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9 Latino Language Practices and Literacy Education in the U.S.

Ofelia García

Introduction

Few issues are as important in U.S. education circles today as how to promote the literacy practices of language minority students, and in particular those of U.S. Latinos, the largest language minority. With this in mind, this chapter focuses on the growing dissonance between the complex sociolinguistic reality of U.S. Latinos and the monoglossic¹ literacy policies and practices enacted to educate them. As Hudelson (1994) has said, “Literacy is language and language is literacy” (p. 102). All processes of reading, writing, listening and speaking are interrelated and mutually supportive. Thus, they need to be considered and developed holistically. In this chapter, therefore, I argue that the lack of understandings of the complex language practices of U.S. Latinos, and the inability of schools to build on them, is responsible for much academic failure.

The chapter starts out by reviewing traditional concepts of language and bilingualism. Focusing on the language practices that are readily observable among bilinguals, new conceptualizations are proposed that are helpful to understand the changes that are necessary to develop the academic language of U.S. Latinos. The chapter then reviews traditional models of teaching literacy to Latinos, and proposes other ways of teaching and assessing complex pluriliteracies by taking into account Latinos’ social language practices, rather than focusing on a discrete set of skills.

From Language to Linguaging

The discourse surrounding the language practices of U.S. Latino communities often has to do with whether they are monolingual or bilingual. But we are proposing here that the language practices of U.S. Latino children cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy. To understand this argument, we have to question traditional concepts of language and bilingualism.

Many have proposed that the notion of a discrete language makes little sense in most multilingual societies where “people engage in multiple discursive practices among themselves” (Mühlhäusler, 2000, p. 358), and that language is a “European cultural artifact fostered by procedures such as literacy and standardization” (Romaine, 1994, p. 12).

That language was “invented” by states that wanted to consolidate political power, and in so doing encouraged the preparation of grammars and dictionaries and the institutionalization of schooling to strengthen these practices, is the central thesis of Makoni and Pennycook (2007).

Standardization is not an inherent characteristic of language, but an “acquired or deliberately and artificially imposed characteristic” (Romaine, 1994, p. 84). Wright (2004, p. 54) clarifies:

A standard language is the means by which large groups become and remain communities of communication. The norm is decided and codified by a central group, disseminated through the institutions of the state such as education and then usage is constantly policed and users dissuaded from divergent practices, both formally and informally.

Standardization occurs by fixing and regulating such features as the spelling and the grammar of a language in dictionaries and grammar books which are then used for prescriptive teaching of the language.

Despite the fact that what schools call “English” or “Spanish” has little to do with the language practices of real U.S. Latino schoolchildren, it is important to acknowledge the importance of “standard language” and its consequences for U.S. Latinos. In schools, even bilingual schools, it is a standard that is valued for teaching, learning, and especially to assess what is being learned. The school’s insistence in using only “the standard” to teach, learn, and assess, has much to do with the concept of *governmentality* as proposed by Foucault (1991). Foucault focuses on how language practices have much to do with “regulating” the ways in which language is used and establishing language hierarchies in which some languages, or some ways of using language, are more valued than others. This has to be interpreted within the framework of *hegemony* developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971) which explains how people acquiesce to invisible cultural power, thus limiting the life chances of members of stigmatized groups. Our routine language practices become “regulatory” mechanisms which unconsciously create categories of exclusion.

In general, languages have been constituted separately “outside and above human beings” (Yngve, 1996, p. 28) and have little relationship to the ways in which people use language, their discursive practices, or what Yngve calls their “*linguaging*.” *Linguaging*, Merrill Swain (2006) tells us, emphasizes language as an action, as it becomes an integral part of our meaning-making selves. Linguaging, says Swain, is how we regulate our social, emotional, and cognitive behavior as well as that of others, and how we transform our thoughts into a shareable resource. Language is then a social notion that cannot be defined without reference to its speakers and the context in which it is used. It is thus more useful to speak of the linguaging of Latinos, rather than their languages.

Reconstituting Bilingualism

Despite the advances of macro-sociolinguistics since the 1960s, scholarship on bilingualism, based on traditional language constructs and focused on school bilingualism, continues to define bilingualism as simply 1 + 1 = 2, and to uphold the notion of *balanced bilingualism* which views a bilingual as two persons, each fluent in one of the two languages. But *bilinguals are not double monolinguals*, and as Grosjean (1982) and Romaine (1995), among others, have repeatedly stated, they cannot be studied (or taught and assessed) as monolinguals. Bilingualism is not about 1 + 1 = 2, but about a plural which mixes different aspects or fractions of language behavior as they are needed to be socially meaningful.

