

# Critical Media Analysis in Teacher Education: Exploring Language-Learners' Identity Through Mediated Images of a Non-Native Speaker of English

Carla Chamberlin-Quinlisk

---

*Media literacy education has become increasingly present in curricular initiatives around the world as media saturate our cultural environments. For second-language teachers and teacher educators whose practice centers on language, communication, and culture, the need to address media as a pedagogical site of critique is imperative. In this article, I introduce critical media analysis (CMA) as a tool that cultivates discussion of language-learners' identities as they are shaped by popular media. I present CMA in the context of critical language studies and communication theories that situate language in social and political landscapes. I describe a hybrid (quantitative/qualitative) approach to CMA as I apply it to a non-native speaker of English (NNSE) character from an internationally successful Hollywood film. I describe representations that "symbolically colonize" (Molina-Guzmán, 2010) the NNSE as lower class, lower status, and comfortably positioned as subordinate to his native-speaker counterparts. I then share examples of how students use CMA to further explore media cultivation of social attitudes toward language-learning, language policies, and NNSE identity. Overall, this article offers second-language teacher educators a theoretically informed model of analysis that engages TESL professionals as active participants in their media-saturated environments.*

*Comme suite à la saturation de nos environnements culturels par les médias, l'éducation à la littératie médiatique apparaît de plus en plus souvent dans les programmes d'études partout au monde. Ainsi, il est impératif pour les enseignants de langue seconde et les formateurs d'enseignants dont la pratique repose sur la langue, la communication et la culture, de faire des médias l'objet de critique pédagogique. Dans cet article, je présente l'analyse critique des médias (ACM) comme outil qui stimule la discussion sur les identités des apprenants de langues telles qu'elles sont définies par les médias populaires. Je présente l'ACM dans le contexte des études critiques du discours et des théories des communications qui situent la langue dans des paysages sociaux et politiques. Je décris une approche hybride (quantitative/qualitative) à l'ACM telle qu'elle s'applique au personnage, dont la langue maternelle n'est pas l'anglais, d'un film de Hollywood qui a connu un succès international. Je décris des représentations qui « colonisent symboliquement » (Molina-Guzmán, 2010) les locuteurs non natifs de l'anglais (LNNA) en les présentant comme étant de classe inférieure, de statut inférieur et de façon*

*générale, occupant une position subordonnée à leurs homologues anglophones. Je poursuis en fournissant des exemples de l'emploi que font les étudiants de l'ACM pour poursuivre leur exploration de la construction par les médias des attitudes sociales face à l'apprentissage des langues, les politiques portant sur les langues et l'identité des LNNAs. De façon globale, cet article offre aux enseignants de langue seconde un modèle d'analyse reposant sur des bases théoriques qui présente les professionnels en l'enseignement de l'ALS comme des participants actifs dans leurs milieux saturés par les médias.*

---

Popular film and other media have been used as sources of authentic language in second-and foreign-language classrooms for many years, and they continue to gain momentum as new technologies bring media into our lives at an unprecedented rate. In many disciplines, including education, journalism, communication, and sociology, to name a few, media literacy education (MLE) has been a growing area of theoretical and practical interest. Media literacy education refers to knowledge of how to use and create media through new technologies, as well as how to interpret and decode media representations. In addition, Lewis and Jhally (1998) argue that "Media literacy should be about helping people to become sophisticated citizens rather than sophisticated consumers" (p. 109). This emphasis on civic participation is shared by scholars who feel that a public sphere for debate and conversation has been replaced by consumption in our media-saturated worlds (Habermas, 1991; Wyatt & Silva, 2007). Media educators Nowak, Abel, and Ross (2007) contend that the classroom can become a place in our public sphere for challenge and debate, allowing students not only to dissect the content of media images, but also to engage in conversation about the relationship between those who produce and consume media. MLE asks questions such as: Why are these images so popular? What do media images convey that consumers want to believe? What alternatives are available? In other words, MLE is not simply about rhetorical and visual (content) analysis, but addresses larger questions of why certain images are normalized in media, how social interactions are shaped by mediated portrayals of *others*, and how alternative representations might challenge established hegemony. This questioning process is not about pushing a particular political agenda, although it does not deny the political dimensions of mass communication, but about teachers and students recognizing that "Media are part of culture and function as agents of socialization; and that people use their own skills, beliefs and experiences to construct meaning from media messages" (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009, p. 7).

In this article I introduce critical media analysis (CMA) as a model for teacher educators to adapt and integrate into their practice. In my second-language teacher education courses, I use CMA to examine images from popular culture that tell stories about language-learners and then connect these

to discussions of language policy in schools and language-learners' identity. CMA can be used to challenge preservice and inservice teachers to view media as sites of pedagogical critique and to problematize their own use of media inside and outside their classrooms.

