CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN S/FL EDUCATION RESEARCH:
SORTING OUT PURPOSES, THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS,
AND IMPLICATIONS

AL LEHNER
University of Hawai‘i

Ethnographic studies in S/FL education research have gradually increased in number in recent years, focusing attention on the personally-situated, sociocultural and political aspects of language teaching/learning. More and more, research that relies upon ethnographic techniques has been considered both valuable and necessary in addressing a wide array of S/FL issues that other research methodologies have not appropriately or effectively grasped, e.g., recognizing the impact of home-school relationships on learning (Heath, 1983), eliciting learner perceptions about classroom practices (Canagarajah, 1993), assessing the use of particular pedagogical techniques in S/FL classrooms (Fiore and Elsasser, 1987), identifying literacy needs within SL (Auerbach, 1993a) and FL (Street, 1993) contexts, and analyzing issues of power in teacher-learner relationships (Peterson, 1991). Much of this research has been identified as critical ethnography. Yet some would argue that ethnographic research is not yet sufficiently understood within the field of S/FL education (Davis, 1995) and that critical ethnography as a research method has not been adequately explained.

I want to explicate the purposes and theoretical underpinnings of critical ethnography and to present examples of critical studies that can inform those of us in S/FL education. I also am suggesting several implications for S/FL education. It is my hope that this paper can help to inform current perceptions about critical ethnography that may have arisen from misleading ideas about its purposes and methodologies.

Critical Ethnography Related to Critical Pedagogy

Within S/FL education, critical ethnography is research which focuses on the personally-situated, sociocultural, and political factors that fundamentally shape the lives of individual participants teachers and learners. It analyzes the impact of these factors on communities and classrooms. Over the past 20 years, critical research has supported the advance of a critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) in which S/FL educators

have attempted to elicit from learners an awareness of the sociocultural and political factors that influence their lives. Thus, an explicit and common theme of both critical ethnographic research and critical pedagogy has been "the practical problems and ideologically distorted understandings of groups that are dominated and frustrated by present social conditions" (Comstock, 1982, p. 388).

Educators who have advocated a critical pedagogy in S/FL classrooms have made it clear that the contexts for teaching/learning in SL and FL are multiple and far from universal. This claim has been especially significant given the variety of ESL/bilingual education settings in the U.S., where issues of language, literacy, culture, and power continue to be identified (e.g., Roller, 1989; Heath, 1983; Gee, 1991; Auerbach and McGrail, 1991; Auerbach, 1993b; Pease-Alvarez and Hakuta, 1992; Weinstein-Shr, 1993; Zamel, 1993). Moreover, the multiplicity of contexts in ESL/bilingual education settings is expanded by the high volume of discussion surrounding world Englishes (Kachru, 1992; Brock & Walters, 1993), linguicism (Phillipson, 1988; Canagarajah, 1993), and language planning/policy (Davis, 1994; Lewis, 1993; Macedo, 1991; Tollefson, 1991)—factors that bear substantively upon the teaching of EFL within any number of contexts. Faulting traditional research for being too abstract in its analysis of sociocultural and political issues, including the relationship between schools and "the maintenance and subversion of social and cultural power" (Apple, 1989, p. 33), some S/FL educators have argued that the "(h)abits of observing, valuing, and organizing" research must be reexamined in light of the participants their work seeks to engage and the contexts in which it occurs (Heath, 1987, p. 105). The sociocultural and political reevaluation within classrooms called for by critical pedagogy, thus has found a complement within educational research and a desire to reexamine its purposes and approaches.

The need for such methodological reexamination began to emerge within a number of studies in anthropology (e.g., Kuper, 1988; Schieffelin & Crittenden, 1991; Gordon, 1992), the field in which ethnography originated. Critical anthropologists reevaluated earlier ethnographic work in anthropology that had resulted in a colonialist instigation and propagation of myths and non-realities that ultimately worked directly against those who were "researched." For example, in his critical text, The Man-Eating Myth, Arens (1979) refers to earlier anthropological research that perpetrated the dehumanizing fabrication (by ethnographers in anthropology) of cannibalism in non-Western cultures. He writes: "The credibility of these published accounts diminishes as they begin to impinge upon us culturally and
CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN S/FL EDUCATION RESEARCH

temporally. Rather than permitting cherished ideas to be challenged, reinterpretation or denial of the material is called for" (Arens, 1979, p. 19). It is a similar reexamining that critical research addresses in S/FL research. For those seeking a critical pedagogy in S/FL education settings in order that learners identify and reexamine sociocultural and political factors in their schooling and in their lives, it is critical ethnography that, most of all, informs this process--precisely because of its attention to the sociocultural and political aspects of language teaching/learning.