Generally, only two models of bilingualism, both having been developed in response to traditional bilingual schooling, are acknowledged in the scholarly literature. Bilingualism could be *subtractive* and resulting in monolingualism, or it could be *additive*, with the two languages added and maintained (see Figure 9.1).

Responding to the disinvention of language considered above, and the resulting “*linguaging*” of speakers, I have proposed (García, 2009a) that bilingualism needs to be also seen as *recursive* and moving back and forth as it blends its components, or as *dynamic* with both languages coming in and out and mixing.

These last two models of bilingualism suggest the fluid relationship between the multiple ways of linguaging with the many interlocutors and the multiplicity of settings in which bilinguals interact. *Recursive* bilingualism reflects situations of *language revitalization* spurred especially by a renewed emphasis on language rights of many minorities in the twenty-first century. For example, U.S. Latinos beyond the first generation who are in the process of revitalizing their linguaging practices to include what we know as Spanish, do so by recapturing bits and

Subtractive Bilingualism	Additive Bilingualism
$L1 + L2 - L1 = L2$	$L1 + L2 = L1 + L2$

Figure 9.1 Subtractive and Additive Bilingualisms.

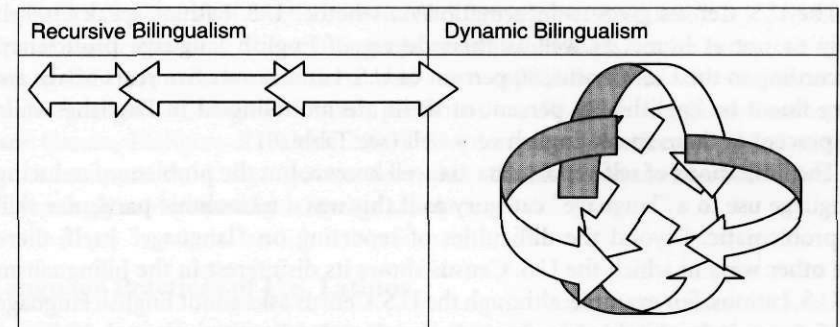


Figure 9.2 Recursive and Dynamic Bilingualisms.

pieces of their ancestral linguistic practices, as they're reconstituted for new functions. They do not start as monolinguals, nor do they add a second language. They simply recover bits and pieces of language practices that exist within their fluid bilingual social context.

Dynamic bilingualism is consonant with the new ways in which bilingualism is being constructed for a globalized world. The concept of dynamic bilingualism has much to do with the notion of *plurilingualism* that has been advanced in the European Union. For the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural action, a plurilingual person "viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures" (Council of Europe, 2000, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, p. 168). It is not about "adding" a "second" language; it is about developing complex language practices that encompass several social contexts. The new discourse contact that comes about from the complex communication that takes place with different interlocutors on diverse planes using various language abilities in simultaneous ways leads to the deconstruction of monolingual realities.

The bilingualism of U.S. Latinos cannot be seen as a simple continuum with monolingualism at either end. With language interaction taking place in different planes that include multilingual multimodalities,² U.S. Latino schoolchildren engage in multiple complex communicative acts that do not in any way respond to the linear traditional models of subtractive or additive bilingualism. And yet, U.S. schools continue to insist on learning and assessing standard language, especially a Standard English, without regard to the multiplicities of language practices in U.S. Latino communities. The failure of Latinos in U.S. schools has much to do with the ignorance regarding their complex languaging practices.

Insisting on Language Characteristics

The lack of understanding of U.S. Latinos' bilingualism, as well as the insistence on seeing language as an autonomous skill separate from sociocultural practices, has led the U.S. government and educators to describe U.S. Latino schoolchildren as being English Language Learners or English monolingual, rather than recognizing their ability to negotiate their languages and varieties.

The U.S. Census gives us information on whether U.S. Latinos speak English only or not at home, as well as their degree of English language proficiency. According to the U.S. Census, 80 percent of U.S. Latinos over five years of age are very fluent in English—30 percent of them are monolingual in English,³ while 50 percent of them speak English very well (see Table 9.1).

The limitations of self-report data are well known, but the problem of reducing language use to a "language" category as if this was a monolithic particular skill is problematic. Beyond the difficulties of reporting on "language" itself, there are other ways in which the U.S. Census shows its disinterest in the bilingualism of U.S. Latinos. For example, although the U.S. Census asks about English language proficiency, it doesn't do so for Spanish, signaling that English is the only language of importance for U.S. society and schools.

