

Language, education and (dis)empowerment – The important role of local languages in educational development

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There are few developing countries that are not characterized by societal multilingualism; this means that many inhabitants of low-income countries must acquire skills in more than one language, either directly from their environments or at great effort through schooling. Societal multilingualism results partially from the natural linguistic diversity of many parts of the world, for which African countries in particular are known but are not alone. Another contributing factor is the historic imposition of various European languages on official administrative and political structures through colonization, whose linguistic influence on decision-making, economic and political alliances, and even access to news and information continues to this day. A further reason is globalization and the spread of major economic languages such as English, whose value as “linguistic capital” often goes unquestioned despite its limited usefulness for the poor and marginalized (Bruthiaux, 2002). All of these conditions conspire to make the provision of quality basic education in developing countries a huge challenge given scarce financial and human resources.

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Despite the widespread use of two or more languages in many societies and the implications of this linguistic diversity for teaching and learning, both national institutions and international agencies working in educational development are often surprisingly silent regarding “the language question.” Educational policy documents often fail to mention that the language of the school (often a European standard) is not the language of the students. Descriptions of literacy campaigns sometimes neglect to mention the language of instruction, or fail to problematize the choice of a language that is not the participants’ mother tongue. Williams and Cooke (2002) also criticize the lack of attention paid to language in the literature on development education as well as education reports from developing countries. Arguably, the relationship of the medium of instruction to the learner’s first language is of major concern if quality basic education is to be provided for all, as promised by the Jomtien Education For All accords (Sida, 2001). As researchers Williams and Cooke have noted, “It is abundantly clear that education in a language that few learners, and not all teachers, have mastered detracts from quality and compounds the other problems of economically impoverished contexts” (2002: 317).

When “the language question” is raised, responses are typically superficial: “There’s not enough money” (education ministries) or “It’s too political” (donors). Elite decision-makers tend to promote exoglossic (ex-colonial) languages unconditionally: “If you want a good job you must speak X” [insert French, English, Spanish or even Portuguese]. Underlying these and a myriad of other excuses for not dealing with people’s own languages are a few basic myths. One that has long influenced policy-makers is the idea that one nation should have one unifying language, a colonial concept that masked the colonizers’ own linguistic diversity; consider for example the cases of Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic in the “English-speaking” U.K., Euskara, Gallego and Catalán in Spain, or Breton and Provençal in France (Salminen, 1999). Another colonial concept is the supposed inherent worth of European languages and the parallel lack of status of indigenous languages, which are still often disparagingly called “dialects” or “vernaculars,” stigmatizing both the languages and their

speakers as being somehow insufficient or incomplete. One linguistic myth that is in play is that one language is learned/used to the detriment of another, and that bi- or multilingualism causes cognitive confusion. Related to this is the idea that the first language must be ignored or pushed aside so that the second language can be learned; this is the myth behind most present-day instruction in languages that learners do not speak.

In this paper I hope to dispel some of these myths, which I see as detrimental to educational development and beneficial only to the elite, whose positions in low-income countries are best secured by maintaining the status quo. I will describe the pedagogical and other benefits of schooling programs that develop learners' own languages and cultures. These programs have implications not only for more relevant and higher quality basic education but also for social development in terms of more democratic and equitable participation on the part of girls and women as well as other traditionally marginalized social groups. Examples from my research and experience in Bolivia, Guinea-Bissau, Niger and Mozambique, representing two continents and three different colonial influences, are used to highlight the benefits of considering "the language question" much more carefully in the teaching-learning process.

The pedagogical principles underlying bilingual programs

Mother tongue or bilingual programs normally use the learner's first language (known as the L1) to teach beginning literacy (reading and writing skills) and academic content.¹ They also teach a second or foreign language (L2) systematically so that learners can gradually transfer their skills between the L1 and L2. There are various models and practices, but what

¹ There are also programs that use a "close" second language, such as a lingua franca, as if it were the mother tongue; these programs have similar success because school-aged children understand and speak the language. Guinea-Bissau is a case in point, where the experiment used Kiriol, a widely-spoken creole language, as the "L1" and taught Portuguese as a second (foreign) language (Benson, 1994).