#### Media Literacy Education and Second-Language Teaching and Learning

Before discussing media analysis as a specific classroom activity, I briefly describe how media literacy education fits in with current thought in second-language teaching and learning. Specifically, MLE converges with critical language studies in which scholar-teachers challenge the traditional discourses of language teaching and learning. Critical studies recognize the symbolic function of English around the world as it relates to local practices and membership in various communities (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, 2008; Pennycook, 1994, 2007), language policies and ownership (Phillipson, 1992; Widdowson, 1994), and social structures that privilege some groups over others (Benesch, 2001; Kubota & Lin, 2006, 2009; Morgan, 1998; Motha, 2006; Nelson, 2009). Through this critical lens, we know that language-learners have culturally complex identities that are constructed in communities and cultures. Some of these are avowed, whereas others are ascribed to them (although not without resistance) through social structures of inequality (Canagarajah, 1999; Ibrahim, 1999). Moreover, a critical perspective examines texts at social and political levels rather than from an exclusively linguistic point of view. Critical discourse analysis investigates the relationships among texts, social practices, and the processes through which dominance and power are maintained (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Kress, 1990; van Dijk, 1993). Taylor-Mendes' (2009) analysis of EFL textbook images in Brazil, for example, reveals the racialized images of native speakers as an elite White group and recognizes language students and teachers' capabilities to respond critically to these images by questioning relations of power in existing social structures. Such critical language studies give us a deeper understanding of language as a symbolic resource that can both maintain and disrupt dominant discourses that shape language-learners' identity.

Similarly, MLE seeks to unravel the symbolic nature of media and their relationship to social structures. This includes critical examination of the stories being told through media representations and the socio-political contexts in which they are produced. The framing and representation of race, gender, class, and so forth in film, music, magazines, Web sites, television, and textbooks have been and continue to be examined by media scholars, because despite changes in format and distribution, stereotyped images continue to be culturally sanctioned and reproduced. Much as critical language studies offer us a framework for unraveling the relationship between language-learning and social practices, MLE gives us a framework by which to look more closely at the relationship between mediated stories and the social processes that maintain, resist, or reinforce these messages. Clearly the social environ-

ments in which we teach are in many ways shaped by mediated discourses (print, oral, electronic) that we simultaneously consume and produce. By bringing MLE into the language-teacher education classroom, we can engage teachers in conversations about social climate, power, status, and identity and encourage deeper reflection on how media are used as pedagogical resources. Also, like critical language studies, critical MLE assumes that teachers and students are not passive receptacles of information, but are capable of interpreting, resisting, and creating alternatives. In the following section I present critical media analysis as one avenue for incorporating MLE into our work.

### **Critical Media Analysis: A Hybrid Approach**

In the field of communication studies exists a divide between those who quantify media effects (a transmission approach) and those who look at media as a symbolic representation of social hierarchies and hegemony (a cultural studies perspective). I propose here that a hybrid of transmission and cultural approaches can be a useful tool for engaging students in analyzing media messages as well as examining the economic, social, and political forces that shape media content (Lewis & Jhally, 1998; Scharrer, 2002, 2007). By first including a more objective description of text and images, a second stage of critical analysis can be grounded in a complete reading rather than selected examples. From a transmission perspective, cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1980, 1994) holds that media stories are powerful not through a direct relationship to viewers' behaviors, but because they create stable images that are seen repeatedly and through many different forms of media. Consequently, these stable images cultivate quantifiable attitudes in those who see them. Gerbner et al.'s research, based on extensive content analyses and surveys of attitudes, shows that heavy viewers of television tend to view the world as a dangerous place and see minorities in limited roles. Such attitudes can build suspicion and distrust that can ultimately profoundly change patterns of communication in communities (Putnam, 2000).

On the other hand, a cultural-studies approach to media analysis is concerned with the symbolic representations that we impose on our environments in an effort to simplify and manage complexities (Carey, 1992). Carey contends that media representations partly construct a reality in which we live and that both producers and consumers of media are invested in this meaning-making process. From this perspective, media messages do not directly affect viewers, but rather might reveal how media communicate certain attitudes and values in a socially sanctioned way. Media symbolically create a comfortable space in which viewers are not challenged by complex identities and multidimensional characters. For example, Molina-Guzmán (2010) describes Latina representations in popular media as "symbolic colonization" or a "storytelling mechanism through which ethnic and racial differences are

