

Resistance & Appropriation: Literacy Practices as Agency within Hegemonic Contexts

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Hegemony & Agency

- n Current conception of *hegemony* is problematic at best
 - q Considered as singular, rather than multiple
 - q Views subjected as “mystified”
 - q Leads to ideological determinism for subjects
- n *Agency* suggests that actors have awareness of power relationships and make conscious decisions

Clayton’s Framework

- n Uses issue of “consciousness” to problematize “mystification”
- n Agents either resist or accommodate hegemonic ideologies and practices
 - q Resistance is overt or “everyday”
 - q Accommodation involves either collaboration, conversion, or pragmatic acceptance

Our Conceptual Framework

- n Framework emerged from Clayton (1998)
 - q *Hegemony* as an overall system of power relationships
 - q *Agency* as conscious acts that weaken the power of the hegemonic system
- n Literacy as social practice
 - q Communities have multiple ways of practicing literacies
 - q Literacies are patterned by culture and power

Research Questions

- n What evidence is there that dominated groups exhibit agency through their language and literacy practices?
- n What *types* of agency do these practices reflect?
- n What do these literacy practices suggest about the construct of hegemony? About the relationship between hegemony and agency?

Methodology

- n Cross-case analysis of 7 ethnographic case studies from the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS):
 - n Scholars from Botswana
 - n Farmers in Puerto Rico
 - n Urban middle-school students in an alternative school
 - n Chinese-American immigrants
 - n Orphaned Sudanese refugee youth
 - n Cuban refugees
 - n An African-American girl

Methodology

- n Inferred agentive practices from:
 - q Meta-matrix of literacy practices across CPLS
 - q Interview transcripts from each case
 - q Contextual data from narrative descriptions each case
- n Coded agentive practices to:
 - q Test Clayton's categories, and
 - q Look for new categories

Two agentive responses to hegemony

- n Identified 41 acts of agency
 - q Acts are collapsed across cases
 - q More than one participant or case
- n Resistance:
 - q rejection through overt or covert means
- n Appropriation:
 - q using hegemonic practices *for agents' own purposes*
 - q *transforming* the original practice

Patterns in agency across contexts

- n Overt Resistance:
 - q Strong in Cuban and Chinese-American cases
 - q Largely about maintaining a national identity
 - q Largely in cases where hegemonic structure was indirect and allowed for resistance

Patterns in agency across contexts

- n Covert Resistance:
 - q Strong in two middle-school cases
 - n Students were "non-voluntary" population
 - q None in cases from Botswana or refugees from Cuba and the Sudan in the U.S.
 - q Largely in cases where hegemonic structure was direct, apparent, and strong

Patterns in agency across contexts

- n Appropriation
 - q Highest proportion of agentive acts coded as appropriation
 - q All cases exhibited instances of appropriation
 - q Strong responses to hegemony in Puerto Rican farmers and Sudanese refugees
 - n Both driven by political purposes and strife
 - q Some appropriations did not involve direct responses to hegemonic context

Types of hegemonies

- n Hegemonies defined by:
 - q the context of the systems involved
 - q the relationship between those in power and those who are dominated
- n Two types of hegemonies
 - q Direct: powerful have great control over the dominated
 - n Apparent power structure, clearly subjected groups
 - q Diffuse: powerful have less obvious control over the dominated
 - n Power structure less apparent

Types of hegemonies

n Direct hegemonies

- q do not allow for overt resistance, but many covert acts
- q relatively few appropriations
- q e.g. middle school cases, Cuba, Sudan

n Diffuse hegemonies

- q overt resistance is acceptable, covert unnecessary
- q relatively many appropriations
- q e.g. Botswana, U.S. contexts of immigrants and refugees, Puerto Rico

