Community and School Language Profile

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CIEP 504 Applied Linguistics for Teachers
Community Profile

Neighborhood: Albany Park

Prior to conducting the community profile, I knew nothing about the neighborhood of Albany Park. I chose this community to focus on due to the fact that it is an area with a Korean population. In researching the neighborhood, I found that the stretch of Lawrence Ave between Kedzie and Pulaski is known as Seoul Drive and nicknamed “Koreatown.” The neighborhood is also home to a Korean television station (WOCH-CA. 41), radio station (1330 AM), and two Korean-language newspapers. I wanted a neighborhood influenced by Korean linguistics because I work with a large number of Korean students at my school in Buffalo Grove. Before visiting the community, I researched the historical background of the neighborhood. I discovered a rich history and background on the every changing culturally diverse community.

Community Background

The area now known as Albany Park began as a sparsely settled farming community. In the early to mid 1800s, German and Swedish immigrants settled here. At this time, the area was part of Jefferson Township. From this background knowledge on the start of Albany Park, I can infer that when the area was first settled the primary languages spoken in the area were German, Swedish, and most likely English. In the late 1800s as Chicago’s population grew, Jefferson Township was annexed and became part of the city. When this happened, investment developers moved in. One of which was a native of Albany, New York and named his development after his hometown.
As the community grew due to investors bring in transportation lines, the population of Albany Park began to change. According to the Encyclopedia of Chicago, “The 1910 census counted 7,000 inhabitants; by 1920 the number more than tripled to 26,676. In 1930 more than 55,000 people resided in the northwest Chicago neighborhood.” In the early 1900s, the community became home to a large number of Jewish Russians. The community was thriving in the early to mid 1900s with the opening of businesses, community centers, public schools, parks, synagogues, and churches. The neighborhood was thriving and growing quickly. According to Schmidt (2012), “Haugan School was expanded several times until it stretched over an entire city block, becoming Chicago’s largest elementary school. Roosevelt High School grew so crowded that the nearby Von Steuben School was converted into another high school. The city widened Kimball Avenue, and the street got its own bus line.

With the booming economy and the large Jewish population, Albany Park became the center for Jewish life in Chicago. According to the Chicago History Museum Research Center, “The need for a Jewish center in Albany Park was recognized as early as 1931 when Samuel A. Goldsmith, executive
director of Jewish Charities of Chicago, surveyed the area and found that 60 percent of its population was Jewish.” This large Jewish population influenced the languages used in the community. Many community members were fluent in English and Hebrew. According to the Chicago Jewish News Online, “By 1950, when the Jewish population of Albany Park reached its peak, the Albany Park Hebrew Congregation synagogue had more than 2,000 members, with 600 children in its Hebrew school.” The predominately Jewish community changed again after World War II when Jewish families began moving to the suburban areas of Skokie and Lincolnwood.

Due the suburban exodus, Albany Park was left in an economic and social decline. In the late 1900s, Albany Park was on its way to becoming a slum. According to Neary (2005), “In the 1970s, 70 percent of the commercial property along Lawrence Avenue stood vacant. Empty buildings attracted illegal drug trade, prostitution, and gangs.” The neighborhood was then revitalized in 1978 by city government community appearance efforts and with a new wave of immigrants from Asia and Spanish-speaking countries. Neary (2005) explains the revitalization, “Albany Park's renewal
included streetscape beautification, the Facade Rebate Program, low-interest loans, and other financing packages. Redevelopment efforts led to a decrease in commercial vacancies and an increase in residential property values in the 1980s and 1990s. Albany Park again presented an attractive urban neighborhood for real-estate development and commercial investment.” Home sales increased and businesses began thriving again. By 1990, the community claimed the largest number of immigrants in Chicago from Korea, Guatemala, and the Philippines.

