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Chapter 2

Understanding the societal role of the teacher in transitional bilingual classrooms: lessons from sociology of language

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Abstract

Teachers are often unaware of the socio-educational agenda of the state and how their classroom practices relate to that agenda. The case of the bilingual teacher in U.S. transitional programs using Spanish and English is here presented to illustrate how these Latino teachers think they're contributing to the maintenance of Spanish when, in fact, they're only accelerating the group's shift to English.

Four sociolinguistic principles, often ignored by teachers, explain why the increased use of Spanish leads to its disappearance:

- Stigmatization leads to shift to the prestigious language.
- Absence of language-identity link leads to shift to the unmarked language.
- Lack of compartmentalization leads to shift to the dominant language.
- Lack of usefulness leads to shift to the useful language.

After discussing each of these principles in the context of the transitional bilingual classroom in the United States, this contribution argues that the teacher must abandon her limited role as instructor merely knowledgeable about educational approaches and materials. Teachers must become true educators, questioning and shaping the societal goal of the educational program and providing students with the knowledge and resources needed. This contribution shows how bilingual educators in the U.S., seeking to empower the Latino community, must then question the school's goal of English monolingualism, given the valid role of Spanish within the community itself.

Introduction

All teachers, regardless of where they teach, who they teach and how they teach, carry out an educational agenda which is most often handed down to them by policy makers, governmental agencies or school administrators. But rarely are they informed about the socio-educational agenda with which they're presented. Their teaching task focuses on developing the appropriate and approach methodology and selecting the right material to teach the children who greet them in the morning. In fact, success in their pedagogical training and in obtaining governmental certification is tied to not questioning the socio-educational goals of the state.

Up to very recently, teachers were mostly members of the ethnic group in power, and thus, although not involved in decision-making about the educational objectives of the state, they probably shared those goals. But in the recent past, as the world has increasingly recognized the ethnolinguistic diversity in its midst, school bureaucracies have had to employ members of minority groups to educate children. And even though it is societally recognized that the socio-educational goals of the state concerning language minorities and those of the language minority itself are sometimes in conflict, the educational establishment has ignored this fact by choosing instead to keep the teacher, even the language minority one, focused on appropriate approaches, methodologies and materials. And so the teacher continues to deliver some content or material to children, while often being unaware of the societal goal of the educational program she merely transmits.

Bilingual education involves the use of two languages in schooling. And even though all bilingual classrooms share the feature of using two languages in some way, their goals are very varied, depending on who has made the decision to use the two languages. When the ethnolinguistic minority has achieved some measure of equality with the dominant group and has been granted the right to educate their children, chances are that the use of the two languages will lead to true bilingualism and biliteracy, which will then become important assets in that societal context. But when the ethnolinguistic minority is marginal to the majority, chances are that the use of the two languages will be just another tool of social and linguistic domination, even if that task is now in the hands of the minority teachers themselves. And in these situations, it becomes imperative that bilingual teachers understand not only their role in accelerating the shift to the majority language, but also the true relationship between language and social rewards, for only then would teachers be able to take a more active role in trying to shape the socio-educational agenda for the children they teach.

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societal role beyond the classroom, for educating is not only delivering content, but also questioning, shaping and changing society's goals for the children she teaches. We provide information on how approaches, methodology, curriculum and materials are tied to the plan that society has for the children being educated. And we use the example of the bilingual teacher in *transitional* programs in the United States to illustrate how sometimes educators think they're doing one thing, when in fact, they're contributing to do quite the opposite.

1 How increased use of the minority language leads to its disappearance: Four sociolinguistic principles

Bilingual teachers in the United States are rewarded with employment precisely because they speak two languages. They may know that the school has a transitional program, and that the children will be transferred to monolingual classrooms once they learn English. But within their classrooms they use the minority language in instruction, and so, although they recognize their role in helping children acquire English, they're convinced they're contributing to the *maintenance* of the children's minority language.

Although there are transitional bilingual programs in many languages, the majority are in Spanish and English, and so, we will focus on the Spanish-English bilingual program to elucidate how it is that teachers who define their pedagogical task in a narrow-mechanical sense, sometimes end up contributing to quite the opposite societal effect from that which they think they're causing. Because the training and education of bilingual teachers is often also narrowly conceived as familiarizing them with appropriate methodology and approaches, these teachers have rarely thought about how two languages function in society or in the classroom. And thus, they think that their use of Spanish is contributing to its maintenance, when in fact, the opposite is taking place.