hegemonically tamed and incorporated through media” (p. 9). Her work finds Latina identity as consistently “gendered, racialized, foreign, exotic, and consumable” (p. 9), often reducing Latinas to audience expectations of what they believe Latina identity to be. Molina-Guzmán (2010) does not focus only on mass media production as a response to social climate, but extends her theory to include how to respond to and challenge *Latinidad*, giving voice and agency to target audiences. She explores audience responses through on-line forums as a means of *symbolic rupture* of these representations, noting that ambiguous representation of ethnicity in media can encourage multiple interpretations that reflect audience members’ own complex identities. This qualitative analytical framework of symbolic colonization/symbolic rupture applies also to examinations of non-native speaker of English representations and opportunities to respond critically to these portrayals in teacher education classrooms.

The model of critical media analysis that I develop here draws on both transmission and symbolic orientations. From the former, I extrapolate content analysis as a first step in identifying patterns in imagery and rhetoric in popular culture. From the latter, I connect this content to the maintenance of social attitudes that narrowly define and marginalize language-learners. When my teachers/students first see the stability of media representations, they gain a better understanding of the power of media as cultural storytellers and become more open to critical engagement with mediated texts.

### **Critical Media Analysis in Practice: The Case of a Non-Native Speaker of English in Popular Comedy**

Our new media cultures provide us with a plethora of choices for entertainment as well as formats and sources of production. Despite these choices, feature films produced by Hollywood, Bollywood, Sony Pictures, Canal+, and IFC, to name just a few, remain a bastion of the entertainment industry. Comedies produced by these industries in particular are a rich site for critical media analysis for several reasons. First, comedy often relies on widespread stereotypes to create characters quickly with whom the audience can identify. These stereotypes in fact must resonate strongly with viewers if they are to develop intriguing characters and stories. Second, despite superficial changes in character representations in the past few decades, stereotypes of foreigners and those with accented speech have remained as stable comedic devices in animations, television programs, and film, particularly in United States productions (Ricky Ricardo in *I Love Lucy*, Pepe le Pew and Speedy Gonzalez in Hanna Barbera cartoons, Fez in *That 70’s Show*, Raj in *Big Bang Theory*, Gloria in *Modern Family*, etc.). Third, comedy presents an interesting site where denigrating people and cultures seems to be socially sanctioned, especially when justified by comments such as “everyone gets made fun of, so it’s okay.” In fact, the structure of comedy itself dismisses viewers from challenging neg-

ative stereotypes or interpreting jokes as anything but harmless (Altman, 1987; Feuer, 1992; Rockler, 2002). Hall (1990) says that the presentation of racial humor in the comedic genre “ultimately protects and defends viewers from acknowledging their incipient racism” (p. 17). Not surprisingly, scholars have examined the strong presence of racial stereotypes in comedy and concluded that these images normalize racial differences and dissuade any challenge or resistance to them (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005; Park, Gabbadon, & Chernin, 2006). Lippi-Green (2011), in particular, highlights the role of accent in Disney characters whose attractiveness and great appeal to audiences effectively masks linguistic stereotyping. In a way, comedy presents itself as neutral and therefore immune to accusations of sexism, racism, and linguisticism.

In the following section I present a critical media analysis of a character in a popular Hollywood-produced comedy. Specifically, this study was intended for instructional use with an audience of inservice teachers (both ESL and in other content areas) who participate in professional development programs in teaching English as a second language and intercultural communication. In class I share the objective results of the content analysis with students and then guide them through a critical discussion of the social implications, allowing them to interpret, debate, and make connections to their own experiences. Here I offer a more formal and comprehensive presentation of the critical media analysis in order to illustrate fully the possibilities for classroom discussion and debate.

### *Deconstructing Nazo*

In discussing stereotypes in popular media in my classes over the past few years, the name of one US comedian, Adam Sandler, came up repeatedly as an example of someone who incorporates well-worn stereotypes in appealing characters in his movies, seemingly with great success as measured by worldwide box-office revenues. So with my students and on my own, I began to look more systematically at Sandler’s international success and representations of non-native speakers of American English in his movies. Between 1995 and 2010, Sandler starred in over 15 movies, five of which grossed over \$100 million in the North American box office. His 1999 film *Big Daddy/Drôle de père* remains Sandler’s top box-office-grossing film with initial releases in over 32 countries and now on DVD worldwide (IMDb, 2011). *Big Daddy* uses a native speaker of (American) English (NSE), Rob Schneider, to play a non-native speaker of English (NNSE) character, a role similar to those that Schneider plays in several of Sandler’s productions from 1998 to 2009 including *Waterboy*, *Eight Crazy Nights*, *50 First Dates*, *Click*, *I Now Pronounce you Chuck and Larry*, *Grandma’s Boy*, *Bedtime Stories*, and *You Don’t Mess with the Zohan* (IMDb). Moreover, the character examined here in *Big Daddy*, Nazo, appears again played by Schneider in Sandler’s 2002 film *Mr. Deeds*. Typi-

cally, most of my students are already familiar with *Big Daddy* or can access it easily on cable or satellite television, computers, libraries, or DVD.

