advantage of the more casual learning environment that separates it from the learning that happens the rest of the school year in schools or the homes of heritage speakers. Often educational institutions such as elementary schools, colleges, or churches will hold these camps, banking on the opportunity to keep current and future students engaged in the institution during the off season. They also allow for students to explore the language and culture taught during the school year in an informal

setting (Feuer, 2009). As we will touch on later, this is one of the most advantageous aspects of the language summer camp.

For heritage speakers, language summer camps can allow students to experience a community of speakers and a chance to experience it away from an academic setting their parents may force them to take part in (Feuer, 2009). As an example, Jewish summer camps sometimes have a lot of or very little of the Hebrew language incorporated, but the camp creates a space for children to bond over a shared identity (Benor et. al, 2020). Research has pointed to the desire to connect with speakers of the language as a motivational factor for learning language (Gardner & Clément, 1990).

### **Framing language summer camps as informal language learning environments**

Meanwhile, language summer camps can also be defined more generally, as part of the larger category of informal language learning environments (Chazan, 2002). “Informal language learning refers to any activities taken consciously or unconsciously by a learner outside of formal instruction that lead to an increase in the learner’s ability to communicate in a second (or other, non-native) language” as opposed to informal instruction, which are “learning activities organized by a teacher that are systematic and regularly scheduled” (Dressman, 2020, p. 4). Informal language learning environments promote language by providing a context for meaningful exchanges in the language (Montrul, 2020).

Editor of the *Handbook of Informal Language Learning*, Dressman, defines acquisition as “the ‘picking up’ of language” as opposed to learning, “the conscious, organized study of and practice in a second language” (Dressman, 2020, p. 2-3). Though some authors prefer to refer to informal language learning as acquisition, it is best referred to as learning in order to compare

summer camp language acquisition to language learning in other types of education research (Sokkett & Toffoli, 2020). There are a few words used by different researchers to describe the cognitive process that improves the learner's language abilities, one of them being "Acquisition." The term "informal learning" is preferable because it allows one to include education research in the study of informal learning (Odo, 2020). This is significant because researchers know comparatively much less about how languages are acquired informally than how they are formally (Godwin-Jones, 2020).

As an informal language learning tool, summer camps are intentionally unique from formal language learning environments. In Feuer's study of three language summer camps, they were all held in spaces that were formal learning spaces the rest of the year, but "the 'classroom' was any location where activities took place" (Feuer, 2009, p. 656). Language summer camps do not intend to run according to the education system the children take part in the rest of the year. As an example, the camps in Feuer's study did not have tests. The camp administrators measured success differently: through the feedback they received and annual re-enrollment (Feuer, 2009). Pnina, the founder of "Camp Israel," created the camp because of her frustration with the formal education system she participated in and to prove what she found in her research for her master's thesis. She stated "I wanted to have fun with the kids, and to let them know that Hebrew is a fun thing. So I decided to write about Hebrew immersion and to prove my theory in a summer camp" (Feuer, 2009, p. 657).

### **Summer camps as an environment for language learning**

If we are to presume language learning is an effective tool for cultural and racial learning, and that culture can best be communicated through language, it is absolutely necessary that language summer camps are an effective means of language learning and/or acquisition. Despite the relevance of this topic, it seems that there is a shortage of research on the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages through summer language programs for monolingual children in the United States (Leruite, 2012). Therefore, I will evaluate the effectiveness of language summer camps by considering the efficacy of the teaching styles typically employed.

### **Informal as opposed to formal language learning**

As aforementioned, language summer camps are considered informal language learning environments. Formal language learning is traditionally considered education in school, and informal education is traditionally considered education that occurs outside of school, but these definitions significantly limit the intersection of these two types of activities that often occur together in schools and summer camps. When describing informal Jewish education Chazan (2002) writes that it “emphasizes experiences, the role of the learner, the educator as shaper of environment, group process, and interaction.” (n.p.).

The prioritization of formal education in schools has led to discounting informal education, when informal education has an important role to play as a complement to formal education. Informal education is a new global trend that was not established as distinct from formal education until after formal education was established. Formal education was developed in modern times, focusing on grades and curriculum as a way to promote “intellectual learning;

progression on a hierarchical education ladder; transmissions of cognitive knowledge from adult to child; and addressing the socio-economic needs of societies” (Chazan, 2002, n.p.). The goal of informal language education is not to replace cognitive learning that happens in schools, but to complement it (Chazan, 2002).

Children who do not have parents speaking the language of the summer camp and do not live in a country that speaks the target language, may not otherwise have exposure to educational or cultural learning outside of the classroom. If their parents expose these children to television or games in that language that may be helpful, but it is not a replacement for interaction with real people (Doughty & Long, 2003; Odo, 2020). Untutored second language acquisition is not something exotic, it is the normal case, and if we want to understand the very principles according to which the human mind constructs, copies, and uses linguistic systems, then we must study how human beings cope with this task when not under the influence of teaching (Klein and Dimroth, 2009). Gambhir (2011) writes “a language camp that provides an immersion experience is the closest parallel to a natural environment for learning a language” (p. 11).

Chazan makes the point that Jewish life is not the same as informal Jewish education because it does not choose the experiences you have, but informal Jewish education does (Chazan, 2002). While it is true that these two forms of learning are distinct, structured learning of that language is not a bad thing. A structured learning environment may actually be more beneficial because it accelerates language learning (Gambhir, 2011). It may also help avoid the misunderstandings and judgements that might otherwise happen through just experiencing language and race in day to day life.

### **Explicit and implicit teaching in language summer camps**

One might argue that the terms informal and formal education are very different attributes than implicit and explicit learning, but it seems to me that they are intrinsically related when it comes to language summer camps. Formal education seems to involve explicit instruction, “with concurrent awareness of what is being learned,” whereas in informal language learning, rules of the language are learned implicitly, “without concurrent awareness of what is being learned” (Dekeyser, 1995, p.380).

Dekeyser, in his study to see if an implicit or explicit learning model is more effective for language learning states that explicit instruction is necessarily deductive. Previous psychology research has shown implicit deductive to be ineffective, so there is only implicit inductive and explicit deductive. He defines: “inductive learning means that examples are encountered before rules are inferred; deductive learning means that rules are presented before examples are encountered” (Dekeyser, 1995, p. 380). There have been several laboratory research studies, including his own, that prove that explicit knowledge is more important than implicit. Yet, these laboratory studies have primarily used adults and university students, who have different learning abilities than children (Dekeyser, 1995). The short-term skills tested in a laboratory may also be so different from the skills needed to actually speak the language that their results may not be accurate (Stanat et al., 2012).