There are four sociolinguistic principles, rarely shared with teachers, that explain why the use of more Spanish in transitional bilingual classrooms accelerates the shift to English of Spanish speakers. They are the following:

- *Stigmatization* leads to shift to the *prestigious* language.
- *Absence of language-identity link* leads to shift to the *unmarked* language.
- *Lack of compartmentalization* leads to shift to the *dominant* language.
- *Lack of usefulness* leads to shift to the *useful* language.

We will explain each of these principles within the United States societal context, focusing on how they apply to the Spanish-English transitional bilingual program'.

1.1 Stigmatization leads to shift to the prestigious language

If one language is assigned a stigmatized status, bilingual speakers will want to shift to the prestigious language.

Although Spanish is a colonial language, present in our context from the very beginning, it is only its role as the language of the conquered Mexican Americans, the colonized Puerto Ricans, and the subjugated Latin Americans from the rest of the Caribbean, Central and South America, that is recognized. Spanish is then, not only the language of subjugated and often poor minorities, but also of people of color. And as with other languages spoken by racially distinct ethnolinguistic groups, especially the African Americans and the Native Americans, Spanish has been the object of one of the most fierce language eradication campaigns in the United States. (For a more complete history of US Spanish, see, among others, Elías Olivares 1983; Elías Olivares, Leone, Cisneros and Gutiérrez 1985; Wherrit and García 1989.)

Spanish in the United States today differs from the languages of other ethnolinguistic groups. Most European languages suffered losses as the English-speaking economy quickly absorbed white immigrants. African and Native American languages underwent losses despite the fact that many speakers of these languages have not been, for the most part, structurally incorporated into American society. (For the difference between linguistic assimilation and structural incorporation, see, Skutnabb-Kangas 1979.) Yet, despite the shift to English of Latinos by the third generation, common to all U.S. language minorities, Spanish has undergone tremendous gains as immigration from Latin America has increased dramatically.

It is not the first time that the United States has had to contend with a non-English language that was widely spoken. But the linguistic eradication campaigns carried out in the early part of the century, not only against speakers of indigenous languages, but also against speakers of widely-spoken languages like German, are no longer appropriate in our contemporary context of Civil Rights. We know from history that we have been most successful in accelerating linguistic assimilation when the economic power of English has attracted speakers. This is indeed the principle upon which our Founding Fathers based their decision not to make English the official language of the land. (For more on this history, see, among others, Heath 1977.) And thus, jobs in bilingual education for speakers of Spanish and English has been one way of publicizing the fact that English speaking ability is socially rewarded, at the same time that it emphasizes the unequal power and prestige of English and Spanish.

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mark Spanish as the stigmatized language, and English as the prestigious language. Usually bilingual teachers are treated as second-class citizens in schools that do not value nor understand the use of Spanish. This inferior position of the bilingual teacher is revealed, for example, by the choice of words in referring to monolingual teachers, "mainstream teachers". And students in these transitional bilingual classrooms are often referred to by the acronym that the federal government, in promoting its remedial stance, has popularized, LEP (Limited English Proficient), connoting associations with leprosy and disease. "Bilingual" in these schools doesn't mean having the ability to speak two languages, but on the contrary, being a speaker of the stigmatized language. And so, the term "bilingual" itself, in its contrived use, acquires the very negative connotation that North American society assigns to it.

In most schools with large transitional bilingual programs, the people in power, the principals and assistant principals, are usually English monolinguals. But most often, the people of least power in the school, the janitor, the cook, the lunch room monitor, are speakers of Spanish. English is the language in which announcements are made by the principal over the loud-speaker. Spanish is the language used by those who serve everyone else. This situation which emphasizes the unequal prestige of both languages, now within one societal context, the school, is quickly apprehended by language minority children.

The stigmatized status of Spanish is now more publicly visible than when Spanish was only spoken in the homes and neighborhoods of the language minority community. By publicizing the little value of Spanish in our English-speaking context and maximizing the confrontation and conflict surrounding the use of Spanish in public, transitional bilingual classrooms make Latino parents and children painfully aware that they should shift to English, the language that is billed as the language of prestige and of success. They no longer want to be speakers of Spanish, nor do they want to be bilingual, they simply want to enter the "mainstream" which in the school context means being speakers of English-only.

1.2 Absence of language-identity link leads to shift to the unmarked language

If the link between a specific language and ethnicity is destroyed, bilingual speakers will shift to the unmarked language, that is, the language of the majority.

Historically, one of the ways in which Latinos were forced to give up Spanish in the United States, was to convince them that they didn't speak the "right" kind of Spanish. While the Spanish spoken by the conquered Mexicans in the Southwest

was debased, only "Castilian" Spanish was recognized in the teaching of Spanish in the United States.