Current ethnography attempts to "explode myths" (Heath, 1987). In its theories and methodologies, critical research specifically debunks myths perpetrated by "academic colonialism" and the "mumbo jumbo of academic 'discourse'" (Trask, 1991, p. 159). Specifically, critical ethnographers have pointed out that in academic discourses, "(t)ext and reality are always implicated in each other" (Crapanzano, 1990, p. 307). As a result, critical researchers "endeavor to demythologize reality (and text)" (Freire, 1991, p. 253) through their research. They have shaped a research process which engages both researchers and participants in a critique of their previously unquestioned reality so that they "re-insert themselves...with critical awareness" (Freire, 1991, p. 253) into a reexamination of their lived realities.

S/FL educators who want to develop the critical awareness that Freire (1991) espouses are urged to consider some of the philosophical assumptions, investigative techniques, and resultant findings of critical ethnography that can impact their work with learners. After all, it is critical research that purports: (a) to uncover "ideologically distorted understandings" in a variety of S/FL contexts (e.g., Street, 1993); (b) to disclose particular "practical value options" that lie within a multiplicity of philosophies in S/FL education (e.g., Carrasquillo & Hedley, 1993); and, (c) to disentangle the "mumbo jumbo of academic 'discourse'" that is directed at both of these (e.g., Wilson, 1988). My own critical awareness leads me to continually develop a philosophy of and approach to S/FL research which attempts to "confront the complex relationship between the language learner and larger, frequently inequitable social processes" (Peirce, 1995). Once such a critical awareness begins to take hold, it "necessitates that we merge our scholarship with a clear politics to work against the forces of oppression" (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, & Cohen, 1989). For S/FL educators who engage in a critical pedagogy, such a merger is found in critical research which seeks to focus attention on oppressive contexts within S/FL education whenever and wherever they might exist. One specific application of critical research is found in ethnography. But what do critical ethnographers believe about research?
What underlying philosophy shapes the S/FL issues they investigate?

Philosophical Assumptions Within Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography originated from the dialectic between traditional ethnography in anthropology—a field "rife with power relations" (Manganaro, 1990, p. 26)—and the rise of critical theory in sociology and philosophy. Its need was further realized as traditional ethnography reinforced notions of researcher as "expert" and promoted a certain form of knowledge separated from those who were "researched" (cf. Arens, 1979; Kuper, 1988; Schieffelin and Crittenden, 1991; Gordon, 1992). Another impetus emerged when critical theorists subscribed to the "new" sociology of education movement (Giroux, 1981; Levinson, 1992) and attempted to examine education vis-à-vis "the postmodern condition" (Peters, 1995). Consequently, some "ethnographers in anthropology raised fundamental questions about both the practice of ethnography and the nature of culture" (Anderson, 1989). What initially followed, according to Masemann (1982, p. 1), was a genuine synthesis. Today, as a result, "(c)ritical ethnography' refers to studies which use a basically anthropological, qualitative participant observer methodology but which rely for their theoretical formulation on a body of theory deriving from critical sociology and philosophy" (Masemann, 1982, p. 250).

Simon and Dippo (1986, p. 196) offer a meaningful framework (relied upon in this paper) for understanding critical research: critical ethnography assumes as a fundamental purpose the "producing (of) a particular articulation of knowledge" (authors' emphasis) and claim that "the avowed concerns of critical ethnography are neither...neutral nor arbitrary." This point is made more bluntly by Lather (1986) who states that critical ethnography is "openly ideological research." Explaining the emphasis on non-neutrality and ideology in critical research that focuses on schools, Anderson (1989, p. 251) assigns a "critical" component to ethnographic research which "would raise serious questions about the role of schools in the social and cultural reproduction of social classes, gender roles, and racial and ethnic prejudice." He further states (p. 253) that "...critical ethnographers aim to generate insights, to explain events, and to seek understanding." In other words, critical ethnographers focus on individuals (often within self-described sociocultural and political groups) "who are themselves constituted through historically specific structural forms and processes and are acting within historically specific institutional contexts and situations" (Sharp, 1982, p. 51). This, of course, includes researchers also. In sum,
the advocacy itself of such a research approach is both non-neutral and openly ideological. Any "knowledge" generated as a result of critical research is, thus, explicitly political.