There seem to be, in general, two types of teaching styles that are mainly employed in summer camps: exclusively implicit and a mixture of implicit and explicit teaching (Stanat et al., 2012; Beller, 2014; Dreher, 1971). In an experimental study testing the acquisition of target language phonology as well as acquisition of English vocabulary by 11 year-old native Spanish

and native English speakers with no background in foreign language learning at a month-long summer camp, the researcher found that both Spanish and English native speakers demonstrated significant growth in their production of the target language phonetics and understanding of the target language vocabulary. There was no explicit instruction involved, yet there was marked growth in their abilities (Dreher, 1971). In another study, a mixture of implicit and explicit teaching were used. A fifth grade Japanese boy spent 7 weeks at an English speaking summer camp in the United States and his education was supplemented by 2 hours of daily tutoring in English as a second language. The pre-test and post-test studies showed that his experience in camp allowed him to construct longer sentences and speak with less unnatural pauses. He also demonstrated use of more advanced vocabulary, more exact pronunciation, and better intonation (Kawano, 2002). Though the testing was sometimes informal, as opposed to standardized testing, a few other camps have had the impression that children can improve their language skills in exclusively implicit language learning summer camps as well (Feuer, 2009; Stantat et al., 2012).

### **Implicit versus explicit instruction in language summer camps**

The majority of studies of language summer camps feature camps that use a combination of explicit and implicit instruction. Indeed, two studies, one performed in Spain and one performed in Germany, reveal that a mixture of explicit and implicit instruction is the most effective method for teaching language learning. The effectiveness of a summer intensive language program, using formal instruction only, and a summer camp, using formal and informal strategies, were compared to test the effectiveness of their teaching of English as a foreign language to 11-13 year old bilingual Spanish and Catalan speakers in Spain. The study

found that though the intensive program had better materials, more time in the formal classroom environment, and more qualified teachers, higher credentials and more fluency, the summer camp students' improvement was the same in all but spoken fluency and lexical richness. In these categories, children in the formal and informal mixed instruction summer camp scored higher. The significance of their improvement despite less resources, shows the benefits of informal education versus formal education. The researchers suggest having more opportunities for students to use the foreign language in the informal environment and having better qualified, higher proficiency teachers (Tragant et al., 2016).

Another study performed in Germany tested to see if a mixture of explicit and implicit instruction or just implicit instruction was more effective for 3rd grade immigrant students learning English over the 3-week period. The students were tested before and after the program for growth in grammar, reading, and vocabulary. The study found that though implicit-only instruction did result in some improvement, the mixture of explicit and implicit support resulted in more significant improvement (Stanat et al., 2012). The researchers write, "although implicit treatments alone may improve students' language skills to some degree, they seem to be more effective in combination with explicit support" (Stanat et al., 2012, p. 168).

Several language camps internationally are intentionally taking on the approach of providing both implicit and explicit support. Mari State University in Russia is starting foreign language summer camps as a way to encourage students to go to college, continuing their education during the six week summer break, and providing unique benefits for language learning by nature of it being separate from the school setting (Shestakova et al., 2017). Summer programs, modeled after American summer camps, were developed to aid in the

acquisition of German by these students, using implicit learning through theater and explicit instruction (Beller, 2014). One American summer camp provides formal language lessons in addition to the informal cultural learning (Feuer, 2009).

### **Fun and language learning**

Summer camps are fun experiences, but we do not need to be suspicious of their educational benefits just because they are entertaining (Chazan, 2002). Some Jewish parents view supplemental Hebrew schools as a necessary but uncomfortable experience, “the ‘castor oil’ of Jewish life”: “a ritual punishment as parents pass on the sentiment of ‘I hated it as you will too’” (Feuer, 2009, p. 651; Sales & Saxe, 2004).

Instead, it is an educational benefit when summer camps are fun. Play is seen by psychologists as very important for developing identity (Chazan, 2002). Positive experiences at camps may increase motivation and desire to learn the language in the future (Feuer, 2009). It is unrealistic that a summer camp would provide enough exposure for a language to be fully acquired, but these experiences are important to foreign language learning because they increase motivation and give the students role models (Vines, 1985).

Anxiety when learning a second language can cause lowered performance (Tobias, 1979). Language summer camps have more flexibility to help children become more comfortable with the language. Tina, an administrator at Camp Beijing explained that the goal of her language summer camp was to give children a chance to have fun with the Chinese language and culture that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to do. She says that cramming in Chinese lessons is both not fun and ineffective. Feuer writes about one camp, “in spite of disparate backgrounds and language levels which often lead to feelings of competition,

frustration and unfairness among learners, such positive environments [that included children of different ages and backgrounds working towards a common goal] emphasized socialization and the potential contributions of all participants” (Feuer, 2009, p. 663). Language summer camps are successful when there is high-quality teaching of language and culture, engagement in activities that the culture group finds interesting, and the concept of language learning making it so that the student is a part of a larger community (Vines, 1985).

The language summer camp is an informal language learning environment, which is a learning environment focusing more on experience rather than a structured classroom setting. Informal language learning allows students to have fun with the language and explore their areas of interest. The language summer camp is also unique from formal education because of its at least partial incorporation of implicit and informal language learning strategies. It has been shown to be most helpful in language learning when a summer camp provides an environment with part implicit and part explicit learning.

### **The intersection of language and race in the United States education system**

In society, “language represents much more than a medium of communication, serving also as a key marker of social identity and as a determinant of intergroup behavior” (Wright & Tropp, 2005, p. 310). Yet, there has been little research on bilingualism’s effect on monolingual majority students (Wright & Tropp, 2005). Raciolinguistics, the study of the intersection between race and linguistics, illuminates that if White, monolingual children in the United States are to value the target culture and speakers of that language, it is necessary that they do

not just learn the skills of the language, but that equality for individuals from the target culture is intentionally fostered (García-Mateus et al., 2020).

