Stuart Hall presents Antonio Gramsci’s definition of hegemony as “a tendential balance in the relations of force…that encompasses the interests of…subordinate groups…which results from winning a substantial degree of popular consent” (13-15). Allan Luke defines “racializing practices” as “the use of categorical distinction in the assignment of arbitrary value to the habitus…as undertaken both by objects of power (e.g., students, learners, the racial “other”) and by those who relationally exercise power (e.g., teachers, administrators, community elders), though obviously not with equivalent institutional force” (288). For the purposes of this response, I wish to combine these two definitions to discuss hegemony as ideological domination characterized by an unequal balance in the relations of force that encompasses the interests of subordinate racial and linguistic groups. Further, such domination is aided by these groups having consented to such domination. This essay will apply this combined definition and strategic uses that exist in current pedagogical and institutional practices that utilize this definition of hegemony.

In order to discuss current practices, it is important to recognize historical uses of hegemony, which is present in the discussion by Theresa Austin in which she

discusses her views of this idea as it has existed among teachers. She constructs a genealogy of how AAE developed from the clandestine fashion in which black educators were forced to work during slave times (254). She describes how, after slavery, it was a commonly held view that “black teachers who provided education commensurate with White schools undermined the subservient station of Blacks as projected by Whites and thereby threatened White supremacy” (257). Such a view placed white educators in a dominant ideological position, which subordinated the interests of black educators. This view led to the innovation of the Jeans program, which prepared a “special corps of black school teachers,” leading them to establish black schools and facilitate professional development for black teachers (258). While it might appear that the Jeans program was an attempt on the part of black teachers to “retain control over community education” (258), one can argue that its establishment was an implicit form of its innovators’ consent to the dominant ideological position. Although it may have been a statement meant to individualize and empower black teachers, the program’s establishment also allowed the ideological domination that characterized segregation to continue in that it contributed to the “assignment of power” that separated black teachers and white teachers. This type of issue is important for the field because it can open up a new area of knowledge that builds on the idea that separation can be a form of consent, which I will show in a contemporary institutional context in the next section.

Paul Kei Matsuda’s article, “Composition Studies and ESL Writing,” begins with a quote from Joel Colton that reads, “Specialization leads to its own problems. The discipline or department can become an end in itself” (699). This quote sets the tone for the problem Matsuda discusses. Similar to Austin, he constructs a history of how the “disciplinary division of labor” (713) between composition studies and ESL was institutionalized and “…how it has had a lasting impact on the relationship between the two professions” (714). From Matsuda’s discussion, we can extract his belief that institutional ideologies create hegemonic forces that frame the two disciplines and “encompass the interests” of both academic areas. Citing examples in scholarship, Matsuda concedes that composition journals like *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* and *Written Communication* had included more articles on second-language writing issues as of 1999 (716), which he implies have the potential to narrow this disciplinary division. However, one can argue that the presence of journals like *TESOL Quarterly* and *Journal of Second-Language Writing*, which focus on second-language issues, have the potential to contribute to the “consent” aspect of hegemony as relates to this division, as the scholars and practitioners who read and write in these journals can be said to be consenting to the institutionalized division that determines the positions of both disciplines. I researched this idea further by scanning the UTEP Library’s databases for issues of *College Composition and Communication* from when Matsuda’s article was published up until the present, and I counted a total of nine articles in *CCC* that addressed second-language issues directly. The dearth of scholarship on L2 writing in this journal further illustrates a hegemonic function of the academy in that reviewers and editors of this journal may be consenting to limit the number of articles that address L2 writing in favor of scholarship that addresses other areas in composition studies, which serves as an example of linguistic hegemony with respect to how our field views second-language issues in its scholarship. Since I do not have direct evidence of this, I would need to investigate this journal’s publication process more thoroughly in order to obtain a clearer picture of this problem. However, this separation has the potential to prompt our field to examine the type of scholarship included in its journals, and it can help us question whether our field gives second-language writing its due in “mainstream” journals like *CCC*.