The screenplay of *Big Daddy* tells the story of Sonny Kolfax (played by Sandler), a law school-educated young man living in New York. Sonny has avoided beginning his law career and is presented as irresponsible and non-committal to both career and relationships. In the beginning of the film, Sonny's girlfriend breaks up with him. In order to prove his seriousness to her, Sonny finds himself taking care of a young boy, Julian. Sonny unexpectedly grows fond of the boy and is inspired to get his act together, developing into a successful lawyer and committed father by the end of the film. From the beginning to the end, Sonny is often portrayed hanging out in his apartment with his friend Nazo (played by Schnieder), a restaurant delivery man whom Sonny has befriended.

This analysis of Nazo consists of two layers. First, a content analysis of discourse and social roles examines the language and interaction styles associated with this character and describes variables such as occupation, status of position, relationship to other characters, perceptions and performance of roles, non-verbal expression of roles, and privileges and obligations that are connected to Nazo's character (Berger, 1998). Second, a cultural analysis presents Nazo's character as part of a dialogic negotiation among producers, media consumers, and symbolic representations that place NNSE identity within a larger social framework. It is here that we can look at symbolic colonization/symbolic rupture (Molina-Guzmán, 2010). The digitized format of the film allowed for verbatim transcription of all scenes in which Nazo appears, noting both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. The transcriptions were checked for accuracy by the principal researcher and two volunteer upper-division students in a media studies course. In addition, graduate and undergraduate students in communication and applied linguistics courses viewed video clips of Nazo's scenes in the film and wrote down their initial impressions of the character. These descriptions consistently matched the researcher's and raters' interpretations of the character. Interrater consistency aside, this reading of Nazo's identity is offered here as a model for critically engaging with media rather than a definitive interpretation. In any media-related activity, students should be encouraged to question and resist interpretations and formulate their own readings and counter-readings of the texts (Nowak et al., 2007).

### *Looking at Content: Nazo's Conversations and Social Role*

Nazo appears on screen a total of 12 times, mostly in short (5-30-second) scenes with little or no dialogue. Although his cumulative screen time is less than eight minutes, his character makes a consistent visual impact throughout the film. However, we learn little about Nazo. His place of residence and educational background are not mentioned. We never see Nazo in his own home. He is seen mostly in Sonny's apartment and in three other scenes in

public spaces. He occupies only space that he does not own. Moreover, no reference is ever made to his culture, native language, or family, which limits his identifying characteristic to his *foreignness*. Overall, Nazo's actions are inconsequential, and his character and life are one-dimensional. Whereas Sonny transforms his lazy, irresponsible ways to become a highly successful lawyer, husband, and father, Nazo remains the same from beginning to end.

*Language and proficiency.* A discourse-level analysis of Nazo's talk in this film reveals few grammatical errors, accurate comprehension and usage of slang, a narrow range of topics, and a marked, yet non-identifiable accent. On no occasions do his errors impede comprehension of his speech. Nazo's 33 scripted lines contain only two pronunciation errors, one subject-verb agreement error, and occasional article omissions. Nazo uses colloquial speech such as "you goin' down, sucka" and "peace out," as well as complex grammatical constructions. In all his utterances and interactions, Nazo displays an understanding and appropriate usage of tense, modals, subject-verb agreement, and so forth. His speech, however, is marked by an ambiguous yet distinctly foreign accent that determines how others perceive him as a communicator. Despite this proficiency, the 5-year-old boy in the movie negatively judges Nazo's worth as a communicator and person. When Sonny, the boy Julian, and Nazo are taking a vote about whether the child should study more, Sonny and Nazo both respond in the affirmative and tell the boy that he has just lost the vote. Julian replies, "No, it's a tie. That guy [Nazo] doesn't count. He can't even read." Nazo is portrayed as lacking in education and English literacy skills. Despite his high competence in oral English, his illiteracy is what defines his character. In a scene where Sonny is quizzing Julian with words printed on large flash cards, Sonny also presents cards to Nazo.

*Julian standing, reading words from poster board held up by Sonny.*

JULIAN: Electricity  
SONNY: Very good  
JULIAN: Constitution  
SONNY: That's it  
JULIAN: Philadelphia  
SONNY: Smart good.