Language summer camps, although an area comparatively much less regulated and researched, are a part of the larger United States language education system (Leruite, 2012). By studying other language programs aimed at fluency in the United States, I hope to frame how attributes of language summer camps can uniquely challenge some of the raciolinguistic issues that remain otherwise unchallenged in language education.

### **The United States education system reinforces racial and cultural stereotypes**

Language, culture, and race interact within the United States education system in ways that privilege White monolinguals. Associate Professor of Educational Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, Nelson Flores, and Associate Professor of Graduate School of Education, Linguistics, Anthropology, and Comparative Literature at Stanford University, Jonathan Rosa, argue that racialized bilinguals are marginalized in the United States, “based not on what they actually do with language but, rather, how they are heard by the white listening subject” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 160).

In response to the tendency in the United States to see whiteness as the norm, anthropologist at Stanford University, Samy Alim, established a new field of research called raciolinguistics, studying the influence language and race have on each other (Flores et al., 2020, p. 6). Alim says that though some Americans have claimed that the United States is “post-racial,” it is actually hyperracial. Americans are constantly interpreting the world based on race, but denying the evidence of its influence (Shashkevich, 2016).

The tendency to disadvantage racialized speakers of other languages and dialects in the United States extends to the foreign language education system. Critical theorist and linguist, Donaldo Macedo (2019) introduces his book, *Rupturing the Yoke of Colonialism in Foreign Language Education*, by criticizing the privileging of European dialects in foreign language education that he has been witness to. Among other examples, Macedo explains that his Spanish teacher emphasized the need to speak the Castilian Spanish variety even though the professor himself was not fluent in Spanish. The lengths the education system takes to cling to the “standard” accent are highly impractical and disadvantage the speaker of the non-prestige dialect (Macedo, 2019, p. 8-9).

As a Chicana, one doctoral student’s Spanish was mocked and questioned by her peers and professors, without them being able to provide a reason for why her speech was so often ridiculed (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998). Spanish from Spain is the prestige dialect usually spoken by people who have received that level of education. Researchers illuminate what her peers and professors would not admit or did not realize: This doctoral student was mocked because of the way her race and dialect interacted in the doctoral Spanish studies environment. The irony is that her training in the Spanish language had been much more rigorous than her White peers who had only spoken the language in the classroom, yet it was less valued (Flores & Rosa, 2019). If the language education system, the ones responsible for teaching language, culture, and race in the United States, are perpetuating the stereotypes present in the rest of society, how will students’ views be permitted to change?

### **Bilingualism discourse differs depending on who is speaking**

Racial stigmatization begins in young children and these impressions are carried on to adulthood. Similar to language learning, it is better to address racial identity learning younger because “it becomes increasingly difficult to influence these attitudes of children as children grow older and move through the grades” (Banks, 1995, p. 328). It has been shown in previous studies that White children tend to have positive attitudes towards other White children, but have less positive views of children they perceive as different from them, notably children from a different group (Wright & Tropp, 2005). It has been found that, “many White children by the age of four have developed strong ingroup preferences and negative attitudes toward other racial groups” (Banks, 1995, p. 328).

Making matters worse, White children are told that being bilingual is an asset, but racial children are told the opposite. White individuals are viewed as brave for doing dual-language programs, but racial speakers are seen as problems needing to be solved in language education (Flores et al., 2020). Flores writes a satiric blog post, describing a linguistic deficit in White children in a similar way to how he sees it is discussed and treated for low socioeconomic children of color. He claims that the real issue is not racialized bilingual’s linguistic deficit, but the education system’s raciolinguistic prejudice. This issue will not be solved until language courses recognize and incorporate the diversity and complexity of language systems that all children grow up in regardless of race (Flores, 2015). No matter what language racialized speakers are speaking, a long history of colonialism has formed Americans into thinking of White speech as good and speech from others as in need of correction (Flores et al., 2020).

Though this paper focuses on the way racialized bilingualism is viewed by White Americans, the fact that racialized speakers of other dialects have also been stigmatized because of how their language is perceived as different from that of their peers this further illuminates the fact that the discrimination is indeed racial and ethnic, rather than linguistic. For example, former President Barack Obama changed his dialect to appeal to different audiences during his campaign and presidency. With general audiences he used a “standard” dialect and with Black audiences, he spoke with a “preacher-style” to gain trust with the American people (Shashkevich, 2016).

Dialects can even be over generalized leading to the “white listening subject” to perceive a difference even when there is none. Racialized speakers that speak the standard dialect can also be perceived as having an accent that makes their speech difficult to understand (Kutlu et al., 2022). Clearly, racial impressions and stereotypes are at play in how the language of others is perceived. Comprehension issues White Americans have attributed to accents and language barriers may actually have to do more with race. Whereas previous literature has stated that it is up to the racialized speaker to learn the standard dialect, it is the responsibility of White Americans to change their perspective of racialized bilinguals (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Our question of how to address linguistic inequality must change from, how can we help speakers speak the standard dialect, to: How has language education in the United States addressed or not addressed the inequalities resulting from the “white listening subject?” (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 151).

### **Is language learning enough to change racial and cultural prejudice?**

Learning a second language has the benefit of the changing perceptions White children have of racialized speakers. Spanish-English Bilingual Education has been shown to improve White student's views of Latinx children especially in racially mixed classrooms according to one study performed by authors Stephen C. Wright, Psychology Professor at Simon Fraser University, and Linda R. Tropp, Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Massachusetts Amhurst. In their study, Wright and Tropp investigated the ingrouping behaviors of White kindergarten through second grade students in Spanish-English bilingual schools by showing them pictures of White and Latinx students and asking them to select the photos with certain characteristics. White children in a racially mixed classroom were more likely to view non-White children as more similar to themselves and choose them as friends. These preferences increased when children were in a racially mixed bilingual setting (Wright & Tropp, 2005). Wright & Tropp highlight, "instructional use of both languages may be the clearest possible statement that the authority is sanctioning positive, equal-status, cross-group interactions" (Wright & Tropp, 2005, p. 312). Another study confirmed this finding; the researchers studying a bilingual education program found that though young children chose their friends based on language and ethnicity distinctions, by third grade, children were just as likely to choose a friend from another ethnic group (Cazabon, 1992). Importantly, the positive viewing of outgroup members extends to the race as a whole, not just the individuals in the children's classroom. These changed views also do not negatively impact the White children's view of themselves (Wright & Tropp, 2005).