And this tradition has continued until very recently. Latinos who spoke Spanish only when they entered school gave up Spanish, only to find that the "other" Spanish, the foreign-one, spoken only in certain regions of Spain, made its entry again in high school. The link between the only Spanish recognized in the United States and Hispanic/Latino identity was destroyed. High School Spanish teaching was then mostly in the hands of North American teachers. But as Spanish became ever present in the United States context, and marked with its civil rights flavor, less North Americans opted to become teachers of Spanish, creating a void that now necessarily had to be filled by Latinos. (For more on this history of Spanish language teaching in the United States, see, García 1992.) Recognizing Latinos as Spanish language teachers using their variety of Latin American Spanish certainly strengthens the language-identity link.

But, it is precisely at this historical juncture that transitional bilingual education makes its entry, attracting Latinos to jobs in which the language-identity link is not marked. In bilingual classrooms, Latinos are teachers of English, as well as Spanish, thus eroding the language-ethnicity link. These Latinos become excellent role models, speaking English publicly, and validating for the Latino community an English-speaking identity.

It is interesting, for example, that transitional bilingual classrooms in the United States use only one teacher. Many successful bilingual programs in the world, and even in the United States, achieve bilingualism precisely by employing two bilingual individuals who work as monolingual teachers, that is, whose job it is to teach one of the two languages that make up the curriculum. But this arrangement, of course, would strengthen and confirm the link between ethnicity and identity of the monolingual language minority teacher. And it would provide for the built-in compartmentalization lacking in transitional bilingual classrooms, the third principle to which we now turn.

1.3 Lack of compartmentalization leads to shift to the dominant language

If two languages are used interchangeably without assigning a specific role to each language; that is, without any compartmentalization, the language of more prestige will take over, and bilingual speakers will shift to the dominant language.

Not only does the existence of one Latino bilingual teacher weaken the language-identity link, but it makes it more difficult to compartmentalize the use of the two

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languages. In bilingual programs with two teachers, usually the ethnic language is marked with a specific function, often having to do with the history, culture and literature, of the people who speak that language. For example, a common arrangement in non-public bilingual schools in the United States, run by either ethnic communities or private entities, is that the non-English language is used to teach the literature and history of the particular group. (For more on these ethnic bilingual schools, see, Fishman 1980; García and Otheguy 1985; García 1988.) In Hebrew Day Schools, for example, Hebrew is used for Biblical Studies and for modern Israeli history, whereas English is used to teach all the other secular subjects, such as, Math, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts. At the Lycée Français, English is used only to teach American History and English Language Arts. Although the functions assigned to the languages differ in both content and time, it is the strict compartmentalization of the two languages that develops both bilingualism and biliteracy.

This curricular arrangement reflects societal *diglossia*, an enduring societal arrangement for the use of two languages by compartmentalizing their use (Fishman 1972). This can be done by either allocating different functions to the two languages (personality diglossia) or different geographical areas (territorial diglossia).

The use of the two languages in the curriculum of the Hebrew Day Schools, for example, reflects personality diglossia, since both languages have received different functional allocation. There are also bilingual programs where a territorial diglossic arrangement for the two languages is followed. For example, Canadian immersion programs which use only one teacher, strictly adhere to what they call "linguistic territories", with children changing classrooms for French and English parts of the school day. Bilingual classrooms that aim to develop bilingualism and biliteracy usually follow either of these two diglossic curricular arrangements, either the personality one followed by the Hebrew Day Schools or the territorial one followed by Canadian immersion programs.

But in transitional bilingual programs, where the goal is neither bilingualism nor biliteracy, the bilingual teacher has rarely given much thought to the language distribution in the classroom. And so, she uses her two languages in the way in which it is most frequently used in the bilingual community, frequently alternating or *code-switching* between one and the other.

Although code-switching has been identified as the natural discourse mode of the bilingual Latino community (see, for example, Zentella 1981), and although functional reasons for code-switching have been given (see, for example, Gumperz and Hernandez-Chávez 1972), code-switching is certainly not always helpful in classrooms where bilingualism and biliteracy are the goal.

In some ways, code-switching may facilitate English language acquisition by providing a context from which to infer meaning. In fact, it is an excellent way to increase comprehensible input, a factor widely characterized by Krashen (1982) as essential in second language acquisition. Jacobson (1990) has even developed a teaching approach which uses functional code-switching in transitional bilingual classrooms. But although code-switching may be valid in helping students acquire English, it certainly works against the minority language, once again eroding the compartmentalization or diglossic arrangement that must exist between the two languages if bilingualism and biliteracy were the goal.

