

**Richard Ruiz: A Voice that Speaks and Speaks,
Making Meanings across Disciplines and Time**

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ABSTRACT

Paying homage to the work of Richard Ruiz, whose ideas have formed the foundations of no fewer than four separate academic fields, this essay argues that Ruiz' most important scholarly contributions have been influenced by his highly creative reformulation and application of the work of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Using philosophical inquiry to argue this point, I situate his work biographically, and weave in interviews with students who reflect on his influence as a scholar and as a teacher. Ruiz' ideas have shaped the fields of language policy and planning; bilingual education; heritage language education; and multicultural education, and his ideas continue to generate new directions in scholarship.

The work of Richard Ruiz is deeply generative. He thought carefully about the intellectual questions before him, and his work crossed disciplines long before that was in vogue. As an undergraduate at Harvard, he majored in French literature. That is where he began to understand the connections among language, politics, and history. As he completed his doctoral study in anthropology and the philosophy of education at Stanford, those connections deepened. I think of Richard as a very special kind of philosopher of language, one who looked at the philosophy of language through an anthropological lens and asked questions that no one had thought to ask before. One of Richard's recent students from the University of Arizona, Brendon O'Connor, who is now tenure-track faculty at Arizona State University told me this:

Richard was a truly serious thinker in a way that is increasingly rare (or so it seems to me) in academia... If you found yourself in an argument or debate with him in the course of a class, he wasn't likely to surrender a conclusion he'd drawn after many, many years of careful thought. He might say something like, "Sure, you could look at it that way," as though he'd already considered that possibility and discarded it. I was really impressed by this – to find

someone who was convinced that *intellectual and real-world problems* [emphasis mine] still deserved serious thought, and that what you decided about these problems actually mattered. He taught me to take the whole enterprise of scholarship more seriously.

I echo Brendan's thoughts about Richard. He also taught me that what I thought about a problem mattered in the world. I was one of Richard's students in a cohort just before Brendan came along, and whenever I visited Richard in his office, the radio was playing, tuned to a classical station. His office was one of the places where he thought carefully and he invited students to do that thinking with him. While he was serious about thinking and how doing it well could make material changes in the world, he was also known for his sense of humor. He used his joking ways both to put people at ease as well as to upend them. In fact, as I write this piece, I have both a smile at the corners of my lips and eyes that are damp.

In this homage to the work of Richard Ruíz, I consider the ways in which his intellectual labor, specifically in the articles "Orientations on Language Planning" and "The Empowerment of Language Minority Students," has shaped no fewer than four scholarly fields. Those fields are:

- language policy and planning;
- bilingual education;
- heritage language education; and
- multicultural education.

To have accomplished this is no small feat. I will also argue that Richard's work was an example of his applying the philosophical ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein to the real world to produce these two influential articles.

Language Policy and Planning

Nancy Hornberger, scholar of bilingualism, biliteracy, ethnography and language policy, as well as Indigenous language revitalization, was one of Richard's first doctoral students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Hornberger recalls his trying out the ideas for "Orientations in Language Planning" with her before he submitted the manuscript for publication. In that simply titled essay, he, with the philosopher's precision, defined the problem and suggested a hermeneutic frame for it. In 1984, Richard published "Orientations in Language Planning" in the *NABE Journal*, and proceeded to shake things up in the world of language policy and planning. The problem was that the field of language policy and planning had not had a robust theoretical foundation. Richard showed us three orientations toward language planning. Two were implicit in the literature: language as problem and language as right. He proposed a new orientation for the field: language as resource. He saw orientations as the deeper construct that, while connected to language attitudes, was not the same thing. That is, language orientations have the ability to give organized existence to our thinking. "Orientations," Richard wrote, "determine what is thinkable about language in society" (Ruíz, 1984: 16).