Though in the aforementioned studies bilingual education had a positive impact on the way that Latinx students were viewed by their White peers, being viewed as a friend is not the

same as being viewed as equal. Other research points to their needing to be more of an intervention for White peers to view their racialized peers as equal to themselves. A case study followed one girl as she completed kindergarten through 5th grade at a bilingual Spanish-English school in Texas. The study analyzed her development and lack thereof of “critical consciousness” which “is an awareness of the structural inequalities the shape the material conditions of our lives and our social relationships due to differences in power and privilege, and includes an acknowledgement of one’s own role and complicity in structuring inequalities” (García-Mateus et al., 2020, p. 245). The authors found that the teachers at her bilingual school sometimes inadvertently privileged her whiteness. In addition, her sense of her own expertise caused her to call to question her teachers’ and Latina classmate’s knowledge of Spanish. Her last year of elementary school, she had a teacher who tried to teach her how to critically engage in racial and ethnic inequalities in the United States. It was evident when talking to her later that this was not enough for this student to internalize these ideas. At the end of her bilingual schooling, she viewed her Spanish abilities as a tool for her to use, rather than a connection to a community (García-Mateus et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, this White student’s lack of advocacy against White privilege in language education is not unique to this case study. Another study cites how parents of White children invited the children of their babysitters to attend the same bilingual school in order to keep the number of both native speakers even. Structural and economic inequalities that existed outside of the classroom continued into the classroom where Latinx students and parents were viewed as in need of help, but White students and parents were seen as helpers (Muro, 2020). There is a tendency in well meaning bilingual education programs to continue to privilege Whiteness by

positioning native speakers of other languages and their cultures as a utility for the White learner.

Language learning is an effective way to help White children feel more similar to and wish to befriend ethnic and racialized speakers, but explicit learning and discussion is necessary to break the paradigms that grant White speakers greater status and prestige. An ideal language summer camp would teach the language in a racially mixed classroom with native speakers from both language groups. Explicit discussion of culture, race, language, and socio-economic status (where appropriate) would be fostered to help reconstruct the presuppositions of the speakers.

### **Cultural learning in summer camps**

“The challenge moving forward will be to build bilingual programs that strike the right balance between acceptance and support—valuing non-English speakers while also recognizing that they might need extra help and resources,” a balance I think that White children in the United States will have to strike as well (Carr, 2015, n.p.). An ironic occurrence in recent American history is that while there was a high demand among monolingual parents for language learning programs for their children, heritage parents were putting a strong emphasis on learning only English. This has begun to shift (Carr, 2015). Language summer camps, with their increased flexibility and young age groups, can be a tool to change raciolinguistic perceptions in the United States.

One way summer camps teach White children how to better interact in our multicultural society is through celebration of the target culture. Banks (1995) discusses the fact that cultural instruction helps students in a general classroom grow in their cultural and racial understanding.

In the multicultural school, “language pluralism and diversity are valued and fostered” (Banks, 1995, p. 330). Specifically, associating black animals with positive traits, having Black students teach their White peers how to build a radio, and having members of different racial and ethnic groups work together were successful methods of decreasing racial inequality in the classroom (Banks, 1995).

Language summer camps have the possibility of fostering language equality in addition to racial and cultural understanding. Some language summer camps focus only on language, while others put a strong emphasis on culture. When describing informal Jewish education, to which Jewish summer camps are a part, Chazan writes that they are focused on developing the whole person, whereas general informal education is just focused on developing skills (Chazan, 2002).

### **Language summer camps with an emphasis on culture**

Heritage language camps seem to put a strong emphasis on culture. In some Hebrew summer camps, the focus of the camp swings away from a focus on language and towards a connection to the target culture. The method they use, “Hebrew infusion” is “the process in which camp staff members incorporate words or elements of Hebrew into the primarily English-speaking environment through songs, signs, games, and words” (Benor et al., 2020, p. 2). The goal of incorporating language into the camp is “for campers to strengthen their feelings of connection with being Jewish through the use of Hebrew” (Benor et al., 2020, p. 3). In another heritage language and culture camp, designed for the Ojibwe people, an indigenous tribe from Michigan, their culture and language had skipped a generation due to ethnic oppression. The elders who remembered their language and culture they had practiced when

they were young sought to teach these skills to their children's children. The camp ended up putting a strong emphasis on culture and little language was learned due to the short duration of the camp. It was decided that there would have to be a stronger emphasis on language in the future. Nevertheless, culture took priority over language (Ross, 2016).

Language and culture are strongly interrelated. Older members of the Ojibwe tribe know this as there were attempts to destroy their language when they were children. Separated from their community, without the ability to speak their language or keep culturally significant objects, it was felt that a large part of the Ojibwe culture was forgotten. A camp elder shared, "At a younger age, I was put into a boarding school, a Catholic boarding school. Everything disappeared. Besides my hair and somewhat of the language that I had learned at a younger age, I was there for five years, and you lose a lot when you're there for five years. It took away our language, took away five years of my life as an Anishinaabe person. Like again, as I said, we have a lot of catching up to do" (Ross, 2016, p. 237).

### **Language summer camps with a double emphasis on language and culture**

Other heritage language camps, recognising the importance of language and culture together, create a linguistic and culturally immersive camp. As an example, though culture was an important factor for two Hindi language summer camps on the East coast, language was also highly prioritized, with the goal being fluency. This study reads "the goal of the camps was to provide total immersion in the target language and culture" (Gambhir, 2011, p. 3). Students were expected to speak in class to the teacher and fellow students in Hindi except for the last 5 minutes for questions in English (Gambhir, 2011). Another heritage camp also had the heritage language, Hebrew, as the official language of the camp. Although they insisted knowledge of the

Hebrew language was not necessary to participate, it was spoken throughout the camp and learned implicitly (Feuer, 2009).

One group of language camps seems to balance learning language and culture despite them being for children from different backgrounds. Founded in 1961, the “International Language Villages” in Minnesota has grown in size and demand rapidly. One article calls for more language camps to be created across the United States to meet the demand. This particular program is run for students ages 7-21. Many students cannot afford to study abroad, but these camps provide an alternative way to gain an immersive experience in the target culture. The program is successful because of high-quality teaching of language and culture, engagement in activities that the culture group finds interesting, and the concept of language learning making it so that the student is a part of a larger, global community (Vines, 1985). Teachers in one study stated that students who participated in the Concordia language camps before studying the language in the classroom were interested in the language, spoke the language in class, and demonstrated cultural knowledge (Nieves-Squires, 1978). Students and staff are chosen with intention with the goal of creating a positive learning environment. Students need to opt into the experience because they are self-motivated and staff need to not only know the language, but be patient and positive, fostering an encouraging environment for language learning. Language fluency is not enough for their language teachers (Vines, 1985).