A teacher who code-switches will naturally use more English than Spanish, since non-conscious language use in a bilingual context of unequal power leans toward the dominant language. And by eroding the borders between the two languages, code-switching brings in English, while destroying Spanish.

1.4 Lack of usefulness leads to shift to the useful language

If one language is perceived as having little functional use, bilingual speakers will shift to the useful language.

English is the only language of value in a society where English monolinguals hold the power. And so, principals and administrators fail to see the value of Spanish for language minority students. Students are then only evaluated on their progress in English. Although Spanish is then used, it is stripped of any value. And it is easy to see how bilingual teachers, eager to do a good job, emphasize English, at the expense of Spanish. The bilingual classroom again, by providing a public context in which both languages are held up to each other, makes the usefulness of English and the worthlessness of Spanish evident.

Not only are the children solely evaluated on the basis of their progress in English, but English-only is mostly used to evaluate the effectiveness of the bilingual teacher, since often the teacher's superior is not bilingual.

English books and curricular material are also better than those available in Spanish. Despite the fact that Spanish is the official language of twenty-one countries and that school material is available in those countries, little effort has been made to obtain textbooks which are seen as "foreign". North American publishing companies have tried to cash-in on the bilingual market and have produced translations of some of the English textbooks. But the translations are often poor, and school administrators often see these textbooks as a needless expense, since they're a repetition of what they already have in English. And so, bilingual teachers often have no texts in Spanish, and are forced to provide

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All teachers know that available determines, in curriculum material is available. And little by little, Spanish is used in simple translations.

Because transitional bilingual with many more kindergartners at elementary school, one of the things there that children learn is the methodology used to teach which Spanish has been used in language reading is most common. But it turns out that in many approaches to Spanish language strategies used in teaching children how to read in Spanish language in which children

2 Bilingual Teaching

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All teachers know that the quantity and quality of the curricular material available determines, in great part, what they do during the day. And so, if more curriculum material is available in English, little time will be devoted to Spanish. And little by little, Spanish is robbed of its usefulness, reduced to the language used in simple translations, in reprimanding, in sending to the bathroom.

Because transitional bilingual programs are often shaped like a pyramid, that is, with many more kindergartens and first grades and less classes with each year of elementary school, one sees the greatest use of Spanish in the lower grades. It is there that children learn to read and write, and close observation of the methodology used to teach Spanish reading quickly reveals the unworthy role to which Spanish has been assigned. Since Spanish is a phonetic language, Spanish language reading is most often taught syllabically in Spanish speaking countries. But it turns out that in many bilingual classrooms in the United States, a phonetic approach to Spanish language reading is used, closely calqued on the phonetic strategies used in teaching children English language reading. Rather than teaching children how to read in Spanish, Spanish is used to teach English reading, the only language in which children will be expected to read in the future.

2 Bilingual Teachers: From instructors to educators

Although the four sociolinguistic principles discussed above are the basis of the great success of transitional bilingual classrooms in accelerating the children's shift to English, bilingual teachers remain mostly unaware of how the structure of these programs, as well as the approach, methodology and material used, are linked to the goal of English language monolingualism. Just as an artist applying color needs distance and a more global perspective to appreciate the painting being worked on, teachers need to see the colors they apply in the classroom from a global societal perspective. Only by recognizing that the classroom is a microcosm of society, and that some social plan is involved in how she is told to apply the color, will she want to question the plan, to influence it in some way, and thus, to feel empowered to truly create her own painting, and not just to apply the colors in the way that society tells her to. This is indeed the difference between the factory worker and the artist, the mere *instructor* who delivers services and the *educator* who not only helps students inquire, but is an inquirer herself.

An understanding of the four sociolinguistic principles presented and their role in the children's language shift is sometimes a painful realization for transitional

bilingual teachers. For those who believe in Spanish language maintenance, it sometimes creates tension in their job, since the school system that employs them often will not allow changes in approach and methodology to support true Spanish language development.

But most bilingual teachers have themselves become victims of the lessons learned in their transitional bilingual classroom. As Spanish is characterized as non-prestigious, marked, non-dominant and worthless, many bilingual teachers become supporters of the English language-shift goal. And so, they are happy only to understand why children shift to English despite their use of Spanish. And they argue that their transitional role is important in itself, since it enables them to provide support and understanding to non-English speaking and their parents. Although this role of supporting non-English speaking students is extremely important, it is limiting as an educational goal, for education must be much more than increased understanding. Education must empower a community by providing it with the knowledge and resources needed to fully participate in the society.