*Nazo on couch, reading from next poster board that Sonny holds up, with words "fish," "pony," and hippopotamus."*

NAZO: Fish?  
SONNY: Yeah.  
NAZO: Pony?  
SONNY: Yes.  
NAZO: Hip? ... hip hop? Hipopononimous?

*(Abruptly stands up to walk way)*

*Damn you!! You give him the easy ones!*



Not only is Nazo presented in this scene as illiterate, he is shown as less capable than a 5-year-old boy, and he reacts with a childlike temperament. In another scene, Nazo, who is holding one of Julian's books open as if he is reading it, mispronounces *wood* and explains that he sometimes has difficulty distinguishing between *l* and *d*. Sonny mutters quickly, "Yeah, well, get it right."

*Interactions and topics of discussion.* Overall, the topics addressed during Nazo's scenes are limited. Nazo mostly reacts temperamentally to what is going on around him. While playing cards with Sonny and Julian, Nazo reacts to the boy's winning:

NAZO: What are your cards?

JULIAN: I got 6, 5, a Jack, a 4 and an 8. I win!

SONNY: What do you mean you win? I had a hand just like that before. I didn't win.

JULIAN: Because I win!

NAZO: (*angry, stands up and throws cards on table.*)  
*This is bullshit!*

SONNY: All right, take it easy man.

NAZO: *Every time, different cards. He still wins!*

SONNY: So what? Relax.

*NAZO sits down again.*

There should be same set of rules for everyone, no matter what age. He's got to learn how to lose too.

Overall, Nazo loses his temper in four scenes. He is reminded of his inability to read English in three scenes. He makes reference to his job four times, and he mentions his illegal immigration status once. Moreover, Nazo's contributions to the dialogue are inconsequential to the plot of the movie, as his utterances and nonverbal reactions refer mostly to immediate circumstances, typically involving his job.

*Nazo's social position.* Nazo is in a specific socioeconomic class strikingly different from that of the other characters. He is introduced in the first few minutes of the movie when Sonny and his girlfriend are arguing. The girlfriend uses an insulting tone to exclaim to Sonny that the delivery man from the restaurant has become "like, your best friend." Sonny defends his relationship with Nazo by conceding, "It's a rough patch in my life right now" to justify his friendship with someone of obvious lower social and professional status. Nazo appears at Sonny's door almost immediately after this. He is dressed as a restaurant delivery person throughout the film and is not portrayed as a responsible worker. He typically has deliveries to make, but he is instead hanging out in Sonny's apartment. Nazo's hair is long and disheveled, he does not appear to be particularly well groomed, and his appearance does not change throughout the movie. Whether in Sonny's

apartment, on the witness stand in a courtroom, or at a party for Sonny, Nazo is always wearing his restaurant delivery uniform.

All Sonny's friends in the film are Caucasian males from law school, and the leading female roles include a doctor and a lawyer. Nazo stands out markedly as not belonging to this social milieu. Nazo never interacts in scenes with Sonny and his law-school friends. Interestingly, when Nazo serves as a character witness for Sonny in court, his testimony is intertwined with that of a mentally unstable homeless man who is cast in a small supporting role. Nazo is not involved in problem-solving or giving advice. Nazo's relationship with Sonny, despite his significant presence, is quite different from those between Sonny and the other characters in the movie. In the closing scene, which takes place a year later, Sonny's lawyer friends are seen entering a restaurant for Sonny's surprise party. Inside, they interact with one another. When Nazo appears, however, he is alone and talks briefly to Sonny only. From nonverbal clues, we can see that the other characters have moved on in their lives, but Nazo remains the same, still making his deliveries.

As a comedic device, it is not surprising that a secondary character is portrayed in such a one-dimensional way. After all, Nazo's main job is to be funny, and the actor Rob Schneider delivers this well. We should ask ourselves, however, why this character works so well as a non-native speaker of English. Would the character be as effective without the accent and all the stereotypes that go along with it? What is it about this character portrayal that makes him believable as a delivery man without the social and educational resources for upward mobility? Such questions may be considered through the framework of symbolic colonization.

### *Nazo as Part of a Larger Story (Symbolic Colonization)*

This section links the above characterizations of Nazo to a larger social climate that maintains or challenges linguistic hierarchy. To begin, we must ask, Can these images, embedded in a comedic genre, be disregarded simply as entertainment? Nazo is a funny character, and Rob Schneider shows talent in his delivery. However, the persistence of such unchallenged stereotypes and comedic devices intimates a level of comfort and acceptance that reflects the social climate in which this character and others like him are so successful. Specifically, Nazo's role reflects broader social values and asks us to question how certain attitudes toward language are legitimized as dominant social narratives (Fiske, 1987; Molina-Guzmán, 2010; White, 1992). In general, the symbolic colonization of this character in a White professional milieu exposes the following cultural narratives: NNSEs can play a strong supporting role; NNSE-NSE relationships are inherently unequal; and, NNSEs lack the competence and/or ambition for personal or professional mobility.