According to Simon and Dippo (1986, p. 195 ff.), "To actually do ethnography is to engage in a process of knowledge production" and, therefore, "the interest that defines critical ethnographic work is both pedagogical and political." Far beyond the traditional ethnographic goal in anthropology of describing and interpreting social discourse (Wilcox, 1980), critical ethnography is grounded in issues implicit in and systemic to a hegemonic claim on culture which overlooks "why things are the way they are and what must be done for things to be otherwise" (Simon and Dippo, 1986). In this regard, Karabel and Halsey (1977) posit that critical ethnographers see social interaction among historically-situated individuals as integral to any interpretation on the part of the researcher. The discovery of "objective reality" is not sought and, in fact, is supplanted by the desire to uncover the "social construction of reality" (Berger & Luckman, 1967) that is implicit in any human setting.

Thus, critical ethnographers embrace certain post-positivist discourses. They overtly attempt to question any socially-imposed meaning on the lives of individuals by focusing on the significance of the social construction of meaning among individuals in any sociocultural and political situation. Such a deconstruction of imposed meaning is central in critical ethnography, and "leads people to an understanding of the grounds of their own actions in the historically and socially situated context of their lives" (Giroux, 1983). Imposed meaning on the lives of individuals generally results in their loss of freedom and power to make choices and to act. This is clearly an issue within some SL contexts, e.g., Auerbach, 1993b, as well as within some FL contexts, e.g., Brock, 1993. Aronowitz and Giroux (1993, p. 124) posit that a legitimate and primary goal of critical research, then, is "to take up the challenge of the new social movements and in doing so attempt to demonstrate how the link between the domination of nature and humanity works itself out on the terrain of everyday life." The overtly political purpose of critical ethnography defines for such research "an important but limited role in the struggle for creating a more just society" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993, p. 126). Thus, the following challenge to educators is made to ethnographers as well:

...it is imperative that strategies (and conceptual frameworks) be developed that take as their starting point an understanding of how knowledge and patterns of social relations steeped in domination come into being in schools (and societies),
how they are maintained, how students, teachers, and others relate to them, and how they can be exposed, modified, and overcome, if possible. (p. 127)

Investigative Techniques

In his now-classic text, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, Agar (1980) is direct when discussing techniques that comprise methodology in ethnography. But, techniques, alone, do not constitute critical ethnography. Agar (1980, p. 204) warns that "we must continue to be more explicit about its (i.e., ethnography's) underlying theory and the procedures by which it is done." This idea is pivotal in distinguishing traditional from critical ethnography. For example, just as traditional ethnography begins "with the selection of a problem or topic of interest" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 13), and involves theory, research design, and formal analysis, critical ethnography relies upon the same techniques (e.g., establishing rapport with research participants, completing fieldwork involving interviews, collecting data from multiple sources, assuring triangulation, etc. [Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Davis, 1995]) in order to develop an emic, i.e., insider's, perspective. Erickson (1986) refers to this as eliciting "the immediate and local meanings of actions" as perceived and described by research participants themselves--what Davis (1995) calls taking a semiotic approach--in order to arrive at what Geertz (1973) defines as a "thick description." But, simply the use of "pure" ethnographic techniques is insufficient for critical ethnographers.

Simon and Dippo (1986, p. 197) posit that ethnography, if it is to be considered critical, must meet three further basic criteria:

1. the work must employ an organizing problematic that defines one's data and analytical procedures in a way consistent with its project;
2. the work must be situated, in part, within a public sphere that allows it to become the starting point for the critique and transformation of the conditions of oppressive and inequitable moral and social regulation;
3. the work must address the limits of its own claims by a consideration of how, as a form of social practice, it too is constituted and regulated through historical relations of power and existing material conditions.