### **Conclusions about culture in language summer camps**

Though there does not seem to be a sufficient amount of research about non-heritage summer camps for me to draw conclusions about their trends, I believe it is a positive sign that camps are able to focus on both language and culture. One Chinese culture and language camp I

did find had “campers [who] were mostly non-Chinese (and many were of diverse backgrounds - Indian, African, Jewish and German),” but the camp only lasted for one week and no empirical data was drawn from it (Feuer, 2009, p. 655).

It is essential that language summer camps teach culture and appreciation of differences between people. Language summer camps are a great opportunity to immerse children in another language and culture. Depending on where they live, White children in the United States may not otherwise get the experience of being a part of a group where they are not the majority language or ethnic group discussed in the classroom. Professor of Education at the University of Washington Bothel, in advocating for multicultural education in schools writes “equal status between groups in interracial situations needs to be constructed rather than assumed” (Banks, 1995, p. 327). Language summer camps have an excellent opportunity to construct equal status between children of different races, cultures, and languages.

### **Improving racial discussion in language summer camps**

Some summer camps seem to have similar drawbacks to bilingual education in the United States, in that they do not seem to address topics of race and culture explicitly (Feuer, 2009). While the implicit language learning environment of summer camps may prove beneficial for language learning, some explicit learning is also beneficial; similarly, language learning in a racially mixed environment increases feelings of similarity with members of that racial group, but it does not address the deeper paradigms of race that may cause certain children to feel superior (Wright & Tropp, 2005; García-Mateus et al., 2020). When done right, I imagine that language summer camps could uplift children from historically marginalized groups and give

White children the experience of being the minority group. One researcher writes, “for minority children and youth, ethnic language and culture camps can be a welcome retreat in which they experience life as a majority culture” (Feuer, 2009, p. 653).

Language summer camps could foster racial and ethnic learning for children by creating a space where “language pluralism and diversity are valued and fostered” rather than prevented “so that it reflects the racial and cultural diversity that exists within the U.S.” (Banks, 1995, p. 329-330). Teachers create an environment for racial learning when they use the target language in the classroom and create cooperative activities for students from different backgrounds (Banks, 1995; Wright & Tropp, 2005). While these methods are effective, more recent research demonstrates that directly addressing cultural, racial, economic, and systemic differences are the best way to break away from the culturally accepted privilege that White children may not otherwise realize they have (García-Mateus et al., 2020).

Even within the field of bilingual education, which predates the founding of the United States, there is limited research into how language education impacts students’ views of themselves and others (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015). The “raciolinguistic perspective” of dual-language education is that it furthers White bilingualism and still looks negatively upon racialized speakers of other languages (Flores et al., 2020). Raciolinguistics as a field was only established recently, but it has important implications for America as a multilingual, multiethnic, and multiracial society (Shashkevich, 2016). As a part of a hyper racialized society, Bilingual schools with good intentions end up prioritizing White children over the racialized bilinguals they were designed to support (Flores et al., 2020). There is even less research on language summer camps, but they must be careful not to fall into the same error.

An understanding of the unequal privilege that White speakers hold in society is not learned implicitly by White children in bilingual language education, and presumably in language summer camps as well. It must therefore be explicitly defined to be resisted. Dual-language programs have always had the goal of promoting a bilingual classroom, but they have been unable to defeat the historical linguistic hegemony present in these schools (Flores, 2020). Bilingual education must change if it hopes to break down the raciolinguistic inequality that plays out in these schools and American society in general. The authors write that in order for these barriers to be broken and for the needs of both dominant and minority groups to be met, there must be an incorporation of “culturally sustaining pedagogies” (García-Mateus et al., 2020, p. 262-263). “Culturally sustaining pedagogy” is a way of thinking critically about topics of race, language, culture and socioeconomic class that does not strive for one standard and is not based upon White norms, middle-class norms, or standards of academic achievement (García-Mateus et al., 2020, p. 263; Paris & Alim, 2017). A similar and effective approach is “critical language awareness”: bringing linguistic backgrounds of students in the classroom and considering how language can be used to enforce and resist power (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 154).

Language summer camps tend to have a large emphasis on either language or culture, but they seem to not be discussing how race connects to these topics. In the hyper racialized United States it is easy to say that race does not play a part in our decisions, but this is not factual. Language summer camps, because of the semi-structured environment and focus on language and culture, seem to be a good environment to introduce further discussion.

### **A case study of an elementary-age French language summer camp**

Recently I worked at a 6-week French language summer camp as a French language instructor. The camp was hosted on the campus of a bilingual French-English elementary school in California, that I will call French Bilingual School. In this case study I will describe the population of students who attended the camp, the teachers and administrators present, the structure of the camp, and how the topics of language, culture, and race were represented in this setting.

The children attending French Bilingual School summer camp came from a variety of levels of French language knowledge. There were approximately 30 children ages 5-12 present on any given day of the summer camp. A few children attended the entire camp and there were a few who attended only one week, but the majority were present for 2-4 weeks. There were only approximately 2-3 children who spoke the French language at home. There were 5 students I was aware of who had attended French Bilingual School during the school year. According to parents, these students were attending this program so as not to lose their French language skills during the summer break. There were 4, 5-year-old students who had attended French language preschool programs in the past that had given them some exposure to the French language. One student had lived in France but his family had just moved to the United States, another student's parents spoke French at home. For the rest of the students, they had little to no experience in the French language besides watching television in the French language. In addition, while the majority of the students were European American, there was one Indian American, one Moroccan American, and four Asian American students.

I was one of five teachers at the French language summer camp. I came into the camp with very little teaching experience. My fellow instructors came into the camp with some teaching experience, but it seemed that it had all been with older children. Four of us were all Americans in our twenties, but one teacher seemed to be in her early forties and from Egypt. There was one administrator of the camp on site in case we had questions or an emergency. There was also an administrative assistant there to help in case something went wrong. However, we were not given any training from the school.