Table 9.1 U.S. Latinos' English Language Proficiency 5-17 Years

Eng Monolingual	3,055,667	30%
Eng Very Well	4,891,303	50%
Eng Less Than Very Well	1,930,387	20%
TOTAL	9,877,357	100%

Source: American Community Survey, 2005.

Of course, the number of U.S. Latino schoolchildren who the U.S. Census classify as speaking English less than very well—almost 2 million—is an important reason why educators need to pay attention to this population. But educators also need to notice the eight million U.S. Latino schoolchildren, who, despite being fluent in English and sometimes even monolingual in English, still fail in the nation's schools. Eighty percent of U.S. Latino schoolchildren speak English only or English very well. Despite the enormous attention paid to school-aged Latinos who speak English less than very well—those often referred to as *English Language Learners* in the literature and *Limited English Proficient* by the federal government—U.S. Latinos are, for the most part, English speakers. Students who are in the process of acquiring English are "only the tail of the elephant" (García, 2006a).

Schools, products of governmental authorities, also create language categories that parallel the educational options that they offer, rather than the close observation of the language practices of Latino schoolchildren themselves. Those classified as "Limited English Proficient" by the federal government and "English Language Learners" by most educators end up in special programs—either English as a Second Language or Bilingual Education. The categorization of "Spanish Dominant" or "English Dominant" has emerged to place Latino schoolchildren into transitional bilingual education programs that use more or less English. The label of "English monolingual" is applied to U.S. Latinos who seem to speak English fluently, as if traces of bilingualism disappear completely in Latino families and communities. Seldom is the category of "bilingual" used by educators, since this category has little to do with success in U.S. schools that is increasingly measured by high-stakes English-only assessments. In fact, there is a lack of recognition that by acquiring English, those considered "limited" in English or "learners" of English, are in effect "emergent bilinguals."⁴ It is precisely this misunderstanding about bilingualism itself that leads to the increased failure of U.S. Latino schoolchildren, and most especially those who continue to be categorized as "Limited English proficient" or "English Language Learners" (see García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2007). The language practices of U.S. Latinos are a lot more fluid than government and schools recognize, and this fact is increasingly understood by language scholars.

Language Practices of U.S. Latinos

Especially in the last decade, the more dynamic and hybrid language practices of U.S. Latinos have received increased attention from scholars. In *Growing Up*

Bilingual, Zentella (1997) described the language use in *el bloque* by five New York Puerto Rican girls who were raised in the same tenement in El Barrio. The girls grew up in bilingual homes where varieties of Spanish such as popular and standard Puerto Rican Spanish, as well as popular and standard English, and everything in between were spoken to them. The girls also participated in networks where other varieties of Spanish and English were spoken, including African American Vernacular English and Dominican Spanish. Other language scholars have described the same complex language uses in other U.S. Latino communities (see, for example, Martínez (2006) for a description of the linguistic complexity of Mexican Americans; González (2001) on their language practices in Phoenix; Schecter and Bayley (2002) of those in northern California and San Antonio). Farr and Guerra (1995) have examined the interplay between English and Spanish language and literacy strategies among transnational populations as they moved between Mexico and Chicago. In addition, Farr (2006) has recently described the ways of speaking of rancheros in Chicago. The language use and learning across home and school among Mexican origin families in Eastside, California, has also been described (Pease-Alvarez & Vásquez, 1994). Kalmar (2000, p. 1) records how undocumented immigrants decided to help each other write down English “*como de veras se oye*” (as it really sounds). They thus developed a hybrid unique alphabet that coded the two languages and enabled them to make sense of their new language.

A *dynamic understanding of language socialization* (Bayley & Schecter, 2003), beyond that originally proposed by Schieffelin and Ochs (1989), is needed to understand how it is that U.S. Latino children acquire and use language. Schieffelin and Ochs (1989) proposed that children are socialized through language (how they learn the group’s ways of being and doing via language) and to language (how they become speakers of the languages of their community) at the same time. But language socialization is not smooth and unilinear, directed from parents or teachers to children. Language socialization is dynamic because it is steeped in participation, and responds to the negotiation with the social context and the participants in which the interaction takes place. In this process, children exhibit considerable *agency*, choosing among options offered, and sometimes *resisting* and *constructing* new languaging practices and new identities (Bayley and Schecter, 2003). The hybrid discourse of U.S. Latino children responds to the construction of the multiplicity of identities in which multiple factors like age, race, social class, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical situation and institutional affiliation come to bear (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

