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Minority Languages: Education

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Definitions and Purposes

Minority language education is here defined as the school's use of a language (or languages) spoken by students whose heritage language differs from that of the more powerful members of society who usually exercise the most control over state schools. Although minority language education always includes the teaching of the minority language, its main purpose is to educate the minority group by using the heritage language as a cognitive and affective instrument to make sense of their world, and sometimes as a way to improve their mastery of the majority language. Minority language education is most often a component of an education that includes the majority language. Thus, minority language education is more specific and focused than, but usually is a part of, what has been termed bilingual/multilingual education.

Minority language education is important for individuals and groups, especially for the language minority community, but also for the majority community. All quality education builds on strengths, and the greatest strength children entering school possess is the language that they bring from home, the instrument they have used to communicate with others, especially with members of their family, and to make sense of their world. For language minority children, therefore, an education which includes their heritage language has effective benefits, enabling them to find continuity between their first learning context, the home, and the school, and making it possible for them to identify with teachers in ways that build on relationships they have with caregivers and friends. A heritage language education also enables minority children to find themselves in school, in the voices of the books they read, the songs they learn, the stories they weave. In addition, minority language education has sociocognitive benefits, enabling children to use the language they know best

to develop their understanding of cognitively complex academic material (Baker and Jones, 1998; Cummins, 2000; Baker, 2001). With time, and alongside a quality education in the majority language, a minority language education enables students to reap some of the sociocognitive benefits that have been associated with bilingualism – greater metalinguistic awareness and divergent thinking (Bialystok, 2001).

In society, minority language education is important for both the minority group and the majority group. It provides minority groups with a way to understand their culture and their history. It is empowering for the minority, offering them educational opportunities and building their capacity as educated citizens in majority society. If well done, it provides a vehicle for greater intercultural understanding. Finally, it conserves the language resources of a society and builds its capacity for multilingualism (Fishman, 1976).

After contextualizing the traditions and the controversies surrounding minority language education around the world, this article will (1) identify the different power-related dimensions that affect whether a minority language has the possibility of being successfully included in education, and introduce a scale that can be used to predict its ease and success; (2) describe the different ways in which minority language education has been organized, giving examples from different societies.

Traditions, Continuities, Possibilities, and Controversies

Minority language education is not new and it has seldom been uncontroversial. Although common sense would dictate an education in the language of the student, the sociohistorical and socioeducational conditions of states often work against the inclusion of the minority language in state education systems. It is then the tension produced, on the one hand, by the understanding that students should be instructed in their home and community language, and, on the other hand, by the inability or unwillingness of the state to do so, for either political or economic reasons, that surrounds minority language education in controversy.

Minority language education has sometimes been established by educators themselves, many times without official state sanction or funds, and often in private venues. For example, frustrated by the difficulty of evangelizing in Spanish, the language officially sanctioned by the Spanish Empire, missionaries in the New World used the languages of natives during the first two centuries of the Empire. But in 1770, Charles III ordered that only Spanish be used in

an effort to spur the spread of Spanish and eradicate the Indian languages (García, 1999). During the Franco dictatorship in 20th-century Spain, *ikastolas*, where Basque children were taught in Euskera (Basque), grew as an underground movement of resistance to schooling in Spanish only (Etxeberria Balerdi, 2001). In the United States, the languages of immigrants, especially German (Standard German), were used in schools throughout the 19th century. But by the early 20th century, and in the wake of the xenophobia surrounding World War I, the practice had become controversial, and 23 states passed laws banning the use of languages other than English in education (Wiley, 1998). Examples of the use of indigenous languages in schooling children in countries in Latin America, beyond those of official bilingual intercultural programs, have been well documented by Hornberger (1997). And throughout the world, language minority groups themselves, especially those with religious affiliations, have organized minority language education programs, sometimes after-school and weekend supplementary programs, other times day schools. This is the case, for example, with the many yeshivas and Islamic schools in New York City, as well as with Mandarin (Mandarin Chinese) after-school and weekend programs.