1. The Problematic

Critical ethnography must begin with "a focus on ordered sets of social practices"; it "also must specify an investigation of the character and basis of such
practices as particular ways of embodying and enacting historically structured social forms that organize, regulate, and legitimate specific ways of being, communicating, and acting" (Simon and Dippo, 1986, p. 197). This agenda of social critique "raises validity issues beyond those of mainstream naturalistic research" (Anderson, 1989, p. 253). Explaining how validity is established in critical ethnography, Lather (1986, p. 67) introduces the idea of a "catalytic validity" which is achieved, she suggests, if research participants develop self-understanding and, more essentially, self-determination by joining the research. Her premise is extended by Erickson (1989), who ascribes a "critical validity" integral to critical ethnography, thereby distinguishing it from more traditional ethnography. He suggests: "...relativist ethnography is itself evaluative when it reports absences... 'neutrally' as absence rather than critically as the result of silencing" (Erickson, 1989, p. 6). Thus, identifying and interpreting reciprocal relationships between data and political theory is a legitimate aim of critical ethnography. According to Angus (1986, p. 65), such a dialectic "can lead to a more sophisticated and better understanding of the situation being researched and to more complete and better theory."

An issue which surfaces with regard to the problematic in critical ethnography is the scope of the research. Wexler (1987) and Ogbu (1990) have faulted critical ethnography as being too narrowly focused on specific classrooms and communities (micro view) and as failing to take into account broad social transformations and social movements (macro view). In particular, Wexler (1987, p. 55) calls for critical ethnography to take into account issues of "finance, political regulations, governance, organizational dynamics, and specific historical, inter-institutional relations." Yet, it would seem clear from the work of critical ethnographers that these issues are directly explicated through the voices of those being researched, individuals whose lives are regularly impacted by macro traditions, practices, politics, etc. This is so precisely whenever research participants help to determine parameters for and, by definition, to participate in the research throughout the process (Lather, 1986). Quantz and O'Connor (1988, p. 98 f.) explain that "multiple voices within the individual and within the community struggle to control the direction of the acceptable dialogue, [so that] ideological expressions may be reinforced, reinterpreted, or rejected..."

Facing the "multiple voices within the individual," critical ethnographers attempt to gain access to the meaning social actors give their behavior. In the semiotic stance defined by Davis (1995), naturalistic techniques for arriving at meaning are central. Yet, as she (Davis, 1995) also points out, this reliance upon qualitative techniques of
data collection does not preclude using quantitative techniques to report frequency of occurrences, etc.

2. The Public Sphere

Critical ethnographers are aware that they conduct research for a wide audience. In line with their intention to develop a participant-grounded problematic, they know that they are writing for a variety of people. Accordingly, Simon and Dippo (1986, p. 199) raise the question: "How can it be done without implicating ourselves in the very hegemonic processes that are the object of the critique in our work?"

Obviously, critical ethnographers run the risk of reproducing in their own discourse the familiar beliefs and values that they are, in fact, critiquing. For this reason, Aronowitz and Giroux (1985, p. 43) call for a discourse that will "relate language and power, take popular experience seriously..., (and) combat mystification ..." Here, a point offered by Thompson (1984, p. 99) regarding discourse analysis seems appropriate: there is a need to pay "attention to the ways in which language is used in specific social contexts and thereby serves as a medium of power and control." In other words, there is an explicit warning here for critical ethnographers to understand the implications of the discourse they use in their research. Simon and Dippo (1986, p. 200) again assert: "The work must find ways of communicating that do not simply reaffirm old 'ways of seeing'; it must challenge the very foundations of our experience of ourselves yet be understandable and sensible."

These points lead to consideration of a third characteristic of critical ethnography: the need for critical ethnographers to critically reflect on their own work, i.e., what they do, how they do it, why they do it.

3. The Need for Self-reflection

The following argument made by Aronowitz and Giroux (1985, p. 36) concerning teachers applies as well to critical ethnographers: they should "employ the discourse of self-criticism so as to make the foundations for a critical pedagogy (and ethnography) explicit while simultaneously illuminating the relevance of the latter for both students (and research participants) and the larger society." In other words, critical ethnographers are academic advocates who "advance emancipatory traditions and cultures within and without alternative public spheres" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, p. 36).

Simon and Dippo (1986, p. 201) offer a range of concerns for critical
ethnographers with regard to the need for self-reflection. These include the need:

1. for critical ethnographers to recognize their own implication in the production of data and the subsequent necessity of self-inclusion in analyses of researched situations;
2. to redefine empathy so that it includes one's limitations in understanding others;
3. to consider how the discourse they use silences as well as articulates;
4. to recognize how being located in a university influences researchers' positions relative to issues like how a research team works together, whose work it is, etc.;
5. to convince colleagues of the importance of providing resources (including of time) for such reflexive inquiry.