U.S. Latinos have been shown to have language practices that violate the traditional concept of *diglossia* (Fishman, 1972) with only one language being used in one domain (Pedraza, Attinasi, & Hoffman, 1980). Their language practices tap into their different dialects and languages in *functional interrelationship* for communicative and social benefit (Martí et al., 2005) in what García (2009a) has called *transglossia*. U.S. Latino schoolchildren pragmatically access their multiple linguistic and cultural resources as they participate in plural social networks. Their speech acts are, as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) have observed, “acts of projection.” Their language practices are not direct manifestations of their

identities; instead they perform their multiple identities through their hybrid language practices (for the concept of “performativity,” see Pennycook, 2003). Gutiérrez and her colleagues (2001) have described these hybrid language practices as “a systematic, strategic, affiliative, and sense-making process” (p. 128). A binary view of the languages of U.S. Latinos has been increasingly rejected, as there has been increased recognition that their linguistic repertoire is a complex phenomenon comprising multiple codes and modes or channels of expression (see Zamel & Spack, 1998, for bilinguals).

The language practices of children in U.S. Latino communities and homes is multiple and mixed, as they draw creatively from their linguistic and cultural systems in innovative combinations. I have referred to these socially complex language practices of bilinguals as *translanguaging* (García, 2009a).⁵ Although translanguaging encompasses code-switching and other features of language practices that sociolinguists often study as “language contact,” it differs in that the starting point is not language as an autonomous skill. Bilingual people translanguage as they make meaning in speech communities that are, in the twenty-first century, no longer attached to a national territory, and thus to a single national language. Bilingual communities often experience transnational lives, shuttling between states, as diasporic communities. But most of the time, bilingual people shuttle between communities that are hybrids themselves, a product of postmodern societies.

The language practices of bilinguals in the twenty-first century go beyond simply using what is considered one language for certain situations and with different people. Bilinguals mix and choose different features that may be considered parts of different autonomous languages, as they discursively perform their meanings. They use language practices associated with one or another autonomous language to perform different languaging acts, sometimes mixing uses for different modalities of communication (listening, speaking, reading, writing, signing; image, icon and sound production, etc.).

That immigrant youth are experts at translanguaging as they translate or paraphrase for their parents has been shown by Orellana, Reynolds, Drner, and Meza (2003) who claim that this language practice could be used to support the within-language paraphrasing that is important in schools. U.S. Latino families are usually *multi-bilingual-tasking*, as they watch television in one language, listen to a radio in another one, read lists, labels, books, and newspapers in different languages, write to different interlocutors using both and sometimes one or the other, at the same time that the young child, the older child, the parents, the relatives are speaking not only in different ways, but also using different codes, varieties and languages. It is almost impossible to live within a U.S. Latino family or community and not engage in translanguaging practices. The language practices of U.S. Latino children have little to do with the ways in which language and bilingualism are framed in school.

These heteroglossic language practices, however, are often debased as inferior. Even when Latino non-English language practices are considered, their way of using Spanish is characterized as deficient, a “patois” referred to as *Spanglish* (Stavans, 2004). And yet, their translanguaging practices reflect greater choice of

expression than each monolingual separately can call upon or that schools can ever accept. Their translanguaging conveys not only linguistic knowledge, but also combined cultural, social, and political understandings that come to bear upon language practices. Sandra María Esteves (1997) expresses this in a poem to the Puerto Rican woman when she says: "I speak two languages broken into each other but my heart speaks the language of people born in oppression" (p. 384).

Monoglossic Miseducation for U.S. Latinos

One of the biggest controversies over the education of U.S. Latinos today has to do with whether it should be in English only or also use what is viewed as their "mother tongue," Spanish.⁶ Especially since the advent of *No Child Left Behind* and the emphasis on high-stakes tests in English that has followed, most U.S. schools use English only in teaching and assessing U.S. Latinos (Crawford, 2004; Zehler et al., 2003). In fact, Hopstock and Stephenson (2003) have confirmed that even U.S. Latinos who are in the process of acquiring English are, for the most part, in English-only programs.⁷ But, as we will argue below, even when bilingual approaches are used, the understandings of the language and literacy practices of U.S. Latinos are considered from a monoglossic angle.