First, NNSEs cast in supporting roles reflect an acceptable position in social hierarchy. Nazo is framed in a seemingly comfortable social space, not

only for himself but for everyone else. Nazo is an acceptable character because he in no way challenges the trajectory of the main characters' development, nor the denouement of the plot. For audience members who feel that "foreigners" are a threat to their employment, language, and national identity, Nazo is reassuringly kept in his place. As someone who does not appear to own anything or belong to a particular community, Nazo does not have much power in the social structure, and as such the "threat" of his presence as a foreigner is minimized.

A second story about NNSE portrayed in this medium is that the relationship between native and non-native speakers is inherently unequal, with the native speaker having more to offer to the relationship. As portrayed in this film, friendships between native speakers and non-native speakers are qualitatively different from friendships among those who share a native language and social status. In reality, friendships are built on shared experiences and/or the ability to reciprocate trust, friendliness, self-disclosure, and so forth in a relationship (Duck & Pittman, 1994), yet these two characters have little in common on which they can build a friendship. On one hand, this unlikely friendship in some ways challenges stereotypes by presenting a relationship based solely on companionship and trust. In the film, Nazo is the friend who is consistently around when Sonny interacts with the child. This indicates a certain level of trust. On the other hand, the clear separation between Nazo and Sonny's other friends reminds us that Nazo is different.

Third, as part of the larger narrative of the movie, Nazo's social position as a restaurant delivery person meshes comfortably with his perceived illiteracy, naïveté, and lack of agency. Nazo shows little desire, ambition, or ability to change his position. As described above, in one scene that addresses his potential for learning, Sonny shows Nazo some flash cards as if teaching him to read. When confronted with a word of more than four letters, Nazo becomes frustrated like a child and gives up. In another scene, Sonny uses Nazo to demonstrate a wrestling move. Nazo passes out and is left on the floor as Sonny and Julian walk away. In a later scene, Nazo is shown still lying unconscious on the floor. Although Sonny, the boy Julian, and other characters in the film display a range of emotional needs for love, success, acceptance, respect, and compassion, Nazo appears to need none of these. He is not portrayed or perceived as a self-actualized adult with emotional needs. His only emotional display is a childlike temperament.

Finally, this media representation of NNSE identity tells us that language-learners lack competence or ambition for personal and professional mobility. The negative association between accented speech and incompetence that Nazo represents is unfortunately a reality for many speakers of varieties of English in our own and other professions where job competence may be judged by one's native-language status. The TESOL profession currently challenges the hierarchy and fixed identities that are implied in the

native/non-native speaker dichotomy (Amin, 1997; Braine, 1999; Faez, 2011; Flowerdew, 2001; Kamhi-Stein, 2004; Liu, 1999); yet in our mediascapes, a simplistic non-native-speaker identity is often unchallenged. Moreover, Nazo's identity as linguistically inferior echoes international discussions of language policy that expose and unravel imperialistic and ethnocentric attitudes toward minority language rights in education, politics, and economics (Pennycook, 1994; Ricento, 2006; Tollefson, 2002; Wiley, 2004). In sum, these representations reflect Molina-Guzmán's (2010) theory of *symbolic colonization*, and as such present opportunity for challenge and debate.

## **Encouraging Conversations in the Classroom and Beyond (Symbolic Rupture)**

Through the example of Nazo in *Big Daddy*, I hoped to show that a critical approach to media resonates with language learning and teaching on many levels such as linguistic stereotyping, intercultural interactions, and exploration of social/controversial issues. Critical analysis of any form of media, from a one-page magazine ad or newspaper headline to a Web site or feature film, can open the door to rich and varied discussions of language, culture, and identity. The key to effective classroom discussion is to conduct an objective content analysis; challenge students to examine the stories told through media and their relation to social climate; and provide opportunity for students to interrupt media messages through their own interpretations, stories, and responses. A character such as Nazo, whose low social status and perceived illiteracy are explicitly portrayed, nevertheless embodies an endearing presence on screen that is somehow heightened through his ethnic and racial ambiguity. It is in this ambiguity that students respond in various ways to this character. I use the framework of symbolic rupture to discuss students' responses because it allows for interpretations that "destabilize dominant U.S. ethnic and racial classification of nationhood and citizenship" (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, p. 16). In other words, some students see the racial ambiguity of Nazo not as the essentialization of his "foreignness," but as a growing acceptance of hybrid identities as part of a multicultural society. In addition, Nazo's friendship with Sonny can be interpreted as crossing social and cultural boundaries that often limit social interactions. Multiple interpretations of Nazo in fact do surface in class discussions and must be woven into our analyses and discussions.