He could have called this paper “ideologies in language planning”, or “the lack of explicit ideologies in language planning” (which he was far too polite to do). When Richard published “Orientations on Language Planning” in 1984, the notion of ideology was just beginning to shed its negative associations with false consciousness in Marxist thought. Richard, situated academically in educational policy analysis, came to his orientations in language policy at more-or-less the same historical moment that Michael Silverstein (1979) was thinking about linguistic ideology in linguistics and Kathryn Woolard (1985) was bringing sociolinguistics into conversation with social theory. Woolard’s 1985 essay was the seed of what would later become Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity’s influential 1998 volume, *Language Ideologies*. What Richard did in his famous “Orientations of Language Planning” essay was to look for what he called our “pre-rational” understandings of what we would today call language ideologies. Instead of calling these understandings “ideologies”, with much thought, he referred to them as “orientations”.

The concept of orientations has relationship and movement built into its sememe.ⁱ We cannot have an orientation toward the south without understanding the context of north, east, west, and all of the hybrid directions in between. Orientations are relational, non-binary positions, and they imply movement. Richard took to heart Wittgenstein’s notion that meanings are not essences that sit motionless within concepts, but rather, meanings live and move in their contexts. Regarding meanings, Wittgenstein (1958) said, “for if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: Don’t think, but look!” (p. 312). Richard put that idea into practice and his work has been foundational in the field of language planning and policy.

Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is language policy at work. What role does language play in public life? What are the language(s) of instruction in public schools? These questions of language policy have everything to do with bilingual education. While it is true that the United States as a nation has no official language, it is still the case that 31 of the 50 U.S. states have “English Only” laws on the books today. The one-nation-one-language ideology becomes a problem to be dealt with now and again in the United States, most commonly when the economy falters. The “English Only” ideology suggests that monolingual English speakers are somehow naturally patriotic to the United Statesⁱⁱ, and that bilinguals are mysteriously treasonous, with two languages dividing their national allegiancesⁱⁱⁱ. In reality, language education is never neutral. To say it another way, language education is always contested in ways that subjects such as mathematics seldom are. Richard (1986) reminds us that at the turn of the last century, the state sponsored abrogation of Spanish in southwestern schools occurred at the same time German was being celebrated in Midwestern schools. Indeed, in the field of bilingual education, Richard’s work makes powerful connections among language, race, identities, and power.

Before “Orientations in Language Planning,” the study of bilingualism had been dominated by the linguistic lens, which focused on issues of how people learn two languages

simultaneously (such as Genesse, 1987), bilingual language development and cognition (including Hakuta, 1986), and language combining, or what has historically been called codeswitching (MacSwan, 1999; Myers-Scotton, 1983; Poplack et al 1988).

Also important is the research of psychologists like Ellen Bialystok, who have focused on the bilingual brain, noting that bilinguals have increased brain plasticity and executive functioning as compared to monolinguals (2001). Psychologists such as Bhatia and Ritchie (2008) have shown how the bilingual brain is capable of increased creativity, both in terms of code mixing and code switching, and in the performance of subtle social interactions.

While linguists and psychologists have contributed much to the study of bilingualism, it is striking to see that Richard's language orientations idea continues to push scholars to consider the social politics of language and identity. Ofelia's transformative text, *Bilingualism in the 21st Century* (2011) employs Ruiz's language orientations approach, and makes it central. García makes clear that one of the key ideas in bilingualism today is translanguaging. Translanguaging is what people in bilingual/multilingual communities do every day. García, Bartlett, and Kleifgen (2007) describe translanguaging as using all of the linguistic resources at a person's or a community's disposal. To say it another way, translanguaging, distinct from codeswitching, embraces the idea that bilingual individuals are not switching between bounded languages, but that their linguistic repertoire is one entity, comprised of intersecting semiotic systems. Rather than understanding the native language as a bounded system that "interferes" with learning a new language, scholars like García understand the languages in one's repertoire as resources that can be combined in many ways to create new meanings. The concept of translanguaging owes much to Richard's language-as-resource orientation. Richard saw the ability to combine languages as something that was an advanced kind of language use, something that should be invited into the classroom. His former student and colleague, Mary Carol Combs has said, "Perhaps Richard used the term 'code-switching' rather than 'translanguaging,' but that is what he meant."