The inappropriate education of U.S. Latinos, whether monolingual or bilingual, often has to do with misunderstanding their sociolinguistic complexity. As a result, U.S. Latino students experience more remedial instruction, greater probability of assignment to lower curriculum tracks, higher dropout rates, poorer graduation rates, and over-referral to special education classes (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Cummins, 1984; De Cohen, Deterding, & Chu Clewell, 2005). Few school leaders, and not enough teachers, are well versed in issues surrounding the language and literacy practices of U.S. Latinos. As the number of emergent bilinguals rises, along with the attendant increase in accountability, the crisis of a shortage of qualified teachers for these students has been exacerbated. For example, in 1986 there was one bilingual teacher to every seventy students in California. By 1996 there was one to 98 (Gándara et al., 2003). In California, less than 8 percent of the school psychologists are bilingual and capable of assessing bilingual students (Gándara et al., 2003). Misunderstanding U.S. Latinos' language practices is a major cause of failure in schools.

Despite the substantial research evidence that it takes between five to seven years to develop academic proficiency in standard academic English (Cummins, 2000), many states insist that emergent bilinguals may stay in special programs for only one year (e.g., California, Arizona, and Massachusetts) or for a maximum of three years (e.g., New York State and Washington). The *No Child Left Behind Act* has established strict Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) to increase the percentage of "Limited English Proficient" (LEPs) progressing toward and attaining English proficiency. In 2005–6, New York State established AMAOs that required that 60 percent of all emergent bilinguals in a school district advance from one proficiency level to the next, and that 84 percent of LEP students with three years in programs, 14 percent with two years, and 10 percent with one year score at the proficient level. In 2005–6, only 23 percent

of school districts in the state met the objective (New York State, AMAOs, 2006). Clearly, emergent bilinguals and programs to educate them are being deemed as school failure at alarming rates. But is the failure that of the children, or is it that of the educational establishment that refuses to understand the intricacies of their bilingualism and their translanguaging practices?

Schooling Practices for U.S. Latinos

As we said before, most U.S. Latino students attend programs in English only. Only a few attend bilingual education programs. The programs in English only sometimes, although not always, include *English as a Second Language* instruction for those who are emergent bilinguals. The programs in bilingual education are usually of three kinds: 1) *transitional bilingual education*, where the instruction is increasingly in English as students acquire more proficiency and which targets emergent bilinguals; 2) *developmental bilingual education*, which includes U.S. Latinos with different linguistic profiles and where students are educated in both English and Spanish; and 3) *two-way bilingual education programs* (increasingly called "dual language"⁸) that include U.S. Latino students with different linguistic profiles, as well as non-Latinos. The first type of bilingual education, transitional bilingual education, responds to a subtractive bilingualism model, with English only as the goal. The second type, developmental bilingual education, reflects a belief in bilingualism being additive. Only the third type, two-way bilingual education, breaks out of the traditional bilingualism mold, although it continues to insist on the separation of languages for instruction. But it is precisely in the mix of linguistically diverse students that is present in those classrooms where traditional definitions of language and bilingualism start breaking down, with children's language use increasingly showing the multiple discursive practices that Mühlhäusler (2000) describes for multilingual communities (for more on this, see García, 2006b and García et al., forthcoming).

Because these two-way bilingual education classrooms often use progressive pedagogies, there is much collaborative social practice in which students try out ideas, actions and language (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The abundant talk present in these classrooms among children with different linguistic profiles often demonstrates the hybrid language practices that characterize multilingual communities. Thus, there is much potential in those classrooms, although often this hybrid talk is contested by teachers and administrators who insist that children use one language or the other, and by the federal government, which persists in measuring progress through high-stakes tests in English only.

Literacy, Bilinguality and Pluriliteracy Practices for U.S. Latinos

Most U.S. Latinos are taught to read exclusively in English through heavily phonics-based approaches, a way to "regulate" their bilingualism, often blamed for their educational failure. And yet, research on teaching and learning has validated the importance of *collaborative social practices* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to socially construct learning (Vygotzky, 1978). Effective classrooms, research tells

us, include a great deal of talk or what Tharp et al. (2000) call *instructional conversation*, that is, talk in which relevant ideas are explored and students are engaged in extended discussions among themselves and with the teacher.

Most schools consider literacy to be simple mastery of reading and writing. And thus, many consider biliteracy a simple mastery of reading and writing in both English and Spanish (see, for example, Brisk & Harrington, 2000; Carrasquillo & Segan, 1998; Freeman & Freeman, 1996). But not all bilingual education programs have this kind of biliteracy as a goal. A more useful definition of biliteracy is that by Hornberger (1990), who defines it as “any and all instances in which communication occurs in two or more languages in or around writing” (p. 213). Hornberger’s definition takes into account Brian Street’s *New Literacy Studies* (1985) (more on this below), and emphasizes literacy as a series of social practices, and not simply a monolithic construct made up of a discrete set of skills.