Therefore, just as critical ethnographers describe, interpret, and critique the multiplicity of voices within individuals, communities, schools, etc., they are faced with the attendant obligation of similarly critiquing themselves—their work, their methods, their discourses. Critical ethnographers must make "a commitment to study the character and bases of one's own work practices and their relation to the knowledge such practices produce" because they are engaged in "a fundamental questioning of how the structured relations within which we live are implicated in the constitution of knowledge we put forward" (Simon and Dippo, 1986, p. 200).

**What Critical Ethnographers "Know": Cases**

Considering the above philosophical assumptions and investigative techniques, what do critical ethnographers report? What are their findings? How is their research able to inform S/FL education?

To begin with, critical ethnography uncovers a variety of issues which empower/disempower particular people in certain communities and specific settings and does so through the voices of individual research participants in a multiplicity of contexts. In this sense, it is research that is polyvocalic. Two current approaches to uncovering such issues include: (a) the critical research described by Lather (1986), in which participants are actively engaged in self-reflection and co-authorship and, (b) the critical research espoused by Davis (1994) which attempts to uncover social inequality resulting from various sociocultural and political factors, even though participants are not necessarily co-authors.

In order to assess findings from such research, it is instructive to look at three particular studies which focus on different issues. The first study, conducted by
Anyon (1981), investigates the issues of social class and school knowledge in five elementary schools in a continuum of social class settings in two school districts in New Jersey. The second, completed by Galindo and Velasquez (1992), looks at linguistic issues of self-expression, innovation, and power among Chicana women in Texas. The third study, involving social class as a significant factor in the development/maintenance of a counter-culture in London, was conducted by Willis (1982), and is considered a seminal and classic critical study. Consistent with the idea that ethnographic research results are not considered generalizable across individuals and communities, but can be transferable, these three studies offer salient examples of how a critical emic perspective can generate results which confront exploitive and patronizing realities, and which, by implication, can inform S/FL educators.

Case #1: Class Conflict in Educational Knowledge

Anyon (1981) attempted to look at how "social stratification of knowledge is possible" in U.S. schools and identified differences among five elementary schools that suggest "that rather than being simply conserving or 'reproductive', school knowledge embodies contradictions that have profound implications for social change." Anyon studied five school settings: two working-class schools, a middle-class school, an affluent professional school, and an executive elite school (designations given by Anyon according to both the level of income of school families and the kind of work that characterized the majority of parents in each school). Her research revealed that "there are profound differences" in the curriculum and the curriculum-in-use in the schools investigated in the study. Specifically, "[w]hat counts as knowledge in the schools differs along dimensions of structure and content" (Anyon, 1981, p. 31).

Anyon delineated between "reproductive" aspects of knowledge (knowledge which is directly linked to the "legitimation and perpetuation of ideologies, practices, and privileges" of current economic/political structures) and "nonreproductive" aspects (knowledge which promotes a basic "transformation of ideologies and practices" by which cultural products--e.g., objects, services, and ideas--are "produced, owned, distributed, and publicly evaluated"). The study determined that school knowledge--in these five particular elementary schools--contributed to "contradictory social processes of conservation and transformation." Explicitly, Anyon states: "We see the schools reproducing the tensions and conflicts of the larger society" (p. 38). Furthermore,
"there are class conflicts in educational knowledge and its distribution." Anyon's study—as critical research—is, thus, "a procedure with a pedagogical and political interest" (Simon and Dippo, 1986). In other words, it "offers an explanation of the processes involved in the production, the reproduction, and the destruction of particular organizational forms" (Benson, 1977, p. 12) that could, if considered, inform current teaching practices within those educational communities.

Case #2: Linguistic Self-expression and Power among Chicanas

In 1992, Galindo and Velasquez published the results of two studies that "operated within a qualitative paradigm and employed social networks and extended social ties to seek out women (Latinas) for the research" of specific issues, including bilingualism versus monolingualism, bilingualism and bidialectalism, and class, race, and cultural differences. The first study focused on the recognition and use of a particular dialect of Southwest Spanish by Chicanas in Austin, Texas. Galindo and Velasquez found that the "willingness to be linguistically innovative" among Chicanas led to their use of a traditionally male-preserved variety of Spanish (calo) even though they faced repressive cultural norms and patronizing gender-distinct roles. In other words, Chicanas were willing to forsake interpersonal relationships based on power and manipulation by men in order to establish and maintain their personal and linguistic freedom.

