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**Positioning Heritage Languages in the United States**

OFELIA GARCÍA, Teachers College, Columbia University

*Lengua de herencia? . . . Como algo viejo, mi bisabuela.
Heritage language? . . . As if something old, my great-grandmother.*

Sonia, a 17-year-old Dominican recently arrived in New York City, May 10, 2005

What does the term *heritage language* mean to Sonia, the newly arrived Latina adolescent whose words appear above? It means “something old, her great-grandmother.” And how does this differ from *Spanish*? Well, she tells me, *Spanish* is what she speaks every day not only in her home, but also in the streets of Washington Heights, a Latino neighborhood in upper Manhattan.

I agree with Sonia. Positioning languages other than English in the United States as *heritage languages* clearly is rear-viewing. It speaks to what was left behind in remote lands, what is in one’s past. By leaving the languages in the past, the term *heritage languages* connotes something that one holds onto vaguely as one’s remembrances, but certainly not something that is used in the present or that can be projected into the future. The use
of the term *heritage languages* in the United States is, as Cummins so aptly notices, recent. This short reflection offers insights into why U.S. academics might have adopted the term, 20 years after the Canadians popularized it. Why, we must ask, has the term *heritage languages* caught on recently in the United States? Does it represent new languages? New language ideologies? New language policy or planning? What terms were used previously and what has happened to those terms?

These questions form the basis for my reflections. I believe the use of the term *heritage languages* in the United States signals a losing of ground for language minorities that was gained during the civil rights era. And yet, I agree with Cummins that the use of the term *heritage languages in education* in speaking with teachers, parents, schools, administrators, and children provides a way to “crack” today’s homogenous monolingual schooling of very different children in the United States, providing a space for the use of languages other than English in educating children.

THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF THE UNITED STATES

The United States has had a long bilingual tradition that was aptly described in the 1960s and 1970s especially by Heinz Kloss (1963, 1977), Einar Haugen (1953), and Joshua Fishman (1966). As Table 1 makes clear, the foreign-born population in the United States has been approximately 10% since 1850, with the exception of the period of immigration restriction surrounding World War II, a restriction that was lifted as a result of the amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

It is instructive to link passage in 1968 of the Bilingual Education Act with the historical period of lowest immigration. Those people who originally benefited from bilingual education were ethnolinguistic groups who were not immigrants—Mexican Americans who had long lived in the Southwest, Puerto Ricans who were U.S. citizens by virtue of the Jones Act of 1917, and the indigenous peoples of the United States, Native Americans. By 1974, when the Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized, immigration was on the increase and the transitional definition of bilingual education came into being. But with this rise in immigration, which returned the levels of the foreign-born to their long-term historical trends, came another change, which affected how the country viewed its bilingual tradition. Table 2 makes evident that, not only was the number of immigrants rising, their countries of origin were shifting dramatically. By 1980, immigration, especially from Latin America and Asia, was on the increase while immigration from Europe was declining rapidly. In 2000, over 50% of the immigrants to the United States were from Latin America.

For the most part, Latin American immigrants speak Spanish. The number of Spanish speakers, combined with second and third generation Latinos who live in Spanish-speaking homes or who claim Spanish as the language of their ancestors, has simply led to a shift in U.S. language ideology, with the language tolerance of its historical past and the language promotion of its civil rights era being replaced by the language restriction of the English Only movement. As in its historical beginnings, the United States has to contend particularly with Spanish, despite the recent growth of Asian and African languages in the country.

SPANISH AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE?

Kloss (1977) attributed the greatest language rights to languages spoken by original settlers. Spanish was present in the continental United States before English. In 1513, Ponce de León discovered Florida, and soon afterwards, Pánfilo de Narváez established the first colony of Europeans near present-day Pensacola. Then, in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded...
TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Europe</th>
<th>Asia</th>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Oceania</th>
<th>Latin America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>92.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Pop Division No. 29 and Summary File 3.

half of the Mexican territory to the United States. Spanish could be considered an original language in the United States, albeit with different histories and fortunes depending on the area in which it was spoken.

Besides being an original language, Spanish is widely spoken today in most of the United States. In July, 2004, Latinos numbered 41.3 million, accounting for one out of seven people in the country (Jelinek, 2005). According to the U.S. 2000 census, there were 35 million Latinos in the United States, comprising 13% of the population. Of those, 21 million or 59% were of Mexican descent, 10% were Puerto Ricans, and 4% were Cubans. Of the total population, 27 million people, or 10%, claimed in the 2000 U.S. census that Spanish was spoken in their homes. Although these figures suggest that over one third of U.S. Latinos do not speak Spanish in the home and may have shifted to English, they also indicate that approximately two thirds of U.S. Latinos continue to speak Spanish in the home, even when they are fully bilingual. In fact, only 11% of those Latinos who speak Spanish at home do so because they do not speak English at all.

With 27 million speakers of Spanish in 2000, the United States is the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world and is only short a million speakers to be on a par with Spain, a multilingual country where Spanish is spoken only by 28 million (Garcia, in press). Spanish in the United States is clearly not simply a heritage language, but one that is spoken, most of the time alongside English, by millions of people who are U.S. citizens. In fact, for many of us, Spanish is no more our heritage language than English is. Both languages form part of our bilingual and transcultural identities, and perhaps it is our bilingualism that is our heritage, a heritage important in our globalized world, but increasingly denied to U.S. citizens in U.S. global politics.