There are four types of biliteracy pedagogy that are used in bilingual education programs:

1. A *convergent bimedial model of biliteracy practices* which uses both English and Spanish in oral communication to transact with a text written in English. Here, teachers and students communicate orally in both Spanish and English *around writing* in English, but Spanish is *not used in writing*. It corresponds to subtractive theoretical frameworks of bilingualism and is prevalent in transitional bilingual education. Only English is assessed. It can be diagrammed as in Figure 9.3.

Language A and Language B —————> Language B written text

Figure 9.3 Convergent Bimedial Model of Biliteracy Practices.

2. A *convergent model of biliteracy practices* which uses English and Spanish in communication to transact with a text written in each of the two languages, but with Spanish literacy practices calqued on English literacy practices. It is often found in transitional bilingual education programs where literacy is expected and assessed only in English, but Spanish literacy is used to assist in that development. In these cases, the Spanish literacy practices are calqued from (or copied from) those of English. It can be diagrammed as in Figure 9.4.

Language B and
Language A calqued on Literacy B —————> Language B written text

Figure 9.4 Convergent Model of Biliteracy Practices.

3. A *separation model of biliteracy practices* which uses English and Spanish to transact with a text written in one language or the other according to their own sociocultural and discourse norms. Children and teachers *match* the language in which they are communicating around writing to the language of the written text. Students are encouraged to “think” in the language in which they are reading or writing. One language or the other is used around writing and in writing in the same language. Both English and Spanish are assessed and it is expected that students engage in literacy practices in one or the other language according to monolingual standards. Bilinguals are expected to behave and use language

as two monolinguals. Usually, bilingual education programs that adhere to an additive bilingual education theoretical framework follow this model of biliteracy practices. It can be diagrammed as in Figure 9.5.

Language A —————> Language A written text
Language B —————> Language B written text

Figure 9.5 Separation Model of Biliteracy Practices.

4. A *flexible multiple model of biliteracy practices* which uses both English and Spanish in communication to transact with texts written in both languages and in other media according to a bilingual flexible norm, capable of both integration and separation, and allowing *cross-overs*. That is, both languages and media are used in literacy practices around a text in one or the other language or in multiple media. Teachers encourage children to use all linguistic codes and modes as resources in order to engage in literacy practices in one or the other language. For example, when planning to write in English, Latino children could use Spanish to build the background, to question the text, to think about strategies; and they use not only print, but also signs, images, videos. Translanguaging is encouraged and supported. Although both languages are assessed, it is expected that students’ engagement with written texts would differ from that of their monolingual counterparts. It can be diagrammed as in Figure 9.6.

Language A —————> Language A written text
Language B —————> Language B written text

Figure 9.6 Flexible Multiple Model of Biliteracy Practices.

It is this type that most closely resembles the hybrid language cross-overs of U.S. Latino communities. And yet, it is seldom used in bilingual education and is much contested (for a notable exception, although not aiming for biliteracy, see Fu, 2003).

Brian Street (1985, 1996, 2005) has maintained that the uses of academic language are a series of *social practices*, and he views literacies as multiple and embedded in a web of social relations that maintain asymmetries of power. Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester’s revision of the *continua of biliteracy* (2003) integrates a critical perspective, positing that biliteracy is better obtained when learners can draw on all points of the continua (Hornberger 1989, p. 289). The interrelated nature of Hornberger’s continua supports the potential for positive transfer across literacies, but its nested nature also shows how transfer can be promoted or hindered by different contextual factors (Hornberger 2003, p. 25). Martin-Jones and Jones (2000) have gone beyond the continua model in proposing the term *multilingual literacies* to refer to the “multiplicity and complexity of individual and group repertoires” (p. 5) and the “multiple ways in which people draw on and combine the codes in their communicative repertoire when they speak and write” (p. 7).

Bilingualism and biliteracy are not sufficient to understand the language and literacy practices of U.S. Latinos. Elsewhere (García, Bartlett, & Kleifgen, 2007) we have referred to *pluriliteracy practices* as a more fruitful concept that includes *literacy practices in sociocultural contexts*, the *hybridity* of literacy practices afforded by new technologies, and the increasing *interrelationship of semiotic systems*. Gutiérrez and her colleagues (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Alvarez, 2001), as well as Reyes (2001) have demonstrated the diversity of, and interplay between, linguistic codes and literacy practices in bilingual classrooms. Manyak (2001, 2002), working in a primary grade English immersion class in California post-proposition 227, examined the blending of not only Spanish and English but also home and school registers in an elementary classroom, although he warned that hybrid literacy pedagogy did not benefit all students equally. And Gutiérrez et al. (1999) have shown how the “commingling of and contradictions among different linguistic codes and registers” (p. 289) offered significant resources for learning.