In a second study conducted in Cordova, New Mexico, Galindo and Velasquez (1992) sought to investigate gender differentiation in language use among Chicanos in a small, rural, isolated village in order to determine "how...English become(s) a tool of empowerment." Their findings indicate that Chicanas in Cordova "function as effective agents for social change as they self-consciously incorporate strategies designed to mediate cultural differences" (Galindo & Velasquez, 1992, p. 168). The women of Cordova are "cultural brokers," in that they have "a broad linguistic repertoire which includes at least three codes--Spanish, English, and codeswitching" and, as a result, have options which "allow[s] them to make choices that are simply not available to women of monolingual speech communities" (Galindo & Velasquez, 1992, p. 168).

Along the lines of Anderson's (1989) earlier description of critical ethnography, Galindo and Velasquez (1992) "generate insights" and "explain events" which, again, according to Simon and Dippo (1986), engage them "in a process of knowledge production." Their findings lead the participants in their studies to an understanding
of their own lives in the realities of their concrete historical and social contexts (Giroux, 1983).

Case #3: Class Conflict and Language Use

Willis (1982) completed a study of working-class culture in London in which he focused on the transition of young males from school to work. He looked at the determinacy of counter-school culture in order to consider the school culture within the context of its surrounding networks. He wanted to understand what prompts the formation of counter-school culture. He found "a direct relationship between the main features of working-class culture...and school counter-culture" (p. 409) and determined that such a relationship is the result of an "uneven pattern of extension and suppression of common working-class themes" (Willis, 1982, p. 409) in the schools.

In his study Willis (1982, p. 417 f.) found that "the real power relationships" in the lives of the young males he studied, particularly in school, led to their development of "an element of 'self-damnation' in the acceptance of subordinate roles" as factory workers, particularly because their working-class culture was not valued in school, forcing them to build strong self-identities elsewhere. At the time of Willis' study, such a counter-school culture was so ingrained in the community that the "lads" entered school with the expectations that they were committed to a working-class future in the factories because their own working-class culture had been reproduced and reinforced within the community to the degree where the "lads" did not have the cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) to enter the dominant society through the school system. For Willis (1982, p. 419), this is an example of how "'autonomous' working-class processes achieve the 'voluntary' reproduction of their own conditions."

In particular, one point is significant about Willis' findings: "The insistence of a human meaning which must justify its situation, but which does not have the material force to change its situation, can simply operate all too easily to legitimate, experientially, a situation which is fundamentally alien to it" (Willis, 1982, p. 419). In other words, a vicious circularity was in place by which the "lads" had formed a counter-culture in response to a situation (school) in which they lacked the prerequisite cultural capital to participate and, as a result, their counter-culture influenced the community (cf. adult males at work in the factories) so that freedom from the counter-culture was unlikely. Willis (1982, p. 408) describes "the profound
significance (this) has for processes of job selection" as well as "its relation to the wider working-class culture." Thus, as in Anyon's (1981) study which uncovered the reproduction of certain kinds of knowledge in schools serving different social classes of students, "the located anti-school culture provides powerful informal criteria and binding experiential processes which lead working-class lads to make the 'voluntary' choice to enter the factory" (Willis, 1982, p. 408). In other words, the working-class counter-culture is reproduced.

***

All three of the above cases illustrate significant findings which can result from critical research that relies upon ethnographic techniques. By entering the lived realities of research participants, and relying upon them for an articulation of their experiences, Anyon (1981) and Willis (1982) were able to describe disempowering situations in order to "raise serious questions about the role of schools in the social and cultural reproduction of social classes" (Anderson, 1989). Galindo and Velasquez (1992) were able to do the same within particular Chicano communities in Texas and New Mexico.

Implications for S/FL Theory and Practice

Critical ethnography has considerable implications in S/FL theory and practice. First of all, theory about learning/teaching that derives from ethnographic research which does not also take into account the power differentials within the lived experiences of learners is grossly limited in its scope and, thus, its utility. Secondly, ethnographic research which is not grounded in "historically specific structural forms and processes" (Sharp, 1982), which does not understand the pedagogical as political, and which does not question "why things are the way they are" can legitimate in an academic setting the same disempowering sociopolitical processes it attempts to describe.