In another example, Colin Baker's *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (2011), now in its fifth edition, is widely thought of as the bible of bilingual education and bilingualism. In this text, Baker nimbly synthesizes different aspects of the linguistic and psychological research on bilingualism, and tellingly, he devotes an entire chapter to Richard's orientations of language: language as problem; language as right; language as resource. When I presented an early version of this paper at a colloquium at my university, the University of Texas at El Paso, one of our doctoral students who is studying bilingualism and who has been a bilingual teacher had a great insight. She noted that in her practice as a bilingual educator in the United States, she had seen language understood as a problem, a right, and a resource all at the same time, within a single moment in the classroom, depending on who the student was and who the teacher was (G. Dosa, personal communication, Oct. 22, 2015). Indeed, Richard's language orientations idea continues its influence on both bilingual education research and practice.

Heritage Language Education

Who fits in the category of the heritage language learner? In 2001, Guadalupe Valdés wrote about heritage learners, understanding them as people who were connected personally or historically to a language that is not part of the canon (e.g., Indigenous languages, immigrant languages). She also saw heritage learners as a particular kind of language student. For example, heritage learners are students who take Spanish classes, having grown up hearing and/or speaking Spanish at home, but whose bilingualism may be limited. That might mean they have vocabulary focused most on the domain of the home, or that they have receptive skills (listening), but their productive abilities (speaking) are less well developed. Joshua Fishman (2001) thought about heritage learners in terms of the history of their communities in the United States. Fishman identified three categories of heritage languages: Indigenous languages that are now endangered, as a result of national policies to destroy them (McCarty, 2002); European colonial languages from the early days of the nation, such as Spanish, French, and German; and the languages of more recent immigrants, such as Arabic, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Both Valdés' and Fishman's chapters appeared in the edited volume, *Heritage Languages in America: Preserving a National Resource*. Richard's language-as-resource orientation framed the initial work on heritage languages.

While Richard's work can be credited with generating the development of heritage language education, he was also critical of the very term *heritage*. He agrees with Daniel Villa's arguments (1996; 2002) that there are significant differences between oral and written language, and that it is unclear as to which form scholars are referring to when they reference academic or standard Spanish. Villa asked whether academic Spanish is "a spoken linguistic reality, a written variety, or an idealization" (2002: 226). Richard sees the disconnection between the Spanish spoken in U.S. communities and the Spanish taught in classrooms as a question of power and understands academic Spanish as more of an idealization than a reality. By focusing solely on idealized language forms, the knowledge that heritage language learners embody gets erased.

In 2002, the scholarly journal, *Heritage Language Education* began publication, and by 2009, Brinton, Kagan, and Bauckus' volume, *Heritage Language Education: A New Field Emerging* came on the scene. In the first chapter of that text, Hornberger and Wang (2009) built on Valdés' and Fishman's definitions of the heritage learner by bringing the cultural and socio-psychological aspects of being a heritage learner into view. Being connected to a heritage language brings with it knowledge that is linguistic, cultural, social, and historical. That understanding again, stems from Richard's language-as-resource orientation. The Center for Applied Linguistics says on its website that "language diversity should be seen as an asset, not a problem" (retrieved from www.cal.org). Again, that is Richard's influence.

In reference to heritage languages in the United States, Thomas Ricento (2015) pointed out that "we are still awaiting the 'fuller development' of a resource-oriented approach alluded to by Ruiz" (p. 349). It seems quite clear that Richard's language orientations idea undergirds the

developing field of heritage language education, and that it continues to be foundational in language planning and in bilingual education.

Up to this point, I have explored the immense impact of Richard's article, "Orientations on Language Planning" on three scholarly fields. It is indeed rare for one scholarly article to shape so much subsequent work in so many fields. In the next section, I turn to another influential article, "The Empowerment of Language-Minority Students."