One of the articles I found in this search was Christina Ortmeier-Hooper’s “English May Be My Second Language, but I’m not ESL.” Like Matsuda’s piece, her article examines linguistic hegemony from the institutional perspective, but it shows how it applies to contemporary classroom contexts. In examining the institutionalized use of terms like “Generation 1.5” and “ESL,” one of her research questions was “for immigrant students, what does it mean to be an ‘ESL’ student in college” (394), which she hoped to explore by examining the identity formations of “second-language students who were enrolled in sections of the mainstream first-year composition course” (395). A response from Sergej, one of her interviewees, illustrates an example of hegemony, in which he states, “I’m not ESL…I look at ESL as some kind of institution” (397), which shows his belief that the term “ESL” serves as a force that “encompasses the interests” of students who “fit” under that label. Ortmeier-Hooper also states that although Serjeg was resistant to the “ESL” label, he accepted the term in front of his “composition instructor because he believed that it would give him ‘more privileges,’…and teachers would be more forgiving of certain errors in his writing and his speech” (397). This response is an example of this definition of hegemony; it implicates that the term “ESL,” as defined by the academic institution of which he is a part, is hegemonic in how it relationally exercises power by categorizing and encompassing the interests of second-language students, who are the objects of power in this scenario. Such hegemony is based on the institution’s perceptions of students who do not speak the “preferred” version of the L1: standard English.

One might agree that Sergej has engaged in Alastair Pennycook’s notion of “transgression,” or an “illicit sense of traveling forbidden boundaries, and perhaps in the process, starting to trample down some of these disciplinary fences” by finding a way to negotiate the benefits of the “ESL” label while inwardly resisting it (38). However, one can argue that Sergej is “consenting” by accepting the term in order to soften what he projects to be his composition instructor’s negative perception of his writing, which shows how he has been constructed by the institution’s expectations of what it means to speak “proper English.” This scenario is similar to that of Austin’s in that Sergej, as well as the innovators of the Jeans program, are consenting to the relational exercises of power that are present in institutionally defined ideologies by actively “separating” from those ideologies.

In continuing this examination of linguistic hegemony, I wish to examine the work of Suresh Canagarajah, who problematizes that “students…are expected to master academic discourse to communicate successfully in the college classroom” (175), which is another explicit example of an institutional ideology that “encompasses the interests” of students in that they are expected to master an “ideal discourse” as determined by an institution. This idea relates to Norman Fairclough’s notion of “discursive colonization,” which relates to his claim that language is “socially shaped,” but also “socially shaping, or constitutive” (92) as well, which means that language can be used to define the social realities of institutions. Canagarajah’s problematization applies Fairclough’s definition as extending from the institution into the classroom.

An obvious example of “consent” stems from how the African-American students in his empirical study “orientated themselves to the academic conventions quite scrupulously…at the beginning of the semester” (176). However, Canagarajah mentions that he had his students “…debate whether the academy is culturally biased against minority students” (184) at the end of the course. One of his students, Donnie, used code-meshing to attack higher education as “homogenized.” This practice involved the combination of his use of his vernacular with academic discourse (187). I argued in one of my practice responses that this mesh of discourses served as an example of transgression. However, it can also be argued that this code-meshing serves as an example of “consent” in that Donnie still uses hegemonic “rhetorical conventions and authorities” that exist in the academic discourse that he is “expected to master.” He has consented to the institution’s ideology by mastering such discourse, even if he is using it to facilitate a rebellious act. It is also interesting to note that this rebellion is taking place in a writing course “for predominantly African-American students” (174), which is a “safe house” in which Donnie has the freedom to code-mesh. In a setting that is not as amicable to the combination of such vernaculars, a question is raised as to whether Donnie would be willing to code-mesh, or whether he would attempt to appear genuine in fully using the academic conventions. This is an area of importance in that it allows scholars and practitioners in RWS to examine how marginalized students negotiate academic discourse in conjunction with their vernaculars, and what situational variables enable their practices.

Having worked with students from a wide variety of races, and who speak a number of different native languages and vernaculars, my feelings have ranged from frustration to sympathy as I have tried to help them learn “standard English” in tutoring and teaching situations. Upon writing this response, I have come to a better realization of how I may have been socially constructed into such feelings and how I may have engaged in practices of linguistic and racial “hegemony.” These practices alone are an example of why this term is important for examination in our field, as it can help scholars and practitioners like myself move away from socially constructed “ideals” and toward a “transgressive pedagogy.”

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