The large Korean population played a vital role in the revitalization of the neighborhood. The Korean population filled civic and commercial roles in the community. With the new immigration shift, the people of Albany Park brought with them their native languages and cultures to the community. I can assume that at this time Korean, varieties of Spanish, and other languages were widely being used. Again the population shifted throughout the 1990s with Korean immigrants moving to the suburbs. The 2010 census reported that 52,000 people were living in Albany Park. About half of the population was Hispanic. Non-Hispanic Whites numbered 29 percent, and Asians — mostly Koreans — were 14 percent. African-Americans were counted at 4 percent.” From German and Swedish to Jewish to South American and Korean, to the ever-changing immigration patterns visible in Albany Parks past, present, and future, the language and culture of the community continues to evolve. As the community members of Albany Park have changed over the years, the language patterns have also changed. From its history to my present day observations, it is easy to see why Albany Park is known as Chicago’s gateway to the world and one of the most ethnically diverse community’s.
My Observations

I visited Albany Park on a Sunday afternoon with my husband Stephen. We spent several hours walking around taking in the neighborhood. We took the Brown Line north to the Kedzie stop. When we first got off the L-train we walked north along Kedzie toward Lawrence. I noticed a number of Lebanese and Middle Eastern businesses. I saw Zabiha Meat—a Lebanese meat market, Noon O Kabab—a Persian restaurant, and Al-Khyam Bakery and Al-Khaymeith Restaurant—Lebanese and Middle Eastern businesses.

In the store and business windows, I saw menus and advertisements in multiple languages. Often the heritage language was used first followed by English. This tells me that community member’s language skills are very diverse and that a large number of people speak the heritage languages represented by the stores and businesses. I also feel that cultural and demographic contextual factors contribute to the language variety. Since Albany Park is so diverse and accepting of the many ethnic groups, it makes sense for stores and businesses to cater to heritage speakers. From my research, I was a little surprised to see these Middle Eastern stores. In reflecting on my research, the businesses I saw are most likely representative of the people currently living in Albany Park.

We stopped along Lawrence and ate a late lunch at Great Sea Chinese/Korean restaurant. In the restaurant, all of the waitresses were of Asian decent. The other patrons in the restaurant were as diverse as the community. There were
families of South America decent, Asians, and a few white people. I knew the restaurant was going to be good when the entire place was packed upon arrival at 2:45 p.m. The restaurant was known for its spicy wings and they were delicious!

While eating, I heard people speaking in English, Spanish, Korean or Chinese, and people code-switching between their primary language and English. The restaurant employees' language varieties included code-switching. They spoke in English and switched to Korean or Chinese when conversing with each other. I heard code-switching between English and Korean or Chinese being used interchangeably. I was surprised at the ease in which the employees code-switched between languages. For the waitresses, I feel that the interchangeable ease in code-switching is due to the diversity of customers and being in the restaurant industry.

In terms of language function, the waitress used her heritage language as her social/casual language register. She joked with other heritage speakers and seemed to carry on informal casual conversations with the other staff members. When speaking in English to restaurant customers, the waitress seemed to use English as her formal “work speak.” The waitress seemed to have a highly developed social language proficiency in English in being able to answer questions and communicating with patrons in English. I would be curious to know if she has used her L1 to transfer knowledge and develop her academic language proficiency in English? I had a great lunch and then continued exploring the neighborhood.

After lunch, we continued walking west on Lawrence and went a little ways past Kimball. I began seeing Mexican restaurants and a Grocery store with advertisements written is Spanish. I continued to see a variety of businesses with signs written primarily in English,
Spanish, Lebanese, and Arabic. The language variety I saw from ads, signs, and menus, tells me that the language skills in the community are very diverse. The stores and businesses seem to cater to people of the same ethnic group. They are advertising authentic cuisine by using their heritage language in signs. Some of the stores didn’t have English translations, which then would cater primarily to those who speak the language. Since the community is so diverse, the businesses also cater to other ethnic groups. I inferred this because in the businesses’ ads, signs, and menus, the heritage language was written first followed by an English translation. I can conclude that English is the lingua franca used among people in the neighborhood who speak different languages but shop and dine at ethnic stores that are different from their own ethnicity.

There were several Chinese, and Korean businesses but not as many as I thought I’d see. Based on what I learned as I researched the historical background of the community with a large Korean population that moved into the neighborhood in the late 1990s; I thought that I would see more. From what I observed, I can infer that Albany Park is going through another immigration shift in its population. I can conclude that the Korean population is moving out of the neighborhood and that Latin American immigrants are moving in. I saw many families with young children of Latin American decent. The language variety I heard was adults and children speaking in Spanish and English and code-switching between the two languages. In some of the interactions I observed, I heard adults talking to children in Spanish and children responding in English. In overhearing these interactions, I can assume that these Spanish-speaking adults and children are bilingual.