The research projects cited above clearly indicate the need to focus S/FL ethnographic research on "the validation of the 'voices' of people" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993). For example, given current political trends in the U.S. aimed at defunding bilingual education programs or the equally political decision in a number of countries (where English is not the national language) to institutionalize the learning of English for college entrance purposes in their own societies (which some
see as the direct result of linguicism), Anyon's (1981) finding that educational institutions reproduce "the tensions and conflicts of the larger society" (or the world) are telling. The power of multilingual "cultural brokers" explicated by Galindo and Velasquez (1992) is an issue that can inform S/FL educators in the U.S. who may subscribe to the current "English Only" trend in politically-driven discussions about a national "American culture." Likewise, the uncovering by Willis (1982) of the development of a "counter-school culture" sustained by teacher choices of "mainstream" themes in academic activities--reinforced by and reinforcing of politically-driven class distinctions--can inform the work of S/FL educators who daily struggle with classroom issues related to learner motivation and academic success, and who might realize a relationship between these issues and the themes they teach in their classes. Considering these three examples, critical ethnography serves as one way for S/FL researchers and educators to question "things as they are" in order to engage learners in an examination of the social circumstances and situations (Macedo, 1994) which traditionally prevent them from enjoying equitable educational opportunities.

What critical ethnography does more than anything else for S/FL educators is to offer "a method of praxis" (Comstock, 1982; Walsh, 1991), i.e., a process of joining self-reflection and action as the basis for developing both theory and practice. It urges researchers who create theories (and teachers if implementing them) to accept as their goal "(t)he task of keeping alive in the minds of the people the collective memory of the struggle for equality, for person rights in all of the institutions of our society" (Apple, 1989). Critical ethnography serves as a poignant reminder that both theory and practice must be joined to, in fact grounded in, an articulation of an ideology that respects and supports the lived experiences of research participants at the same time it seeks to understand and interact with their lived experiences in a non-exploitative way (Walsh, 1991). S/FL theory and practice which have been derived from critical ethnography, "explode the myth" (Heath, 1987) of a monolithic approach to S/FL teaching/learning, as well as of a hegemonic explanation of culture and power.

Critical ethnography reminds researchers that "(w)hat is sought is a reflexive process that focuses on our too easy use of accepted forms, a process that might lead us toward a science [sic] capable of continually demystifying the realities it serves to create" (Lather, 1992, p. 95). Those who construct S/FL theory, according to Lather (1992, p. 96) must avoid "a 'one best way' agenda." Conceptual frameworks for
ethnographies in S/FL education should begin from "notions of how society and basic research operates, how fundamental change occurs, or what kinds of changes, if any, are desirable" (Levinson, 1992, p. 221). In this way, "critical research...is the basis for critical theories which have practical utility in the political struggle for freedom" (Comstock, 1982, p. 389). Considering the issues faced by the large population of political and economic refugees currently enrolled in ESL and bilingual education programs in the U.S. (e.g., Tajitsu-Nash, 1991; Auerbach, 1993a), as well as the multiple ideologies which confront the growing number of learners enrolled in EFL programs globally (e.g., Tongue, 1991; Macedo, 1991), Comstock’s (1982) statement is a point well taken.

S/FL practice, on the other hand, must be equally informed by the findings of critical ethnography so that what ensues in classrooms is, in fact, a critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) which asks direct questions: "Whose knowledge is taught? Why is it taught in this particular way to this particular group? How do we enable the histories and cultures of the majority of working people, of women, of people of color...to be taught in responsible and responsive ways in schools?" (Apple, 1989, p. 48 f.). Anyon (1981, p. 39) reminds teachers "who are working to transform society (that) there is much to do, at all levels, in education." Beginning with an understanding of critical ethnography, S/FL educators might no longer "underestimate in their own work the potential of sociolinguistic analysis to systematically explore how relations of domination are sustained through the mobilization of meaning" (Anderson, 1989, p. 263). Instead, they might be informed by their own critical "analysis of the connections between issues of everyday activity in specific schools and the broader social, cultural and structural issues that are related to such interaction" (Angus, 1986, p. 66).

For both S/FL theory and practice, as Simon and Dippo (1986, p. 201) posit, "If we want to avoid yet new forms of cultural imperialism, we will have to redefine our work both in its substance and form."
REFERENCES


Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 119-161). New York: Collier-Macmillan.


Al Lehner
Department of English as a Second Language
University of Hawai‘i
1890 East-West Road
Honolulu, HI 96822
e-mail lehner@hawaii.edu