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these programs generally have in common is their use of the mother tongue in the early years so that students can understand their instruction. The alternative, which is too often the status quo even today, is instruction through an exoglossic language, despite the fact that few school-aged children speak this language and that even teachers may find it difficult. Skutnabb-Kangas (see e.g. 1990) coined the term “submersion” for this situation because it is analogous to putting students underwater without teaching them to swim. The problem is the same in literacy campaigns that use a language from outside the community; for example, despite the fact that Guinea-Bissau’s campaign immediately after independence was supported by Paulo Freire himself, it was a “disaster” because it compromised revolutionary use of Kiriol as well as Freire’s concept of empowerment by contemplating only Portuguese, presumably in the name of national unity (Freire & Macedo, 1987). There is no doubt that submersion, compounded by chronic difficulties such as low levels of teacher education and training, poorly designed, inappropriate curricula, and lack of material support to schools, makes both teaching and learning extremely difficult. This is true for adult literacy as well as basic primary education, the latter of which is the focus of this paper.

In contrast to submersion, bilingual programs offer a number of pedagogical advantages that have been established in the literature (see reviews in Baker, 2001; Cummins, 2000; Dutcher, 1995). First, they provide content instruction (mathematics, for example) in a language that children understand, so that learning does not have to be postponed until children master the L2. In traditional submersion programs, teachers lack strategies to make new content understandable, so they tend to “talk at” students and elicit rote responses. When instruction is in the L1, teachers and students can interact more naturally and negotiate meanings together, which incidentally creates more participatory learning environments known to be conducive to language learning as well as knowledge development (Richardson, 2001).

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Another pedagogical advantage of bilingual schooling comes from the use of the L1 (or a familiar language) to teach beginning literacy, facilitating an understanding of both sound-symbol correspondence—at least in the case of phonetic languages—and the connection between spoken and written communication. Some specialists have explained that beginning reading is easier when students can employ “psycholinguistic guessing strategies based on knowledge of that language” (Williams & Cooke, 2002: 307). This advantage was acknowledged in educational development policy fifty years ago by UNESCO (1953) and has been supported by many reviews of language of instruction (see e.g. ADAE, 1996; Elley, 1994; Greaney, 1996). In contrast, L2 submersion programs may do a reasonable job of teaching children to decode words; however, they are extremely inefficient, because it is often a matter of years before children are able to discover meaning in what they are “reading.”

A further benefit of bilingual programs is that they teach the L2 explicitly, as the second or foreign language that it is. An early focus on oral communication skills in the L2 allows students to learn the new language through meaningful interaction. In submersion systems, teachers may sometimes translate, but otherwise they tend to provide few if any contextual cues so that students can guess what they are talking about. In bilingual programs, once students have basic communicative skills in the L2, they can begin reading and writing the L2, efficiently transferring the literacy skills they have learned through the mother tongue. The pedagogical principles behind this positive transfer of skills have been established by Cummins (1991) and many others (see reviews mentioned above, as well as longitudinal studies such as those of Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, 1991 and Thomas & Collier, 2002). All of the evidence to date refutes the idea that the first language is a problem; in fact, the more highly developed the first language skills, the better the results in the second language (Cummins, 2000).

Background on the status of bilingual programs

The past twenty or so years have seen a resurgence of interest in bilingual education in a number of ex-colonial countries, based on findings from around the world regarding the efficacy of first language literacy instruction, the transferability of skills between the L1 and L2, and the interdependence of first and second language competence, as discussed above. There have been historical precedents; for example, some former British colonies had experience with mother tongue teaching as part of “separate” schooling for indigenous peoples, the most bitter example of which was Bantu education in South Africa under apartheid (Heugh, 2003). Missionaries in Latin America brought mother tongue instruction to religious practice and sometimes to schools (Albó, 1995; Hyltenstam and Quick, 1996). Some initiatives have come from within, such as Nyerere’s historic promotion of public schooling in Kiswahili in Tanzania, bringing basic education to more citizens (Rubagumya, 1990). Other initiatives have come from the outside, where some donor agencies with experience in educational development have begun to promote mother tongue instruction as a means to improve educational quality and equity (see e.g. Sida, 1996, 2001).

Although it was half a century ago that UNESCO stated, “It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his [or her] mother tongue” (1953:11), implementation of bilingual programs has not been speedy. The four countries used as examples in this paper represent a range of experiences in this regard. Guinea-Bissau conducted a highly innovative and successful experiment in three remote regions of the country from 1986 to 1994 with European Community sponsorship using Kiriol, the widely-spoken lingua franca, and Portuguese (see Benson, 1994, 2002b; Hovens, 1994, 2002); unfortunately, when project finances ran out Ministry of Education officials failed to make any decisions regarding implementation, and later civil strife conspired to break down official structures as well as any momentum the bilingual schools had generated. In Niger, systematic bilingual experimentation began in 1973 with a large USAID-funded project that involved five different L1s and French; when these schools reverted to Ministry supervision they lost technical support and prestige, so that the

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40 remaining schools are still considered “experiments” to this day (Hovens, 2003).