In describing the vicissitudes of globalization, especially as it relates to language policy and language planning, Wright (2004) explained:

Some of the most robust resistance to globalisation comes from within the United States itself... The U.S. government is able to guard its sovereignty and autonomy in the classic manner of the nation state... We appear to be witnessing asymmetric developments within globalisation: loss of economic autonomy and political sovereignty for many states; continuing economic autonomy and political sovereignty together with the survival of some elements of traditional “one nation, one territory, one language nationalism” for the United States. (pp. 163, 165)

I agree with Wright. Perhaps it is in the distancing of the United States from the globalization that it has spearheaded for other countries that we find the meaning of the shift in calling languages other than English heritage languages. As the languages of the world transcend their traditional territories and English spreads, languages other than English in the United States are being controlled through a shift in discourse. This shift is perhaps best exemplified by the silencing of the word bilingual and replacing it with heritage languages.

CLOSING UP THE BILINGUAL SPACE

It is obvious that the word bilingual has disappeared from the national discourse and that bilingual education has undergone a successful slandering campaign that has left it unable to name itself. As heritage languages came into our national use in the 1990s, the term bilingual was being phased out. Table 3 shows some of the changes in naming that have silenced the words bilingual.
education and minority languages, replacing them with language instruction and acquisition and English language.

As these official name changes were taking place, the bilingual education enterprise moved to support programs that did not call themselves bilingual but dual language, another way of referring to bilingual education without naming our country’s bilingualism. In theory, dual language education programs, the great majority of them in English and Spanish, integrate English language learners with Spanish language learners. In reality, however, these programs are more what Hervé Varenne (2005) called examples of “unauthorized education” or instances of the “centrifugal, hidden and playful activity of all human beings, even under oppression.” That is, as bilingual education programs, even those of the transitional kind, have come under attack, committed educators have found ways to continue to educate Latino students using their bilingualism as a resource. As a consequence one finds mostly Latino students in dual language classrooms; at least in New York City, they are Latino students who for the most part speak Spanish, but who are also bilingual.

In a recent article (García, 2004), I referred to bilingual education in New York City as “lost in transculturation,” as I decried the loss of the “safe spaces” that bilingual education programs, even of the transitional kind, provided for language minorities. As I reflect on what is happening in dual language classrooms today, however, I can also speak of what has been found—a way, “a crack” in the educational homogenization that surrounds the No Child Left Behind Act, that enables bilingual instruction to continue in an era of restrictions and attacks on language rights. The same may be said of the use of the term heritage languages in education—it is a way of continuing to operate even a small modicum of professional bilingual activity in times of an increasingly bilingual U.S. reality but strict English monolingual imposition.

**HERITAGE LANGUAGE AS OPENING UP NEW SPACE**

Despite what has been lost, that is, the potential for full bilingualism and biliteracy of U.S. citizens, the introduction of the term heritage language in U.S. education discourse has opened up some new educational possibilities within the public schools. On the one hand, in opposition to foreign language education, heritage language education, mostly at the secondary and tertiary level, makes it possible to have classes for those students who have some measure of proficiency in the language because they speak it at home or in the community. On the other hand, in elementary and secondary school, heritage language education provides the possibility of using languages other than English for instructing those students who are in English as a second language, Sheltered English, or monolingual English-only programs. The use of heritage languages in children’s learning even when instruction is in English has been shown to be highly effective (Cummins, in press; Fu, 2003). These heritage languages are used for their cross-linguistic transfer potential in educating children. They are different from the language awareness programs that make children cognizant of other languages. Heritage languages in education are good for language minority children who are receiving no mother-tongue support in schools. But they are a far cry from what we should be doing with the nation’s bilingualism and biliteracy potential.

**TWO SOLITUDES VERSUS ENGLISH SOLITUDE**

I agree fully with Cummins that the two solitudes of the languages in second language immersion and bilingual/dual language programs are no longer useful in a globalizing world where different degrees of multilingual abilities are needed for different purposes and where
monolingual spaces are seldom isolated. Schools need to calibrate their expectations to meet the world’s plurilingual reality, and new instructional arrangements must be developed to benefit from the linguistic hybridity of the 21st century and its attendant technology. The use of heritage languages in every child’s education may be one way to develop a well-protected space for this activity.

It is important to understand that, despite its promise, recognition of heritage languages in education has only come about as a fall-back position, when the potential for bilingualism and biliteracy became restricted. In the United States, we have gone from the two solitudes of our two languages in bilingualism, to our sole solitude in English, with whispers in other languages. Our multiple identities have been silenced, with one language identity reduced to that of a heritage.

Those of us who work with language know that our use of language has the power to change realities. It is important to acknowledge the shift in the sociopolitical context and in our democratic process of giving voice to language minorities, indigenous peoples, immigrants, and refugees that is indexed by the silencing of the words bilingual and mother tongue. The recognition and use of the term heritage language harks back to a mythical era when English only reigned supreme in the nation’s public schools, an era before bilingualism, before the recognition of two solitudes. It relegates languages other than English to a powerless position—backward and unimportant. But the term heritage language also keeps feeding the possibility of expressing our multiple identities—plural transcultural identities that refuse to disappear even when the solitude of U.S. English spreads throughout the globe.

REFERENCES


Opening and Filling Up Implementational and Ideological Spaces in Heritage Language Education

NANCY H. HORNBERGER, The University of Pennsylvania

Wonderfully and characteristically, Jim Cummins has written a startlingly clear and practical piece on a topic both theoretically and politically complex. I agree with everything he has to say—from his definitions of what we mean by heritage languages to his classroom-level strategies of what to do to consolidate and affirm them. There is nothing for me to add there. What I can do, though, is reinforce and extend some of his points, with particular attention to international, indigenous, and policy perspectives. In the comments that follow, I take up three such extensions: (a) the notion of opening and filling up ideological and implementational spaces in order to advance heritage language education, (b) the significance of bottom-up language planning in relation to heritage language resources, and (c) the value of working (at both policy and classroom levels) from a conception of biliteracy in developing learners’ heritage language talents and identities.