Spanish language maintenance in and of itself, that is, as a symbol of Latino identity, is not enough of an incentive for bilingual teachers to question the socio-educational goal of English-language shift. We must then enlighten bilingual teachers about how Spanish for Latinos is tied to social rewards and how it can function as a resource of the community. Only then, will these Latino teachers want to leap from being only instructors to true educators able to push for the transformation of the socio-educational agenda for Latinos in the United States from one of English-only to one of true bilingualism and biliteracy.

3 The language garden: not only colorful, but useful

In a previous contribution (García 1991), I presented the image of the linguistic heterogeneity in the world as a colorful garden, adding beauty, but also complexity, and needing a plan and work in order to conserve its beauty. But the language conservation of minority languages has to do not only with the color it adds to the world at large, or to the majority world, but also with what it adds to the minority group itself. We must then distinguish between the majority perspective and the minority one in deciding to till the language garden.

To dominant groups, minority languages are of little use. That is why one finds few Anglos who speak Spanish or rather few Dutchmen who speak Frisian. And language majority groups in control of resources, and especially of the educational establishment, most often believe that what is of no use to them can have little

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value to the minority community. Eager to mold the minority community in their image, the educational policy is most often one of linguistic eradication and imposition of the majority language.

To minority groups, however, majority languages are of great use. That is why Frisians are also speakers of Dutch, and why Latinos in the U.S. attempt to become English speakers as soon as possible. The majority in control of the educational establishment usually helps the minority group in the acquisition of the dominant language. But because they fail to realize the value of the minority language in the language minority community, and as a result, in the majority context itself, they are critical of minority language maintenance.

In the United States when the language minority has had characteristics, skills or values that are congruent with the majority community, language shift has led to their structural incorporation. (For increased understanding of this see, Greer 1972, Otheguy 1982.) But this has not been the experience of language minorities of color in the United States, for racism has prevented the full incorporation to take place.

In the Latino community, bilingualism and biliteracy are certainly assets today. With the presence of a large monolingual Spanish speaking community, bilinguals act as the mediators between the Anglo and the Hispanic world. They hold the jobs in the many agencies that serve Latinos, in the schools, in the local supermarkets, restaurants and businesses. And those who are more bilingual and biliterate are bound to get the jobs.

Bilingualism and biliteracy are marketable resources in jobs serving the Latino community, positions for which there is no competition from the dominant monolingual group. In contrast, however, English-monolingual Latinos have to compete with white Anglos for jobs that most likely will not go to them.

Usually we appeal to the majority's compassion and conservation sense in advocating for language minority maintenance. But beyond the fact that a language minority person who no longer speaks the minority language will never know who s/he is, information only available in the minority language and only through telling it without opposing the experience to that of the dominant group, the minority language has an important role as a way of achieving some measure of structural incorporation into the dominant society, at least initially. This is certainly the case of Spanish for Latinos. Jobs that require Spanish proficiency almost guarantee that a Latino will be hired. And although the Latino community greatly benefits from this increased employment, it is our society at large that is served the most, for it increases harmony between groups as everyone participates and takes on a share. In a way, recognizing Spanish as a resource of the Latino community, while ensuring that Spanish speakers also become English speakers, acts on Bill

Clinton's inaugural words, "We must . . . offer more opportunity to all and demand more responsibility from all."

Transitional bilingual teachers are a case in point. Being bilingual is a requirement for the job, a qualification which in our English-Only speaking country and school system only language minorities hold. The advantages for both the minority and the majority community are great. For the minority community, a professional is born, able to contribute to the economic viability of the ethnic group. But for society at large, this professional is now a contributor to the United States economy and a loyal participant in our society.

In conclusion

The responsibility of a teacher goes beyond the classroom and beyond the immediate community. She must stop being an instructor, accepting of orders, of curriculum planned, of material given, and must claim her role as an educator, empowering the community she teaches by providing it with the appropriate knowledge and resources it needs. The case of the bilingual teacher in transitional programs in the United States helps us understand how well-intentioned teachers often work against the interests of the children she teaches. Because language is such an important part of education, all teachers, but especially bilingual teachers, should understand the role of language in their particular societal context, and how their classroom practices reflect that goal. Only then, will teachers want to look beyond their instructional practices to the societal goals that inform the practices. And only then will they feel empowered to transform practices that can, little by little, crack by crack, impact on societal goals.

Notes

1. The comments made about practices in Spanish-English transitional bilingual classrooms are based on my own experience as a bilingual teacher, as well as observations made in the last ten years in many different classrooms as the supervisor of many City College student teachers.
2. I am indebted to Joseph Gaines from Boricua College for enlightening me about the difference between these two terms.

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