More progressively, both Mozambique and Bolivia are undergoing educational reforms based on past experiments that address the importance of language of instruction. The PEBIMO experiment in Mozambique with U.N. and World Bank sponsorship worked in two regions with the corresponding two Bantu languages and Portuguese (Benson, 2000, 2001), and its findings have fed into the preparation of bilingual programs in 16 languages to be implemented as part of a wide-scale curriculum reform project. Implementation of the bilingual programs was delayed for some years, but began in 2003 in pilot schools (two per province) with somewhat limited resources. Implementation will be gradual, and schools will be able to choose whether they want mother tongue-based education or "monolingual" education that only uses the mother tongue orally "as a resource." Bolivia has made the most progress in terms of policy; the Bolivian Educational Reform law passed in 1994 built on the findings of the large-scale PEBI experiment that had strong international funding and counterpart projects in Peru and Ecuador, and operated in 140 schools with three indigenous languages and Spanish (UNICEF, 1998). The Reform sets high linguistic and intercultural goals (Hornberger, 2002) by calling for the introduction of all indigenous languages into primary bilingual schooling, to be taught as L1 for indigenous children and L2 for monolingual Spanish speakers. The process of country-wide implementation faces many challenges in terms of practical limitations, such as how to cultivate a critical mass of bilingual teachers (King & Benson, 2004), as well as the political limitations of a new government that may want to throw out policies set up by the previous administration.

These are four contexts in which bilingual education has been, is being, and will be applied. The next section describes some benefits of bilingual programs as observed in these countries and describes why they should be of particular interest to educational development professionals.

Positive outcomes of bilingual programs in four developing countries

In attempts to document the pedagogical successes of bilingual programs in developing countries, test scores are most often used (see e.g. Elley, 1994; Dutcher, 1995), though they often require explanation. The exclusive use of test scores and comparison groups tends to provide mixed results in terms of judging the relative success of bilingual schooling. The typical method is to test bilingual and comparison groups in the target language (L2); it is a method many have used including myself (Benson, 1994, 2001; Hovens, 1994; Dialló, 1996) but find unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. First, at the time of testing bilingual students have not typically developed L1 skills to their fullest, nor have they been exposed to the language of testing as much as have comparison students, and since tests are based on the L2 curriculum, comparison students have the advantage. Thomas and Collier (2002) have shown that all-L2 programs have similar results to bilingual ones during the first three to four years, and that the advantages of bilingualism do not become clear until years five to seven or beyond, yet bilingual experiments in low-income countries often stop after three years and rarely continue past grades 4 or 5. In addition, as demonstrated by our data in Guinea-Bissau and in Mozambique, “comparison” groups are not always so comparable, given that children in all-L2 programs tend to repeat and fail more often than those in bilingual programs (see Benson, 2001 for a description of the difficulties of the Mozambique comparison). Hovens (2002, 2003) found an innovative solution by testing both bilingual and “control” groups in Niger in both languages, despite the fact that “control” students had never been taught L1 literacy, and he controlled for degrees of socioeconomic and gender disadvantage. He was able to establish that the highest scores were attained by bilingual students tested in the L1, then by “control” students tested in the L1, followed by bilinguals tested in the L2, and finally by “controls” tested in the L2 (*Ibid.*).

I believe that many important advantages of bilingual programs defy quantification, making them less easy to package in ways economists and other decision-makers prefer, but this does not mean they are not worthy of serious consideration. Some very positive qualities are more likely to appear in descriptions of classroom observations, interviews, and anecdotal evidence. Taken together, they point to the need for further exploration into the social mechanisms at work and the potential for L1 use to effect change more directly than one might think.

1. The observable effects of bilingualism and biliteracy

One of the goals of a good bilingual program is that students become bilingual, i.e. communicatively competent in the L2 as well as the L1, and biliterate, i.e. able to read, write and learn in both languages (see Hornberger, 2002). Since these skills take some time to be developed, what parents first notice is the ease at which children learn beginning literacy and content through the mother tongue. For example, one Aymara mother in Bolivia told D'Emilio, "Before it was in Spanish; there was no chance to understand, but now that it's in Aymara and Spanish, it seems to be better; though I don't know how to read and write, I observe that it's better" (D'Emilio, 2001: 48). A Bolivian man who was a Guaraní community leader said the following:

I suffered when I went to school. I couldn't understand in Spanish: the teachers treated me like a donkey, like I am stupid, but if they had spoken to me in Guaraní, I would have been able to answer well. When they taught me to read, of course, I read but I didn't understand a thing. For this reason we have seen that it is necessary to study in one's own language (Gottret, Del Granado, Soliz, Perez & Barreta, 1995, as quoted in D'Emilio, 2001: 20).