There were several street vendors selling fruits and vegetables out of trucks and ice cream out of street carts. As I walked I saw discount stores, currency exchanges, restaurants, and local businesses. There was some graffiti on buildings and trash along the street. Most of the stores
had bars on the windows. I didn’t think I was in the safest neighborhood but felt okay because I saw lots of people and children on the sidewalks. However, as Stephen and I walked two young white men that seemed up to no good approached us. The men used nonverbal body language to intimidate us. They stared us up and down and flexed their arms at us as they strutted toward us. You could tell they were trying to intimidate Stephen and make us feel uncomfortable. Stephen ignored the two men by not verbally engaging or making eye contact with them and we luckily walked past them with no problem. Shortly after this encounter, we made our way back down Lawrence to the L-train Kedzie stop. I would have like to have gone back to the neighborhood to explore other streets but I didn’t feel comfortable going back alone. From my observations and experience, the Albany Park neighborhood is a richly diverse community with many different cultural groups living and working in one area.

The linguistic repertoires and contextual factors (deJong, 2011) of Albany Park are primarily based on the community being hugely diverse. The community has always celebrated and embraced its rich diversity in being known as one of the most ethnically diverse communities with over 40 languages spoken in its public schools. There are a variety of languages spoken and registers used among community members. The varieties I experienced were code-switching between heritage language and English, heritage languages being used as the vehicle for casual, informal, joking conversations and English as the vehicle for “business” conversation (i.e., communicating with customers at a restaurant). I really liked seeing that heritage languages are viewed and used as equally important languages to English. I saw this in terms of the language domains used. Stores and businesses used written heritage language for menus, advertisements, and signs. Some businesses had English translations but many only used the heritage language. In Albany Park it seems culturally and socially acceptable to use ones
heritage language as the primary source for each language domain. With so much cultural groups in one area, it could be argued that the lingua franca of Albany Park is English.

School Profile

School: Volta Elementary School—4950 N Avers Ave, Chicago, IL 60625

School Background

Located in Albany Park are eight Chicago Public elementary, middle, and high schools. I chose Alessandro Volta Elementary School to focus on for the school profile because it is located in the heart of Albany Park. I wanted a school centered in the community I was exploring and learning about. I also chose this school because of its diverse student population, which is representative of the Albany Park community and
linguistic environment. According to the school website, around 90% of the student population comes from homes where another language is spoken. The diverse student body is comprised of 8.7% Caucasians, 4.2% blacks, 64.6% Hispanics, and 22.5% Asians. I was able to gather a wealth of information from the school website and staff webpages. In researching Volta Elementary, I discovered a richly diverse school with a variety of resources, programs, and community partnerships related to language teaching and learning.

Volta Elementary School is a neighborhood school servicing approximately 1020 students from Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade. The school uses a comprehensive general education curriculum with a variety of bilingual and special education services. The student population represents 23 different language backgrounds. According to the CPS school profile, 86.7% of students come from low-income families, 9.7% are identified as special education students, and 47.4% identified as limited English learners. The languages represented within the school are: Spanish, Arabic, Cambodian, Tagalog (Pilipino), Vietnamese, Romanian, Bosnian, Assyrian, Cantonese, French, Ewe, Turkish, Russian, Swahili, Somali, Creole, Burmese, Bulgarian, Kurundi, Korean, Gujarati, Malayalam, and Urdu. From the richly diverse student body, there are thirty-eight countries represented at the school. The countries represented are: Guatemala, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, Ecuador, Panama, Honduras, Chile, Columbia, Peru, Bahamas, Egypt, Burundi, Somalia, Congo, Liberia, Iraq, Jordan, Yemen, Palestine, India, Pakistan, Russia, Romania, Bosnia, Burma, Russia, Bulgaria, Philippines, Vietnam, China, Korea, Cambodia, Haiti, Albania, Serbia, and Assyria. According to the school website (2009), “The diverse cultural make-up of Volta's student body and faculty make it an exciting place to both learn and teach.” The following information was collected from the school website:
**School Mission:** Alessandro Volta's mission is to close the achievement gap by providing high-quality instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards that will prepare our students for college, careers and the global workforce. It is our mission to prepare students to be responsible citizens and leaders who are tolerant of diverse perspectives and can communicate, think critically and problem solve.