One student, for example, felt strongly that Nazo represented a Latino culture and that his character was a positive portrayal because he appeared as the friend of the main character. She thought he was endearing, and was pleased that as a Latina herself, part of her identity was represented in this attractive character. For this student who had been bombarded with images of members of her culture as poor, uneducated, and prone to criminal behavior, her heightened awareness for the positive provided a much different

reading of this character. As she defended her idea to the rest of the class, she unraveled some of the social conditions in education and elsewhere that had affected her own cultural identity, and she discovered how her experiences differed from or were similar to those of her peers. Some of her peers in fact questioned her insistence that Nazo was Latino rather than Italian, Middle Eastern, or Greek, as some had suggested.

As a follow-up to this discussion, I asked the teachers to find positive media representations with which they could identify and to analyze these from a content and cultural standpoint. Not surprisingly, diverse interpretations of stereotypes emerged and inspired meaningful discussions of individual and group identity. Most notably, the Caucasian teachers who were native speakers of English realized how much easier it was for them to find positive representations of themselves in popular English-language media than it was for their multilingual and multicultural colleagues.

Some of the most common questions that arise in class discussions of this critical media analysis center on audience agency and response. "What can we do about these images? If our media-saturated environments continue to portray non-native or accented speakers of English in such derogatory ways, how will attitudes ever change? How can we disrupt this negativity?" When working with a group of second-language educators, either preservice or inservice, these questions can be restructured as, "How will you use media in your classroom in the future?" "How will you decide what textbooks and other materials to use?" "How will you talk about language-learner identity to those whose experiences with non-native speakers are limited to what they see in the media?" As teachers answer these questions and are asked to conduct critical media analyses of their own (as a course assignment or final project), a true rupturing of dominant discourses emerges. They talk about how to voice alternate stories through digital storytelling; they reexamine popular media that they have always considered to be culturally diverse; they critique their textbooks and classroom materials; and they discuss strategies for talking to their non-ESL colleagues about language learning and teaching. Many students decide to analyze the media of their schools and school districts (Web sites, handbooks, newsletters, and flyers). Several have found that information about language-learning services, support for families, and ESL resources for teachers are neither easy to find nor presented in accessible language. They realized how difficult it might be for their colleagues, their students, and their families to acquire clear information and to be able to take full advantage of language resources. Some teachers have responded by holding their own informative workshops and finding alternate ways to communicate information to families. By first identifying through content analysis what exactly appears in media and then interpreting the symbolic nature of mediated messages, students and teachers can critically respond to their communities and the larger world around them.

## Conclusion

Whenever I introduce this case study to a new class, at least one student retorts, "Why do we want to look at this? It's just for fun. Everybody gets made fun of in the movies." This is not an uncommon way to think about entertainment. Once we begin to think about media as we do language, however, and consider its power as a cultural storyteller and symbolic resource, we find a place for media literacy education in our practice. The model of critical media analysis presented here offers a thorough description of content combined with critical reflection of media as part of a process of socialization. It does not matter whether we look at movies, newspaper articles, YouTube videos, magazines, music, textbooks, or any other mediated artifacts, and it does not matter if students' interpretations of media messages vary widely. What matters is that we recognize how media infiltrate our lives, normalize certain images, and hold the potential both to limit and to expand representations of language-learners' identity. By adapting critical media analysis to fit into our language-teacher education curricula, we offer our students a framework for exploring another layer of what it means to be a language learner or teacher in our rapidly changing media-saturated world.

## The Author

Carla Chamberlin-Quinlisk is an associate professor of applied linguistics and communication arts and sciences at Penn State Abington College, near Philadelphia, PA. Her teaching and research interests focus on relationships among language, culture, and media and the implications of these relationships in language-learning communities.

## References

- Alim, H.S., Ibrahim, A., & Pennycook, A. (2008). *Global linguistic flows: Hip hop culture, youth identities, and the politics of language*. New York: Routledge.
- Altman, R. (1987). *The American film musical*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Amin, N. (1997). Race and the identity of the nonnative ESL teacher. *TESOL Quarterly*, 31, 580-583.
- Benesch, S. (2001). *Critical English for academic purposes: Theory, politics, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Berger, A.A. (1998). *Media research techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Braine, G. (Ed.). (1999). *Non-native educators in English language teaching*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Canagarajah, S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Carey, J.W. (1992). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Duck, S., & Pittman, G. (1994). Social and personal relationships. In M.L. Knapp & G.R. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (pp. 676-698). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Faez, F. (2011). Are you a native speaker of English? Moving beyond a simplistic dichotomy. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 8, 378-399.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.