Multicultural Education

Not only did Richard mentor Nancy Hornberger at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, but he mentored Christine Sleeter, as well. Christine Sleeter is a scholar of multicultural education, teacher preparation for culturally diverse schools, and anti-racism education. When I asked Christine about the experience of working with Richard, she told me:

He was on my dissertation committee at the University of Wisconsin in about 1981. My major professor Carl Grant put Richard on the committee. Richard had just arrived at UW as an assistant professor in the Educational Policy Department. My dissertation was a study of the student culture in a desegregated junior high; the students of color were mainly African American and Mexican American. I didn't have a background in language, linguistics, or bilingualism at all, so Richard raised some questions for me to think about with respect to language issues in the school.

In the early 1990s, Christine edited an influential anthology called *Empowerment through Multicultural Education*, and because Richard's work had led her to think about the role of language in multicultural education, she invited him to contribute a chapter to it. The result was "The Empowerment of Language-Minority Students," and while only ten pages long, it made a powerful contribution to the field of multicultural education.

Beginning from the standpoint of critical pedagogy and post-colonial theory, Richard asks what it might mean to be "empowered." Just as he did in "Orientations of Language Planning," Richard continues to look for meanings in context. He digs into the work of Jim Cummins, selecting Cummins because of his personal commitment to English Language Learners (ELLs) and his influence in the field. Richard makes it clear that he is not singling Cummins out. Seeking to understand how Cummins used the term "empowerment," Richard identifies it as something people in power do for those who did not have access to power. From there, he asks these fundamental questions:

If empowerment is a gift from those in power to those without, what kind of power would they be willing to give up? Will it be a sort that might lead to the transformation of society? Could empowerment entail another sort of acculturation, by which we change the behavior of underachieving students to conform to that of high achievers? Are higher test scores the ultimate index of empowerment? Would empowered students become critical, or merely successful? (1991, p. 222).

By asking who is doing the empowerment and for what purposes, Richard deftly brings Freire (2000) to the table. Richard critiques the idea that empowerment is something done to those who lack power, just as Freire critiqued traditional education (i.e., the banking model), as something that is done to the student by the teacher. He argues that if empowerment is a transitive verb (i.e., a verb that requires a direct object, the receiver of the action), then it is probably not a good thing.

Connected to his critique of empowerment as a gift from the powerful, Richard theorizes about the difference between language and voice. Noting that voice is a central idea in critical pedagogy, he makes it clear that in critical pedagogy, the students' voices are not included in the curriculum – they *are* the curriculum. By including bilingual education in the curriculum, the notion remains that this addition will fix the problem. Richard suggests that language is abstract, but that voice is concrete. Then he explores the difference between the two, noting that:

Language has a life of its own – it exists even when it is suppressed; when voice is suppressed, it is not heard – it does not exist. To deny people their language, as in the colonial situations described by Fanon (1967) and Macedo (1983), is to be sure, to deny them voice; but to allow them “their” language (as in the bilingual education ...cases...) is not necessarily to allow them voice. Indeed, this may be the most evil form of colonialism, because everyone, even the colonizers themselves, recognize it as just the opposite. To have a voice implies not just that people can say things, but that they are heard (that is, that their words have status, influence) (1991, p. 220).

To say it another way, even when Spanish speakers, for example, have access to bilingual education, English is the voice that continually speaks over Spanish. Voice is central to critical pedagogy, and it must also be central to bilingual education reform.

Richard's concept of voice, which means having the power to be heard in the larger conversation, has become a foundational idea in both research and practice in multicultural education. It is evident in work on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, *interalia*), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010, *interalia*), the preparation of culturally responsive teachers (Villegas and Lucas, 2002, *interalia*), and multicultural learning communities (Nieto, 1999, *interalia*). Again, with a single essay, carefully thought through, Richard's work has shaped a field.