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After a few years, parents begin noticing the positive effects of literacy. In Mozambique, 105 parents or guardians of bilingual students completing grade 5 responded to an open question about why they liked the program in the following ways:

Figure 1: Most frequently mentioned reasons given by Mozambican parents for supporting bilingual education

<i>Reasons given (in order of frequency)</i>	<i>Number of respondees (%age)</i>
Child can read, write, and count in both languages.	73 (70 %)
Value of the local language/culture is increased.	52 (50 %)
Child can write letters in the L1 to family members living abroad.	46 (44 %)
Using the L1 makes learning easier for the child.	36 (34 %)
Child can read the Bible in the L1 at religious services.	34 (32 %)

(Benson, 2000)

As their responses demonstrate, Mozambican parents found evidence in the school, home and church of bilingualism and biliteracy. The bilingual program gained advocates when people began to see students actually

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transferring literacy skills between the L1 and L2. In Guinea-Bissau, families were not consulted when their children were placed in bilingual classrooms, and they were understandably skeptical at the beginning. However, as a Guinean bilingual teacher explained, parents in his community were won over by the results: "Now that they have harvested some fruits, they are in favor of the project" (Benson, 1994, my translation).

Even in Niger, where problems had developed with the bilingual model at the time of Hovens' research, the majority of parents involved with experimental schools wanted to keep the bilingual system, citing better understanding of lessons along with *la valorization* of the home culture (Hovens, 2003). This brings us to the next related advantage of bilingual education.

2. Revaluating of the home language and culture

Another noticeable result of bilingual schooling, and one that often figures prominently among parent responses (including 50 percent of Mozambican parents as shown in figure 1 above), is the re-discovered pride the community feels in its language and culture. Use of the mother tongue in the official context of schooling elevates its status and usefulness in the eyes of speakers and non-speakers alike. Once the L1 is present in the school, cultural values also come into focus. For example, Mozambican parents were pleased that traditional practices such as signs of respect were promoted in bilingual classrooms. They particularly liked the handing over of homework papers by supporting the right arm with the left, which promoted a certain consistency of values between home and school (Benson, 2000). One Changana teacher even used his students' home names instead of the Portuguese names they had adopted when they enrolled in school (Benson, 2001).

Bolivian parents, especially those from the Guaraní communities, expressed similar reasons for supporting bilingual schooling. For example, a Guaraní mother explained that children "have to know our culture, our language, so that the culture of our grandparents is not lost. That's why I think...that Guaraní should continue and that they keep studying it past

fifth grade, that they become more bilingual” (D’Emilio, 2001: 53).

The case of Guinea-Bissau is particularly interesting because of the experimental use of Kiriol, a second language for most Guineans. My colleagues and I observed that around all-Portuguese submersion schools, Kiriol was often spoken on the playground and by community members passing by the school; however, where there were bilingual schools using Kiriol, the mother tongue was heard within a closer radius of the school. It seemed that the elevation of status of the widely spoken creole brought about a similar rise in the status of the mother tongue in the community (Benson, 1994).

3. Positive affect in the classroom

Affective differences between bilingual and non-bilingual classes are readily observable. From my classroom observations in all four countries, it is easy to generalize that bilingual students enjoy dramatically greater levels of classroom participation and warmer, more familial relations with their teachers, appearing to enjoy school much more than their peers in all-L2 classes who sit fearfully listening or reciting, watching classmates for signs that they might be making a mistake. Bilingual teachers, unlike their colleagues in traditional programs, tend to use students’ first names rather than last names or student numbers (Benson, 1994, 2001). One Mozambican teacher even took the initiative to use his students' home names instead of the Portuguese names they had been forced to adopt upon school entry, and his students responded by calling him “Uncle” in Xichangana (Benson, 2001).

Parents notice these affective differences. The following quotes from two Bolivian fathers - Quechua-speaking and Aymara-speaking respectively - are representative:

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To me the mother tongue is good for children; because when they are taught directly in Castellano they get scared and don't want to come to school (D'Emilio, 2001:48).

In my time we were very afraid of the teacher, unlike with EIB, [where] the children share experiences with the teachers. They come to school confident and happy...Before this horizontal relationship with the teachers did not occur, [but now] there is no fear (*Ibid.*: 51).