A *pluriliteracy practices* approach moves away from the dichotomy of the traditional English/Spanish pairing, emphasizing instead that language and literacy practices are interrelated and flexible, positing that all literacy practices have equal value, and acknowledging the *agency* involved in communicating around writing. Although grounded in the social and the political, pluriliteracy practices have the potential for *transformation and change*, precisely because of the dynamism and flexibility of integrated hybrid practices and the agency of those involved. What is important in pluriliteracy practices is that students develop the agency to use both languages in an integrated or separate fashion, depending on the sociocultural context in which they perform the literacy practice.

Promising Pluriliteracy Pedagogies and Assessment for U.S. Latinos

The New London Group (1996) has identified four factors in meaningful literacy pedagogy:

1. *Authentic situated practice* and immersion of students in such practice;
2. *Overt instruction* to develop awareness and understanding of practice;
3. *Critique of practices* so that meanings are related to students' social contexts and purposes;
4. *Transformed practice* in which students transfer and re-create their designs of meaning from one context to another through experimentation with innovative practices.

We believe that these are important blocks; but a meaningful pluriliteracy pedagogy for U.S. Latino bilinguals would have to build on their translanguaging practices to enable them to think deeply, imagine widely, create broadly, as well as approximate acceptable academic “standard” languages. Following Freebody and Luke (1990), U.S. Latino students must (1) *break the code* of written texts in one or the other language by recognizing and using fundamental features of language;

(2) *participate in understanding and composing* meaningful written, visual, and spoken texts using all the modes and varieties of languaging practices at their disposal, including translanguaging; (3) *use texts* functionally by knowing about and acting on the different linguistic, cultural and social functions that various texts perform inside and outside school; and (4) *critically analyze and transform texts* by understanding that texts, whether written in standard academic language or not, are not ideologically natural or neutral.

More than simple adaptation of the New London Group recommendations and the roles proposed by Freebody and Luke would be needed if U.S. Latino students were to develop strong pluriliteracies. For that, schools would have to let go of their traditional understandings of language and bilingualism and would have to take notice of the hybrid language practices of U.S. Latino communities—their translanguaging. Some schools around the world are already paying heed and supporting translanguaging practices. In Wales, Ceu Williams encourages teachers to involve students in hearing or reading the lessons in one language and developing the work (the oral discussion, the writing of passages, the development of projects and experiments) in another language, and vice versa (Baker, 2001; García, 2009a). In countries of Africa, where the switch to the dominant language, usually English, typically occurs in the third or fourth grade, causing the miseducation of most African children who do not understand the language of instruction, educators who had previously banned code-switching from the classroom have started to defend what they are calling “responsible code-switching” (Van der Walt, 2006; for more on this see García, 2009a). In the United States, Gutiérrez and her colleagues (1999) have suggested that bilingual classrooms can use the “commingling of and contradictions among different linguistic codes and registers” (p. 289) of bilingual communities as resources for learning. Instead of holding the two languages separate and ignoring the translanguaging practices that U.S. Latino schoolchildren engage in outside of classrooms, schools could develop ways of using them, making students aware of their potential and their distance from the use of “standard” languages that schools uphold. Incorporating these practices, rather than ignoring them, might go a long way towards solving the problem of the continued miseducation of Latinos in the United States.

Despite educators' efforts to silence these practices, they are rampant in most bilingual classrooms whenever children are asked to work collaboratively. In the growing two-way bilingual education programs that pride themselves in being “dual language,” thus keeping the two languages separate, the prevalent practice to teach literacy to linguistically integrated groups is the “workshop model.” This method of reading and writing instruction combines language and literature-rich authentic activities aimed at enhancing meaning, understanding, and the love of language and literacy, with explicit teaching skills (Honig, 1996). This approach does not privilege either *top-down processing* (where high-level processing strategies⁹ are used to make predictions about text and inferences about characters and events in a text) or *bottom-up processes* (starting with precise bits of knowledge about language, writing, and processing strategies that permit readers to “turn the squiggles on the page into meaningful symbols”

(Birch, 2002, p. 2), but balances both. During the literacy workshop, children freely incorporate their own language practices, and not the “artificial” ones of the teacher. And it is those translanguaging practices that negotiate their learning. The potential of the workshop literacy model for these students is great precisely because it builds on their own hybrid language practices.