For the morning classes, we split the students into two groups based on age, as opposed to proficiency: one classroom ages 4-6 and the other classroom had children ages 7-12. The classrooms had about fifteen students each, although there were some weeks when the 4-6 year-old class had a few more students. I co-taught the 4-6 year old class with one other teacher, but a third teacher joined us at the end of week three, leaving two teachers in the older class.

Parents were able to drop off their children as early as 8:30am. Morning classes were held from 9:00am until 10:30am, at which point there was a 30 minute snack break and then classes recommenced until 12:30pm. After our hour-long lunch break, two of us teachers would lead a sports activity outside or in the gym. We would all head inside once this was done for a snack break and unstructured playtime.

Before the start of the camp, we met as teachers 5 times for 1-2 hour sessions on Zoom to discuss the topics we would present during the different weeks and days of the camp. We were tasked with writing all of our own curriculum. We ended up planning the first week and making very little progress on the weeks that followed prior to the start of camp. Towards the

end of the camp, we planned the curriculum each evening before the next day of camp. The planning process was admittedly unorganized as we were unsure of which teaching strategies were effective for teaching the French language and the school did not provide us with an organized curriculum. Some students made some visible progress, but the majority made little linguistic progress during the duration of the camp. Students could understand basic commands that had been rehearsed daily, but their spoken vocabulary had not expanded very much. In part, this can be expected due to the short duration of the camp, especially for students who only were present for a small portion of the camp. On the other hand, when teachers are well trained and the curriculum is well planned, students can learn language more quickly (Gambhir, 2011).

On the other hand, one major improvement that I noticed over the course of the camp was the acceptance of the French language as a legitimate form of communication. From the first day of camp, we as teachers, spoke French as much as possible during the camp and encouraged students to do the same. I remember one 6-year-old student who had had very little exposure to the French language before asked me “can you just speak normal?” Another student echoed this concern the first day, “Why are you talking to me in French? I speak English!” There was little understanding among monolingual children that the French language was an arbitrary way of communication just like English. This idea had to be learned and ultimately acquired implicitly through speaking the French language to make it normal.

As may be expected for a French language school, the Parisian culture and accent was elevated. There was little recognition of the globalized nature of the French language. There was one week where we highlighted a different country around the world each day. We tried to

incorporate French-speaking countries around the world to demonstrate how the French language was spoken by many people around the world, but due to a lack of resources it became very difficult to do so. In a specific example, instead of spending one class session on Vietnam, we decided to discuss the culture in India. Even though India is not a French speaking country, one of our students whose parents were Indian, asked us if she could share about some of the holidays her family celebrates. We let her share and it seemed that she was proud of her culture and was able to answer questions from fellow students later. The teacher from Egypt volunteered to present about Egyptian culture one day of that week, which also felt significant both because she was able to provide us with so much cultural knowledge. Inside our classroom, we tried to instill in our students the idea that the French language is not tied to only one culture or country.

Yet, outside the classroom, the Parisian French accent and culture was given priority over others. The school was decorated with monuments from France. Of course, there is nothing wrong with highlighting French culture, but discussion of French culture dominated. Macedo recalls that the administration of the French immersion school he evaluated in Vermont for six years went back and forth between wanting to teach the Canadian or the Parisian dialect of the French language. Though Canadian French was the dialect most spoken in the area, he states that Parisian French had a greater prestige that administrators saw as a helpful tool to help their students and families gain more prestige (Macedo, 2019). In California, we were halfway around the world from France, but the Parisian dialect was held in the highest esteem.

Our French language summer camp was not void of the racial and cultural presuppositions that existed outside. A child of Indian parents who attended the camp and

attended the school during the school year told me how she loves Indian food but she is often made fun of because of her lunches. To cope with this, her parents told her to not be friends with anyone who was mean to her. At such a small camp, this was nearly impossible, so she was forced to forgive one White child several times as she would say insensitive words that hurt her feelings. It did not seem that the White child was being mean intentionally, but she was ignorant. We asked her to apologize when she blurted out something and tried to make peace as much as possible. At the end of camp, the children seemed to be friends again, but not as close as they were initially.

One of the teachers on our team tended to take the lead in a way that made all the rest of us feel inferior. This teacher spoke French with a French accent because she lived in France when she was younger. She would not let the teacher from Egypt lead any lessons in class or plan anything for class. After a few weeks the teacher from Egypt moved to the classroom with the 4-6 year-olds because she was tired of working in the classroom where she was not allowed to do anything. My coworker in the small kids class likewise refused to speak with her the last two weeks of the camp. There developed a clear division between teachers that I believe was partially due to raciolinguistics and partially due to personality.

In our small community at a French language summer camp of 5 teachers and 30 children, we were given the opportunity and flexibility to focus on the subjects we were interested in. Topics of race, ethnicity, culture, and accent appeared throughout the camp implicitly. Though in our small classroom we tried to demonstrate that French existed outside of the country, culture, and ethnicity of French people, the stereotypes of the individuals participating in the camp nevertheless influenced the structure of the camp. In addition, due to

a lack of structure and training of the individuals teaching the camp, the linguistic progress of the students was limited.

### **Limitations of my study and areas for future research**

I echo past researchers who have pointed out the need for more studies of the language summer camp as a learning environment. While this study aimed to bring attention to summer camps as a language learning environment, many of the benefits listed from previous research lack empirical evidence. I drew from research of informal language learning environments to postulate the results of learning a second language in a language summer camp environment. However, it seems that more empirical research should be performed in the future to validate the legitimacy of drawing conclusions from the general study of informal language learning environments.

In addition, I drew research from bilingual education to explain that linguistic and cultural learning can help learners overcome racial and ethnic prejudice. However, bilingual education differs from language summer camps in that they are longer, take place in a formal learning environment, and often involve both languages being equally represented in the classroom, rather than an intensive exposure to only one language. As a result, the projected influence of language learning at a summer camp on racial and ethnic learning may be inflated.

Lastly, while I have read and included studies who came to a conclusion about language learning and cultural exposure's effects on racial attitudes, I have not studied race at a university level and I limited my study primarily to the conclusions found in the field of raciolinguistics. However, raciolinguistics is also a new field so there are a small number of authors who have

written on this topic. As a result, further studies are necessary to determine the real effect of language education in an informal environment on racial attitudes.