**School Vision:** Alessandro Volta welcomes the children of the world and prepares them for a lifetime of success and service.

**School Motto:** "Where the world comes together!"

**School Findings**

In researching Volta, I learned a lot about the school and the programs it provides specifically in regards to language teaching and learning. I think the school does a great job recognizing, accepting, and celebrating students’ cultural diversity. According to the school website, about 45% of our immigrant students are identified as English language learners (ELLs) and are enrolled in bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. With such a diverse student population, the school language programs provided include: two Spanish/English Dual Language sections for grades 1-4 and one section of Spanish/English Dual Language for Pre-K, ESL classes and teachers for Arabic, Gujarati, and Spanish, Arabic as a foreign language for grades 6-8, and what I infer as one designated gifted classroom teacher per grade level for grades 1-5. The Dual Language program uses an additive model of two-way immersion. The goal of the program is for students to become bilingual and biliterate in being able to speak, listen, read, and write in both Spanish and English. Dedicated educators trained in language education and multilingual programs provide the many language programs at Volta.
The diverse programs are taught by Volta’s talented staff members of which, 46% hold Masters degrees and 100% are considered highly qualified. The school has specific positions for: bilingual lead teacher, dual language coordinator, Arabic world language instructor, RtI coordinator, and special education. As well as specials classes, which students have once a week for the areas of: music, art, character education, computers, P.E., and library. In addition to providing many language programs, the school also provides various academic programs. The school has a teen reach program for students in grades 3-8 as well as after school reading programs for students in grades 2-8 who need extra assistance in reading and math. The school serves approximately 100 students with disabilities. Special education instruction is provided through an inclusion program model. The school also offers a comprehensive gifted education programs for about 125 students in grades 1-8. The school has a strong partnership with parents and community organizations. The website stated that, “At Volta, the Principal, Assistant Principals, staff members, Volta Local School Council (LSC) and parents work together as a cooperative group, which focuses on students and their academic growth. Volta Elementary School is committed to students’ growth and well being in regards to language learning.”

Volta does a great job utilizing the resources within the community. The school has strong partnerships with various non-profit organizations. Partner organizations include: Family Focus, Albany Park Community Center, Albany Park Neighborhood Council, World Relief, Indo-American Center, and the universities of North Park University and Northeastern University. Family Focus is an essential community partner at Volta. From the school website (2009) I learned, “The mission of our community school initiative is to promote the well-being of children and their families. We offer after school programs for 1st-5th graders, support parent involvement, and connect the school with other organizations in the community. We believe that
the education of children is linked to the strength of their families and the resources in their communities.” Community activities organized by Family Focus include: Korean Culture family night, field trips to Urban Habitat of Chicago, and a cooking and nutrition workshop.

I also discovered in an end of year school newsletter a celebratory news blurb on parents graduating from an ESL class. Parents took part in an 8-week adult English as a Second Language class sponsored by Family Focus and Truman College. Over 30 parents completed the session and received certificates from City Colleges of Chicago. The partner organizations plan to continue this program in the fall when school resumes. These community programs not only enrich students’ experiences but also encourage cultural and linguistic diversity. With partnerships from Family Focus and the Indo-American Center, the school promotes not just the language instruction of students but the entire family.
School Recommendations

With all of the knowledge I gained about the community of Albany Park and Volta Elementary School, I have several recommendations that would benefit and align the linguistic environment and language teaching and learning in the school and community. Based on my findings, I recommend the following: (a) Volta and community partners promote and/or organize heritage language programs, (b) provide resources to parents in multiple languages, and (c) offer more world language choices for upper grades 6-8.