But no amount of translanguaging as classroom practice will undo the monoglossic language ideologies of U.S. school assessment. Every assessment is an assessment of language (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1985), and thus, unless some recognition is made of the different ways of using languages, U.S. Latino schoolchildren will continue to perform poorly and be foreclosed of meaningful educational opportunities. We know that test translations and accommodations do not solve the problem for bilingual students (Abedi & Lord, 2001; Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004). Assessments that claim to be in the child’s “native language” demonstrate monoglossic biases and misunderstandings about children’s bilingualism and have little validity since there is nonequivalence of vocabulary difficulty between languages, making comparisons for content proficiency between tests given in different languages totally inappropriate (August & Hakuta, 1998). Assessments conducted in different languages are not psychometrically equivalent (Anderson, Jenkins, & Miller, 1996). But there could be ways for assessments, even standardized ones, to take the translanguaging of U.S. Latinos and their pluriliteracies into account.

U.S. Latino students could be *assessed via a bilingual mode*, a way of rendering their bilingual competence an accepted part of their identity and knowledge. For example, questions may be put in the two languages and responses allowed in any. Or the written text could be produced by the learner in their language of choice and the oral presentation in another. If U.S. schools insist that only English be used, assessment could still follow a *bilingual tap mode*, a way of tapping the students’ different language practices in order to produce a target language of assessment. That is, rather than negate the students’ bilingualism, this type of assessment would, for example, give instructions and questions in English and Spanish and ask students to respond solely in English. In this way, the children’s Spanish and their bilingualism would be used to activate knowledge for assessment. This *bilingual-tap assessment* builds on recent work on bilingual language processing by Dufour and Kroll (1995) and Kecskes and Papp (2007). Van der Walt (2006, 2007) has shown how an explicit bilingual task affected the performance of a group of bilingual higher education students in South Africa, compared to another group of bilingual students who were given the same, but monolingual task. Although rarely used, *bilingual-tap assessment* holds much promise, for it builds on the ways in which languages and literacies are naturally used in U.S. Latino communities.

Although translanguaging and pluriliteracy practices are readily observable in U.S. schools with Latino bilingual students, teachers and administrators continue to insist on using language as monolingual bounded systems. In both teaching and assessment, the results continue to be disastrous, as Latino schoolchildren’s multiple voices are ignored within the school walls.

Conclusion

Despite the potential to build on the integrated plurilingual literacy practices that are prevalent among peoples in the twenty-first century and facilitated through new media, schools in the United States reflect a national monolingual and monoglossic ideology. The core of the resistance lies in the lack of will to change the status quo of situations in which dominant languages and literacies hold power and privilege. An important question is whether schools, regarded as the most influential educational domain, will continue to protect literacy in standard national languages and in traditional media, or will begin to build on the flexible and multi-modal plurilingual literacy practices that are sorely needed by ALL U.S. citizens in the world today.

Notes

- 1 I use monoglossic to refer to treating each of the languages as separate and whole bounded autonomous systems. In contrast, heteroglossic refers to multiple language practices in interrelationship, as the multiple voices in Bakhtin (1981).
- 2 By multimodalities, I mean that linguistic modes of meaning are intricately bound up with other visual, audio, and spatial semiotic systems. For more on this concept, see, for example, Jewett & Kress (2003) and the New London Group (1996).
- 3 This figure, taken from the U.S. Census, has to be interpreted with caution. The U.S. Census asks what language is spoken at home. Those who reply that they speak English only are here considered English monolingual, although it is possible that some of them might have bilingual proficiency.
- 4 For more information on this topic, see García, Kleifgen, and Falchi, 2007, and García, 2009b.
- 5 I borrow the term “translanguaging” from Cen Williams who used it only to refer to a pedagogical approach that alternates language modes. For more on that use of translanguaging, see Baker, 2001. I have extended its meaning.
- 6 The concept of mother tongue is contested. For different dimensions of mother tongue, see Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981. See also García, 2009a.
- 7 A significant use of the native language was provided for only 16 percent of those who were learning English, and of these, most were Spanish speakers. Zehler et al. (2003) report that in 2001–2, 12 percent of emergent bilinguals were receiving no special services whatsoever, and only 36 percent were receiving appropriate services. According to the survey, only 52 percent of those identified as “ELLs” were receiving an educational program substantially different from that of their monolingual counterparts.
- 8 This has to do with the negative connotations that the word “bilingual”—what Crawford (2004) has called “the B-word”—has acquired in the U.S., but also of insisting on the separation of the two languages. Increasingly in the U.S. the term “dual language” is also used to refer to bilingual education programs other than transitional ones.
- 9 These strategies refer to making meaning out of stories, paragraphs or sentences.

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