Family Resemblance

It is truly remarkable that Richard's work has impacted so many scholarly endeavors. Why have his two articles, “Orientations in Language Planning” and “The Empowerment of Language-Minority Students” been so generative? I have a theory about that.

Richard encouraged me to read Wittgenstein when I was a doctoral student. He admired Wittgenstein's philosophical journey. That is, when Wittgenstein wrote the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), he rather pompously claimed to have single-handedly solved all the

problems of philosophy that had flummoxed every Western philosopher before him. The *Tractatus* was the only book Wittgenstein published during his lifetime. The work of the later part of his life, *Philosophical Investigations* (1958), was published after his death, and it was in that text that Wittgenstein refuted all of his previously held notions. The *Investigations* was a much more humble document. When Richard and I would talk about Wittgenstein, we would talk less about Wittgenstein a, the logical positivist of the *Tractatus*, and far more about Wittgenstein b, the social constructivist of the *Investigations*.

As I prepared to write this essay, I returned to the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations*, the social constructivist, and in particular, to his idea of family resemblance, which I will explicate below. I argue that the reason Richard's work has influenced so many fields has to do with his deeply creative application Wittgensteinian ideas.

Thinking about concepts is a big part of what we do as scholars. Too often, we come up with new ideas that are merely old ideas with one small change. But Richard did something very different. He *thought* about concepts like "language," "empowerment," and "voice" and then he *looked*. He looked carefully at how people used these concepts in everyday contexts. He looked at the ways in which concepts were related to each other. I argue that Richard applied Wittgenstein's approach to the study of language in context, and that:

instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all – but that they are related to one another in many different ways.

And it is because of this relationship, of these relationships, that we call them all "language" (1958, p. 31).

The idea of meanings for Wittgenstein is not about difference (e.g., Black is not White), but rather, meanings emerge in relationship, through a series of similarities that weave in and out between large similarities and small ones.

Wittgenstein used the metaphor of games to further explore his ideas about meaning. Board games have some things in common with card games; card games have some things in common with ball games; ball games have some things in common with chess; chess has some things in common with tennis; tennis has some things in common with ring-a-ring-a-roses. "And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way," Wittgenstein said, and we "can see how similarities crop up and disappear" (1958, p. 32). By considering the similarities among these games, he came to call games a kind of family of meanings.

This is Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblances. That is, meanings are produced through subtle similarities, not only through bold differences. I think Richard's "Orientations in Language Planning" are a family of meanings. Richard's approach to understanding "empowerment" also relied on looking at how the word was used in context. And his distinction between "language" and "voice" acknowledges the criss-crossing meanings that arise in use, while focusing on the relational meanings they share and the ways in which relations of power lead to their differences. Richard thought about what words mean, and then looked carefully at cases of their use. In doing that, he uncovered the theoretical frames that lay beneath them.

Then he made those frames explicit for the rest of us, and showed us his tracks through many different literatures.

Conclusion

Richard Ruiz' ideas have shaped and continue to shape no fewer than four fields: language policy and planning, bilingual education, heritage language education, and multilingual education. Like Wittgenstein, he did not publish a great amount, but what he published has been hugely influential. Richard used ideas from the philosophy of language and situated them anthropologically, in the more applied contexts of other fields. His ideas remain prescient and present in many fields, in spite of his physical absence. May Richard's ideas continue to make meaning.

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ⁱ Sememe is a term from structural semiotics that refers to an elementary particle of meaning.

ⁱⁱ Of course this is the nativist approach, and is based on fear more than evidence. Timothy McVeigh illustrates the folly of this view. McVeigh was "the Oklahoma City Bomber," a monolingual English speaker who bombed a federal building in 1995, killing 168 people and injuring more than 600. Hardly a patriot.

ⁱⁱⁱ Civil rights activist Cesar Chavez contributed to the struggles for racial, ethnic, and economic equality in the United States, bringing the nation closer to its ideals. He did so as a bilingual American, and his birthday is marked as a national holiday in many parts of the United States.