With such a culturally diverse community and school population, I feel that heritage language programs offered to students would be beneficial in supporting their language development and multilingualism. In his article Children’s Mother Tongue: Why it is important for education, Jim Cummins gives a number of research based reasons on why it is important to support students’ heritage language. According to Cummins (2001), “Children who come to school with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language” (p. 17). Heritage language is an essential part of culturally identity and research has proven that when students have a strong foundational understanding of their first language it is much easier to develop a second language. Cummins (2001) also states:

More than 150 research studies conducted during the past 35 years strongly support what Goethe once said: “The person who knows only one language does not truly know that language”. The research suggests that bilingual children may also develop more flexibility in their thinking as a result of processing information through two different languages” (p. 17).

Providing heritage language classes at school would promote cultural diversity and minority languages. This would provide what deJong defines as linguistic equity. It would create language
enrichment and increase minority language status outside the classroom. This would also support deJong’s principle of structuring integration. In discussing structuring for integration, deJong quotes, “Being with other bilingual learners appears to be an advantage for the students. Grouping students from the same ethnic and linguistic background can also support the development of stronger (bi) cultural identities (Andersson, 1971; Faltis, 1994). Heritage language classes would be a great way to support students’ development of bicultural identities.

Volta does a great job promoting multilingualism with its Spanish dual language, ESL, and Arabic foreign language programs, but with so many cultures it is impossible to support and develop every child’s native tongue. To find out students developmental level in their L1, the school and community could conduct surveys. Brisk and Harrington (2000, pp. 130-140) “list over 30 questions teachers can ask to get to know their multilingual learners. They include questions about students’ immigration history as well as about parents’ languages and education, home language and literacy practices, and students’ reading and writing experiences in schools in the native language and the second language.” The school and community could utilize this book to better understand students, families, and create heritage programs. In using the surveys, teachers could easily cluster students by ability and heritage language to create learning groups that would develop students L1. Using the surveys to find out about parents linguistic background and education would also be beneficial. In finding out about parents and their assets, the school could utilize parents’ to teach heritage language classes. The school could also work collaboratively with local organizations to create heritage language programs. This would encourage community members to participate and instruct courses to support the youth of their culture. The school already has many partnerships with local organizations. Setting up heritage language programs with help from parents and these organizations could easily be attained. In
doing this, language maintenance and language transfer would occur and students would have increased metalinguistic awareness.

Another recommendation I have is to provide resources to parents in multiple languages. With Volta school valuing and celebrating its students’ diversity, I was surprised to see only a few resources provided in Spanish. Most of the school website was in English. The only Spanish I found was for grade level supply lists for the dual language classes. There were also school uniform requirements listed in Spanish. With having such a diverse population, a Spanish dual language program, and ESL instructors for Arabic, Spanish, and Gujarati, I was surprised to not find multilingual information. To support parents and strengthen the school/community relationship, Volta could provide newsletters, school forms, and school information in multiple languages. In doing this, Volta would provide what deJong defines as linguistic equity. They would be valuing the languages of their families and providing access to school information and resources.

My last recommendation is for Volta to offer different world language choices for the upper grade levels foreign language classes. Currently grades 6-8 are only offered Arabic at school. I think students would benefit from being given several language choices to choose from. If Volta couldn’t afford adding additional world language classes, they could incorporate student-run language classes after school. This would be a great way to reinforce the cultural value of students L1. This would provide great opportunities for students and directly connects to deJong’s principals. According to deJong (2011), “engaging in culturally affirmative practices requires spaces where students’ voices can be heard and their experiences can be validated” (p. 186). It would also provide students with an opportunity to take on a leadership role and responsibility in planning and teaching others about their language. deJong (2011) also states,
“Affirming students’ linguistic learning identities calls for a more holistic approach, which allows multilingual students to demonstrate their knowledge through multiple languages and not just through the societal language, whenever appropriate” (p. 191). Giving students the opportunity to learn from one another would promote deJong’s principals of affirming identities and structuring integration. It would also provide linguistic equity. As deJong (2011) states, “When teachers invite students to share what they already know and consider their personal experiences in their planning, they are able to validate students’ daily experiences and interests” (p. 189). Since the school is so culturally diverse, I feel that students would love the opportunity to learn from one another in student-run language class. It would also be another unique way for the student to celebrate the linguistic diversity of its students.

With the wonderful programs and partnerships that currently exist and the recommendations outlined above, I feel that Volta Elementary and the community of Albany Park could strengthen its linguistic environment and language teaching and learning of its community members.
References