There are also many examples of officially initiated and supported minority language education programs, although unfortunately many of these efforts continue to meet opposition. In the 20th century, as many African and Asian countries were achieving independence, minority language education was supported, especially by the UNESCO declaration that it is axiomatic to use the child's mother tongue in teaching reading. But the selection of which mother tongue to use as the medium of instruction, and the use of diverse children's mother tongues in the highly multilingual contexts of Africa, has proven problematic (Alidou, 2004; Webb, 2004). Likewise, the transitional bilingual education programs that were created by US federal legislation in the 1970s have recently undergone attack, and by the early 21st century Arizona, California, and Massachusetts had outlawed the practice (Crawford, 2004). The European Union, through the efforts of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages and Mercator, supports the development of minority and regional language education, although more attention is often paid to the spread of international languages such as English (Truchot, 2003). It is in contexts where indigenous languages are protected by law and not considered a threat to the majority language that minority language education has gathered momentum and strength. This is the case of Maori-medium education in Aotearoa/New Zealand (May, 2004), of Welsh/Cymru in Wales

(Jones and Martin-Jones, 2004), and of the regional languages of Spain, especially Catalan (Catalan-Valencian-Balear) (Artigal, 1993), since the advent of democracy. When minority language education leads to political and economic advantages, the majority also becomes interested in being included. The exemplar in this case is Quebec, where immersion programs engage the anglophone majority in French-medium instruction (Genesee, 1987).

In the 21st century, as globalization has spurred the movement of people, goods, and services across national boundaries, creating huge linguistic diasporas and the need for communication across languages and in many languages, minority language education has gained in importance, and also in complexity. In societies with high population mobility such as the United States, two-way dual language programs have been developed, involving language minority children with different degrees of proficiency in their heritage or majority language, as well as language majority children. Although problematic (see García, 2004; Valdés, 1997), these programs build on the interculturality of the multiple knowledge bases that shape

the transnational/transcultural identities of students in the 21st century.

Power-Related Dimensions of Minority Languages and Their Access to Education

The power-related dimensions identified in Table 1 affect the possibility that minority language education will be developed and successfully implemented with official support. Successful officially sanctioned minority language education depends on the will of the majority, often determined by the linguistic rights it is prepared to cede (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), which are related to the historical status of the language (indigenous or immigrant), its economic value, and its uniqueness, that is, whether it is the sole minority language or is in competition with others. But beyond the majority's will lies the will of the minority itself, whether it considers the language important enough to its survival as a people (identity). There are then schooling factors that are important to consider regardless of the will of peoples – whether, as

Table 1 Power-related dimensions for implementation of minority language education

Factors	Dimension	Score = 4	Score = 3	Score = 2	Score = 1
Majority will factors	Historical power	ML ^a is indigenous language of long standing	ML is indigenous but of more recency	ML is spoken by indigenous settlers and immigrants	ML is spoken only by immigrants
	Economic power	ML has economic value in local and global contexts	ML has economic value only in local context	ML has economic value in other contexts only	ML has no economic value
	Uniqueness power	ML is sole in community and has many speakers	ML has numerical majority, far beyond the other MLs	ML is one of many in community, but is numerically important	ML is one of many in community, and constitutes a small minority
Minority will factors	Identity power	ML and ethnic identity are deeply intertwined	ML is an important ethnic marker to most	ML is an important ethnic marker to some, but not to most	Ethnic identity has lost all link to ML
Schooling factors	Political power	ML has official status in many developed countries	ML has official status in at least one developed country	ML has official status only in developing countries	ML has no official status in any country
	Literacy power	ML has rich literary tradition and academic texts	ML is written but has few published works and few texts	ML lacks written standardization. Academic texts not available.	ML is not written
Organizational factors	Sociolinguistic power	ML is spoken by all or mostly all the ML community	ML is spoken by over $\frac{2}{3}$ of the ML community, both old and young	ML is spoken by approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of the ML community	ML is spoken by less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the ML community, mostly aged
	Demographic power	ML community is numerically strong and lives in very isolated communities	ML community is numerically strong and lives in somewhat isolated communities	ML community is demographically weak, although lives in somewhat isolated communities	ML community is demographically weak and lives in integrated communities

^aML = minority language.

a result of its official status in other countries (political), there are teachers, books, and a rich literacy and literature tradition (literacy). Finally, the organizational factors of minority language education depend on the sociolinguistic status of the language (whether it has been maintained or has undergone shift) and whether there are many speakers of the same language in isolated schools (demographic).

Table 1 presents a rubric that enables states to determine whether implementation of minority language education would be relatively easy or very difficult. The higher the score, the more likely that minority language education can be implemented successfully and without too much effort. It is important to point out, however, that despite low scores, some language minority communities succeed on their own, and without external support, in running highly successful minority language education efforts.

Organization of Minority Language Education around the World

Although, as stated above, minority language education is not new, it was in the 20th century, and specifically after the UNESCO declaration of 1953 supporting the teaching of reading in the children's mother tongue, that it was first considered a field of study. The organization of minority language education responds to the different sociolinguistic and sociopolitical needs of different societies and language communities. At least seven different organizational models of minority language education coexist in the world today, and examples of such models in different societies follow.