### **Conclusion**

Language, culture, and race are implicitly connected in the United States language education system in ways that solidify the stereotypes already present in the United States. Language and race are both best learned by young children. While summer camps display a variety of approaches to teaching language, culture, and race, research demonstrates the best methods to teach these important topics.

Since language, culture, and race are interconnected, none of these topics should take a backseat in language summer camps. Language is best learned by elementary-aged children in a setting that mixes implicit and explicit teaching, rather than just one or the other. Additionally, White monolingual children need to learn about culture and race through explicit teaching of these topics in their classes and implicit positive interactions children have with their classmates.

I believe that short term linguistic and cultural experiences can have a large impact on the lives of children. The summer camp I worked at even had a significant impact on how I thought about language, culture, and race in the United States. Seeing some positive impact on the children at the camp, despite our disorganization, inspires me to believe in the future of these camps.

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## Appendix

*This speech was presented at the Honors Symposium on May 18, 2024 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Liberal Arts major at Seattle Pacific University. This presentation was part of a three student panel exploring how cultural and community influences shape youth development in the panelists' various disciplines.*

Summer is a unique time of exploration and self discovery for children. Freed from the rigid schedules and curriculum of the school year, language summer camps provide children with an alternative method of learning a language domestically. In many cases, children at summer language camps have fun while they are learning. While some may be skeptical of language learning programs that are fun, learning a language this way tends to increase the motivation of children to learn the language and decreases the anxiety associated with learning a second language.

Language summer camps tend to focus on experiential learning, opting to teach language through activities, rather than in a traditional classroom. This aspect makes summer camps a part of the larger category of informal language education, which, according to the editor of the Handbook of Informal Learning, [quote] “includes all activities undertaken by learners outside a formally organized program of language instruction” [end quote] (Dressman, 2020, p. 4). Language summer camps often mix informal learning with short explicit instruction. Two empirical studies of language summer camps have demonstrated that the most language improvement occurs when summer camps educate students in this way, by learning primarily through an activity with lessons mixed in that draw students’ attention to particular aspects of

the language. In both of these studies, the morning was spent in the classroom and the afternoon was spent learning the language implicitly, such as through theater.

Summer camps have a time constraint of 1-8 weeks, depending on the program, to teach the target language. Language teachers know this is simply not enough time for children to obtain language fluency. The goals of parents who enroll their children in language summer camps range from wanting their child to experience being surrounded by the language spoken at home in a new environment, to parents helping their child not forget the language they are studying in school during the summer, and to parents trying out a language immersion experience for their child for the first time. Parents who speak the target language will notice if their child is progressing, but as I noticed when I was a teacher at a language summer camp, monolingual parents will rely on the language teachers' judgements of how their child is progressing in the language.

Language summer camps include cultural experiences in addition to language exposure. These experiences can be through art, music, food, and explicit instruction of cultural values. I have found that some heritage summer camps choose to emphasize culture over language, such as in the Jewish summer Camps described in the book entitled, *Hebrew Infusion* (Benor et al., 2016). Rather than the goal being language proficiency, Hebrew words are inserted into a primarily English-speaking camp environment to help students feel a stronger connection to the Jewish identity. Through this identity formation there is an emphasis on cultural connection, rather than language proficiency.

Other language summer camps put an equal emphasis on language and culture, such as in two Hindi language summer camps that took place on the East Coast. The goal of these

camps was [quote] “to provide total immersion in the target language and culture” [end quote] (Gambhir, 2011, p. 3). This was done through requiring the Hindi language be spoken during the duration of the camp, except for the last five minutes, which were reserved for questions. All the activities chosen were present to encourage cultural and linguistic learning.

Beyond personal enrichment, language learning has the ability to change children’s perceptions of other speakers. One study of kindergarten through 2nd grade students at bilingual schools revealed that White children were more likely to view their Latino and Latina classmates as friends and as similar to themselves after studying Spanish in a bilingual school. It was also found that learning in a bilingual setting with Latino and Latina classmates was more helpful in improving racial attitudes than bilingual learning without these classmates, and more helpful still than traditional learning in a racially mixed setting. In another study at a bilingual Spanish-English elementary school, while kindergarteners tended to choose their friends based on race and culture, by third grade the students instead chose their friends because of shared interests. Professors of Psychology Wright & Tropp (2005) illuminate, [quote] “instructional use of both languages may be the clearest possible statement that the authority is sanctioning positive, equal-status, cross-group interactions” [end quote] (p. 312).

In recent history there has been a shift in the discourse surrounding bilingualism. While bilingualism was for a long time considered a handicap, modern research has demonstrated the cognitive benefits of multilingualism; bilinguals have been found to be more creative, flexible, and have a greater understanding of how to manipulate language. In the Seattle area alone, there are 30 bilingual preschools. In one bilingual Spanish-English preschool in Bellevue,

Washington as many as 96% of the parents are monolingual speakers (Goldenberg & Wagner, 2015).

This shift towards bilingualism being viewed positively has unequally affected historically marginalized groups, demonstrating the inequality that exists in the United States among racial and cultural groups. As an example, while Ivanka Trump's 2017 video of her daughter singing in Chinese was praised, Chinese international students at Duke University were threatened in 2019 by an administrative email that their use of Chinese in public spaces could negatively affect their future careers. Both of these events went viral and they demonstrate the linguistic inequality present in the United States. The co-authored book (2020), *Bilingualism for All?* highlights the fact that bilingualism in the United States tends to be viewed positively when it is a White person speaking, but is viewed negatively when bilingualism is expressed by a racialised speaker.

The unequal privilege of bilingualism in the United States based on the race of the speaker may be evident to some and difficult for others to recognize. Professor and Chair in the Division of Social Sciences at the University of California Los Angeles, H. Samy Alim, explains that rather than post-racial, the United States is hyper-racial. He states, [quote] "we are constantly orienting to race while at the same time denying the overwhelming evidence that shows the myriad ways that American society is fundamentally structured by it." [end quote] (Shashkevich, 2016) Alim states that many thought when Barak Obama became president this showed that America was post-racial. Instead, the way that Obama strategically changed his speaking style based on the audience he was speaking to in order to gain trust from the audience demonstrated this division. Unfortunately, we have not yet reached linguistic, racial,

and cultural equality. The field of bilingual education demonstrates that these topics need to be addressed explicitly in order for change to take place.