- Feuer, J. (1992). Genre study and television. In R. C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse reassembled: Television and contemporary criticism* (pp. 138-160). Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Fiske, J. (1987). *Television culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Flowerdew, J. (2001). Attitudes of journal editors to nonnative speaker contributions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, 121-150.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1980). The "mainstreaming" of America: Violence profile No. 11. *Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 10-29.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1994). Growing up with television: The cultivation perspective. In J. Bryant & D. Zillman (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 17-41). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Habermas, J. (1991). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hall, S. (1990). The whites of their eyes: Racist ideologies and the media. In M. Alvarado & J.O. Thompson (Eds.), *The media reader* (pp. 7-23). London: BFI.
- Hobbs, R., & Jensen, A. (2009). The past, present, and future of media literacy education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 1(1), 1-11.
- Ibrahim, A. (1999). Becoming Black: Rap and hip-hop, race, gender, identity, and the politics of ESL learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33, 349-369.
- IMDb: International Movie Database. (2011). Available: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0142342>
- Kamhi-Stein, L.D. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning and teaching from experience: Perspectives on nonnative English-speaking professionals*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Kress, G. (1990). Critical discourse analysis. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 11, 84-99.
- Kubota, R., & Lin, A. (2006). Race and TESOL: Concepts, research, and future directions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40, 471-493.
- Kubota, R., & Lin, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Race, culture, and identities in second language education: Exploring critically engaged practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Lewis, J., & Jhally, S. (1998). The struggle over media literacy. *Journal of Communication*, 48(1), 109-120.
- Lippi-Green, R. (2011). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Liu, J. (1999). Nonnative-English-speaking professionals in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 33, 85-102.
- Mastro, D.E. & Behm-Morawitz, E. (2005). Latino representation on primetime television. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82, 1, 110-130.
- Molina-Guzmán, I. (2010). *Dangerous curves: Latina bodies in the media*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Morgan, B. (1998). *The ESL classroom: Teaching, critical practice and community development*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Motha, S. (2006). Racializing ESOL teacher identities in U.S. K-12 public schools. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40, 495-518.
- Nelson, C.D. (2009). *Sexual identities in English language education: Classroom conversations*. New York: Routledge.
- Nowak, A., Abel, S., & Ross, K. (2007). *Rethinking media education: Critical pedagogy and identity politics*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Park, J.H., Gabbadon, N.G., & Chernin, A.R. (2006). Naturalizing racial differences through comedy: Asian, Black, and White views on racial stereotypes in *Rush Hour 2*. *Journal of Communication*, 56(1), 157-177.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.
- Pennycook, A. (2007). *Global Englishes and transcultural flows*. New York: Routledge.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Ricento, T. (Ed.). (2006). *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Rockler, N. (2002). Overcoming "it's just entertainment": Perspective by incongruity as strategy for media literacy. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 30(1), 16-22.
- Scharrer, E. (2002). Making a case for media literacy in the curriculum: Outcomes and assessment. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 4, 354-358.
- Scharrer, E. (2007). Closer than you think: Bridging the gap between media effects and cultural studies in media education theory and practice. In A. Nowak, S. Abel, & K. Ross (Eds.), *Rethinking media education: Critical pedagogy and identity politics* (pp. 17-35). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Taylor-Mendes, C. (2009). Construction of racial stereotypes in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks: Images as discourse. In R. Kubota & A. Lin (Eds.), *Race, culture, and identities in second language education* (pp. 64-80). New York: Routledge.
- Tollefson, J.W. (Ed.). (2002). *Language policies in education: Critical issues*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse and Society*, 4, 249-283.
- White, M. (1992). Ideological analysis and television. In R.C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse reassembled: Television and contemporary criticism* (pp. 161-202). Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Widdowson, H.G. (1994). The ownership of English. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28, 377-389.
- Wiley, T.G. (2004). Language policy and English-only. In E. Finegan & J.R. Rickford (Eds.), *Language in the USA: Perspectives for the twenty-first century* (pp. 319-338). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Wyatt, W., & Silva, K. (2007). Reviving a culture debating public through media education. In A. Nowak, S. Abel, & K. Ross (Eds.), *Rethinking media education: Critical pedagogy and identity politics* (pp. 1-16). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.