1. *Heritage language education models*, specifically supplementary (after-school and weekend) classes, are often run by the minority language community itself to maintain and develop the heritage language in the language minority community. Instruction is most often solely in the minority language. Programs of this type are found throughout the world.

2. *Developmental maintenance bilingual education (DMBE) models* are either private all-day schools organized and run by the language minority community itself or state-funded all-day schools. Instruction is in two languages, with some portion of the school curriculum or day taught in the majority language and the other taught in the minority language.

Sometimes, the more ethnically encumbered subjects (such as history and social studies) are taught in the minority language, and the other subjects are taught in the majority language. This is the case, for example, with the Hebrew day schools in the United States, which use Biblical Hebrew for the study of the Old

Testament and the Commentaries, modern Hebrew to teach the history of Israel, and English to teach all secular subjects. This is also the case of schools in the Philippines, which reserve Filipino (Tagalog) to teach Philippine history and literature and use English to teach math and science (Gonzalez, 1998).

The strict compartmentalization and functional complementary of languages observed in the DMBE model of the Philippines contrasts sharply with that in Wales. The purpose of the DMBE model in the Philippines was to spread Filipino (Tagalog) as a national language in a highly multilingual context, and thus it was formally protected. In Wales, however, Welsh and English are used to teach all subjects, with a great deal of instructional code-switching used to contextualize Welsh for those for whom it is not a mother tongue, as well as for those who have undergone language shift (Jones and Martin-Jones, 2004).

DMBE models do not always devote equal time to the two languages. Sometimes, as in the Cuban-American schools in Dade County, Florida (García and Otheguy, 1988), Greek day schools throughout the world, or the Frisian (Western Frisian) schools in Friesland (Zondag, 1988), the minority language is used as a medium of instruction only for literacy-related functions, and often for just one instructional period a day. Usually, the minority language is taught by a different teacher.

3. *Heritage immersion bilingual education models* have been developed in societal contexts where there has been a high degree of language shift. In an effort to reverse the language shift that had occurred in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Kōhanga Reo movement established nursery schools completely run in Maori by the community elders. Those early immersion efforts have now been complemented by the establishment of *kura kaupapa* bilingual schools, following a developmental maintenance model (May, 2004). Likewise, immersion bilingual education models where language minority children are initially immersed in their heritage language are now prevalent in Scotland for Gaelic (Scotts Gaelic), Ireland for Irish (Irish Gaelic), and Spain for Euskera (Basque), societies in which there has been a great deal of language shift. Immersion in the minority language is always followed by an education which balances the minority with the majority language.

4. *Bilingual intercultural education models* are prevalent in Latin America for indigenous groups who have traditionally received a poor Spanish-medium education. Bilingual intercultural education is available in Aymara, Guarani (Guaraní) and especially Quechua/Quichua, among others, alongside Spanish. The purpose of such minority language education is to provide basic literacy to the

indigenous population, while giving them the intercultural skills that enable them to interact in the Spanish-speaking world (López, 1995). Despite legislation supporting intercultural bilingual education, programs are few and often experimental in nature.

5. *Transitional bilingual education models* exist mostly in contexts with a high degree of immigration such as the United States, or in countries of Africa and Asia where minority language education lasts only until the child acquires the majority language. Transitional bilingual education models are an example of subtractive minority language education and lead away from the minority language to the majority language.

6. *Two-way bilingual education models* provide language minority children with an education in their heritage language, while making it possible for language majority children to learn the minority language. Although these models usually keep the two linguistic groups separate during the period of emerging bilingualism, especially for literacy instruction, the recent programs developed in the United States insist on the linguistic integration of children at all times. This linguistic integration often works better for the acquisition of English than for the maintenance and development of the minority language (García, 2004).

7. *Language Awareness and Inclusive models* are organized in contexts where the minority language speakers are integrated throughout the school system and it is impossible to provide them with minority language education. It cannot be considered minority language education in its own right. Children in these models are encouraged to use the minority languages to read, find information, and write reports (García, 2000). Language awareness models specifically encourage children to compare and contrast their minority language to the majority one (James and Garrett, 1991). The teacher does not instruct in the minority language or about the minority language since she or he rarely has knowledge of the minority language.

Conclusion

Minority language education is very important, but it is fraught with controversy and challenges. By using the scale provided here, educators will be able to determine the kinds of human and financial resources needed to implement minority language education successfully. Each society and community will have to determine the kinds of models that it can support. More minority language education is better than less,

and its absence in a society is a sure sign that a large proportion of the school-age population is being excluded from a meaningful education.

See also: Bilingual Education; Education in a Former Colonial Language; Mother Tongue Education: Nonstandard Language; Mother Tongue Education: Standard Language.

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