For a long time, educators have pushed the idea that it is up to the non-native English speaker or nonstandard dialect speaker to learn to speak appropriately in different settings in order to participate fully in society. However, Professors of Linguistics and Education, Flores and Rosa, (2015) reveal the extent to which this presupposition is incorrect. They write, [quote] “we argue that people are positioned as speakers of prestige or nonprestige language varieties based not on what they actually do with language but, rather, how they are heard by the white listening subject.” [end quote] (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p.160) The White listener can perceive an accent even when none is present. It is then up to White Americans to change their view of the speech of racialized speakers and for these speakers to no longer be judged according to how well they can follow White norms in the classroom.

I approach the topic of raciolinguistics, a field of research analyzing the intersection of race and language, with the hope of promoting true equality of language, culture, and race in United States language education. I assume that summer camp administrators have this same desire, but it is important to not simply believe in these ideals to make sure that children are being taught value for other identities in language summer camps. Though language summer camps are a very small part of the language education system in the United States, issues of linguistic and racial inequality need to be explicitly addressed in order for people to advocate for change. One way to address structural inequalities that lead to feelings of supremacy is referred to as critical consciousness, [quote] “an awareness of the structural inequalities that shape the material conditions of our lives and our social relationships due to differences in power and

privilege, and includes an acknowledgement of one's own role and complicity in structuring inequalities" [end quote] (García-Mateus et al., 2020). This is fostered through critical discussion and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, which I will discuss later on. Racial learning requires explicit discussion and instruction.

Earlier I mentioned that language learning can lead to White children viewing others as more similar to themselves and as friends, but this is not the same as children viewing children who speak other languages, or are part of another cultural or racial group as equal. As a 6 year long case study illuminates, a White child can internalize the praise that they get compared to their racialized peers to see their bilingualism as more valuable. Additionally, though bilingual education was created to help historically marginalized groups, professors of linguistics and world languages and cultures Flores, Tseng, and Subtirelu write that bilingual education ends up supporting the White middle class monolingual anyway. As a bilingual school gains prestige, the housing in that area increases in value, forcing some families to move away. Furthermore, as an example to demonstrate that good intentions are not enough, in one bilingual school that tries to keep the number of native Spanish and native English speakers even, middle class monolingual parents often recruit the children of their house cleaners to attend the school. Through separating parents into English dominant and Spanish dominant speaker groups, the stereotypes of [quote]"helpers" and "helped"[end quote] have been carried across racial and socioeconomic lines. In one sense Spanish first language speakers are seen as very valuable in this environment, but in another they end up being marginalized within this environment as well because of a lack of intention of breaking harmful stereotypes.

Authors García-Mateus, Strong, Palmer, and Heiman (2020) point to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, intentional discussion of race and social factors that privilege certain groups, as the solution. According to professors Alim and Paris, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies [quote] “reframe the object of critique from our children to oppressive systems.” [end quote] (2017, p.3) In this way, diversity in culture and language would not only be celebrated, but sustained. It is through intentional effort, rather than good intentions that all cultures and backgrounds will be celebrated.

I have not found any research indicating that a language summer camp has spent time discussing Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies or spent any time talking about race at all. While this is to be predicted because of the avoidance of discussing race in our society and the limited time of summer camps, it is disappointing because of how clearly these topics are tied together in the United States and in the education system in general. Moreover, when a child learns a language in the United States, the dialect of that language is chosen for them, which is nearly always the dialect with the highest social status; one example of this is that the Parisian dialect is almost exclusively taught in French language programs in the United States, even though the French language is spoken on 5 continents. Race is implicit in which accent and dialect of a language is chosen.

Language and race are both concepts that are best shaped when an individual is quite young. Linguists debate about the precise cut off age for a language to be acquired to a native level, but they tend to agree that the earlier the language is learned, the better. One researcher states that it is easier for a child to learn a second language than for an adult to do so (Yang, 2006). When writing about the East Coast Hindi language summer camps, retired South Asian

Studies professor, Gambhir writes, [quote] “a language camp that provides an immersion experience is the closest parallel to a natural environment for learning a language. A language camp has the added advantage of being a focused program, where the process of language acquisition can be accelerated.” [end quote] (Gambhir, 2011, p.11)

Similarly, founding director of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Washington, James A. Banks writes [quote] “many white children by the age of four have developed strong ingroup preferences and negative attitudes toward other racial groups” [end quote] (328). Children learn how to interact with others early on, so it follows that the topic of racial equality must be addressed early on as well. In one case study, a White child goes through 6 years of schooling at a bilingual Spanish-English elementary school. It is not until the last year of her studies that the topic of critical consciousness was presented to her, but interviews at the end of her studies demonstrate that the ideas of critical consciousness were presented to her too late in her education for her to internalize them.

In this panel, we address how youth are formed in community. When a monolingual White child enters a language summer camp, they enter into a new culture and community. White children may not have another experience in their life where they feel like the minority cultural group. Experience in this setting does more than just help them learn language skills, but it helps them identify better with the target language group.

Childhood is a relatively short part of our lives, yet it has a substantial impact on who we become. One should not discount the impact of a language summer camp on the thoughts and perspectives of a child simply because it is a short experience. When a child enters into an unfamiliar environment where they are spoken to in a foreign language and immersed in a new

culture, I believe the intensity of this experience often stays with them. It is no wonder that one six year-old child in my French language summer camp class asked me a few hours into the first day of class, “can you just speak normal?” My insistence on speaking French with her though she was unfamiliar with the language was strange to her.

It is through exposure to another language and culture that an individual becomes aware of their own. To be human is to be born into a community and to find one’s identity in relation to others. People have a strong desire to belong and to create beauty, and each people group has strived for these ends. On the other hand, human beings are imperfect and tend to fear what they do not understand. It is through discussion and intentional effort that people can bridge this empathy gap.

Language summer camps are an effective environment for short term language and cultural learning. As a result of limited research of language summer camps, I have also used research from the fields of raciolinguistics, informal language learning, and bilingual education. Future research would do well to study language summer camps as environments for cultural and racial learning in addition to language learning. Though language learning can be a helpful tool for communication, the field of language education should be on the front lines of breaking down cultural and racial discrimination, rather than the furtherance of these injustices.