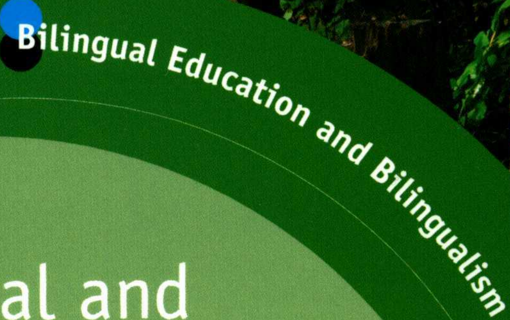

Bilingual and Multilingual Education in the 21st Century

Building on Experience

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8 From Diglossia to Transglossia: Bilingual and Multilingual Classrooms in the 21st Century

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Introduction

It is broadly accepted that a requirement for the stable maintenance of the two languages of a societal group is the functional allocation of each of the languages; that is, one language is used in certain domains, with specific people and for particular functions, whereas the other language is kept out of this territorial or functional space. But in the 21st century, as the movement of people, goods and information has become more complex, the separate functional distribution of two languages in bilingual and multilingual societies has been questioned. This chapter[1] explores the tensions between the two positions – one which claims that the languages of bilingual groups must be kept separate and be functionally allocated if they are to be maintained, and the other which suggests that the language practices of bilingual groups are always fluid and interrelated. We explore the tensions of these two positions in a societal space that makes the tension evident – the bilingual or multilingual classroom.

This chapter starts out by discussing the concept of *diglossia* in the sociolinguistic literature, that is, the functional allocation position. The chapter also describes how diglossia has impacted the development of models of bilingual education, as well as pedagogical approaches for bilingualism, throughout the world. But focusing on primary and secondary classrooms in New York City, the chapter then portrays how bilingual and multilingual classrooms are violating the separate functional distribution of languages. Looking at the *languaging*, that is, the language practices of both students and

teachers in bilingual and multilingual classrooms, the chapter suggests that effective multilingual classroom spaces might be better described as being *transglossic*. That is, despite the strict separation of languages, students and teachers in these classrooms enact fluid language practices that we call *translanguaging*, and which will be explored below. The chapter argues that translanguaging might be a fruitful way of developing the complex language practices that all students need in the 21st century, as well as the standard languages which are taught in school.

Diglossia and Bilingualism in Education

Conceptualizations of bilingualism in education have rested in traditional understandings of *diglossia*. The term *'diglossie'* was used by Psichari (1928), a French philologist studying Greek in the late 19th century, to distinguish the classical standard of Greek, *Katharevusa*, from the popular modern Greek, *Dimotiki*. This is the way in which Ferguson (1959) used *diglossia* in his now-famous article to refer to societal arrangements in which one variety of a language is used for prestigious or high functions, whereas the other variety is used for informal or low functions.

Fishman extended Ferguson's definition to encompass not only language varieties, but also different languages. Fishman *et al.* (1971: 560) warn that 'socially patterned bilingualism can exist as a stabilized phenomenon only if there is functional differentiation between two languages'. In Fishman's macro-sociolinguistic framework, diglossia is necessary because 'no society needs two languages for one and the same set of functions' (Fishman, 1972: 140). Fishman's model of diglossia relies on strict compartmentalization for the two or more languages in question. This language separation could be accomplished either by territory (what Fishman calls the territorial principle) or by functions (what he calls the personality principle).

Diglossia has been a foundational principle in macro-sociolinguistics (also known as the sociology of language and Fishmanian sociolinguistics; see García *et al.*, 2006). The language planning field emerged in the mid-20th century, mainly as a result of the language diversity that struggles for civil rights and the independence of African and Asian countries brought to the forefront. Language planning efforts focused greatly on how to functionally allocate societal languages to ensure that indigenous languages in the case of Asia and Africa, and the languages of regional or immigrant minorities in the case of North America and Europe, had a role in society (see Spolsky, 2004; Wright, 2004). Whereas in the case of new African and Asian nation-states decisions had to be made about whether a former colonial language or an indigenous language was made official or used in governmental functions, the most important language planning choice occurred in the context of education. The struggle over which languages were to be used in education

highlighted the conflicting desires about the language practices of different groups of speakers.

When education was reserved for the elite, the standard language taught in school had great similarities to the language practices of the powerful groups whose children attended these schools. An important purpose of school was then to ensure that children developed a standard academic language which was the measure of an educated man or woman. However, once mass public education was introduced in one country after another in the 19th century, schooling became a place where the language practices of school often had absolutely no similarities to the language practices of the home. Monolingual education became simply a way of developing complex academic abilities in the language of the powerful elite who controlled the schools. Little attention was paid to the language practices of everyone else, and language minority students were expected to either conform to the language practices of the formal school context or drop out of school, guaranteeing that only the elite and the few became educated.

It is not then surprising that one of the most important demands of the struggles for civil rights and freedom of the oppressed that took place in the mid-20th century was precisely to make room for the language practices of minorities in their education. The bilingual education programs that emerged were modeled after monolingual education programs, arguing that language minority children would become better users of the standard language of the majority if they also became literate users of their own standard academic language. *Additive bilingualism*, with each language clearly separate and fully developed, became the mark of excellence in all bilingual education programs. Thus, bilingual education programs often separate languages through one of four strategies (García, 2009: 292–295):

- *Time-determined separation*: that is, one language is taught for one part of the day, one day or one week; the other language is taught for another part of the day, another day or another week.
- *Teacher-determined separation*: that is, one teacher teaches in one language and the other teacher uses the other language.
- *Place-determined separation*: that is, one language is spoken in one physical space or classroom and the other language is taught in another classroom or space.
- *Subject-determined separation*: that is, one language is used to teach certain subjects while the other language is used to teach the other subjects.

However, although bilingual education programs that separate language in this way might work well for language majorities that are adding additional languages of prestige with power similar to their own, the same cannot be said of language minorities. By definition, the language practices of language minorities are stigmatized and often have not been included in