While it is difficult to know exactly what factors of bilingual schooling give positive affective results, the results are observable. For example, when Mozambican parents who had children in both bilingual and submersion classrooms were asked to compare their children, many said that their bilingual children were significantly different in terms of liking school, helping even older siblings with schoolwork, and taking more initiative at home (Benson, 2000).

An interesting local argument against bilingual education in Niger was that mother tongue use would disrupt classroom discipline, i.e. that increased communication on the part of students meant they paid less attention to lessons. However, observations by Hovens and his colleagues found that bilingual classrooms were simultaneously more dynamic and more disciplined. In addition, 95 percent of focus group participants thought that bilingual students expressed themselves more in the classroom, while only 22 percent thought it happened at the expense of discipline (Hovens, 2003).

The implications of positive affect in school are important, since high absenteeism, repetition and dropout characterize primary schooling in low-income countries, and these negative factors affect only those children who manage to get to school in the first place. The number of school-aged children enrolled in primary school is estimated by UNICEF (1999) to be 28 percent in Niger and 50 percent in Mozambique, while it is 52 percent in Guinea-Bissau (UNDP, 2001). In Bolivia, enrollment is estimated at 87

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percent in urban areas but only 60 percent in the rural Andean region, where poverty and indigenous background are highly correlated (ETARE, 1993). While the simple factor of “liking school” can not overcome physical and social barriers to schooling, it may well make a difference in attracting children to the school and keeping them in attendance when other factors are present.

There is evidence that more children attend school when the program is bilingual. In Mozambique, the bilingual program appears to have experienced less dropout overall than traditional schooling (Benson, 2000). Relatively equivalent proportions of girls and boys were originally enrolled in the experiment, unlike in the national system where fewer girls started school, and bilingual girls remained in school longer with less repetition than girls in the “control” classes and nationally (Benson, 2002a). Further, all parents and guardians reported that their children who finished the bilingual program at grade 5 would go on to grade 6, which was unprecedented given the high dropout rate between these grades in the traditional school system (Benson, 1994).

4. *Increased self-esteem*

Along with more positive affect comes increased self-esteem, a natural bi-product of bilingual programs that value the language, culture, and experience that the child brings to school. Bilingual programs allow children to express their full range of knowledge and experience in a language in which they are competent. This contrasts with L2 submersion, which has long been criticized (especially by Africanists like Ngûgî, 1987; Prah, 1995) for rejecting children’s linguistic and cultural values and personality. As a Nigerian scholar has explained:

[T]here is little doubt that the systematic but frequently ignored differences between the language and culture of the school and the language and culture of the learner's community have often resulted in educational programmes with only marginal success at teaching anything except self-depreciation (Okonkwo, 1983:377).

Students whose backgrounds are appreciated by the teacher and the school are likely to feel better about themselves and participate more. Positive effects such as increased motivation and self-esteem have been widely reported (see e.g. ADAE, 1996; Dalby, 1985; Dutcher, 1995) and are evident in my research. For example, my colleagues and I observed a total of 64 classes in rural Mozambique in 1997, and found that students in bilingual classes often had the courage to ask questions or even correct the teacher, actions that we never observed in traditional classrooms (Benson, 2001). Similarly, a study done in two Quechua-speaking departments of Bolivia five years after the Reform began reported the notable success of bilingual schools in improving overall attendance (Urzagaste, 1999: 145). Despite some continued use of traditional methods, parents and school personnel said that bilingual schooling "strengthens student self-esteem [and] enables identification with their culture, context and people" (*Ibid.*: 157, my translation).

5. Increased parent participation

A welcome outcome of bilingual programs is increased parent participation in school affairs, a situation that cannot be divorced from the fact that parents are finally allowed to use the L1 to speak to the teacher. In submersion programs, parents often feel powerless to support their children's schooling, especially when they do not speak the language of the school; this feeling of powerlessness often results in reticence to speak, which tends to be misinterpreted as lack of interest by teachers and school officials. The mere act of bringing the community language into the school makes the school, teacher and curriculum more accessible and understandable

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to all. This de-mystification of the school means that parents can and do approach the bilingual teacher to do things like ask for information regarding their children's progress, offer support, or even question the teacher in contexts where there was virtually no communication before. Likewise, the teacher can approach the parents, leading to a closer and more productive relationship and more likelihood that the home and school will both support children's learning. This is a widely-cited factor in successful bilingual programs (Cummins, 2000; Dutcher, 1995).

In Bolivia, bilingual schooling in its experimental stages succeeded, according to D'Emilio, in "breaking the monopoly teachers have had on education" (1995: 85). She finds that when they are given a "real opportunity to participate in decision-making about their children's schooling, parents no longer think speaking to teachers is a 'waste of time,' nor are they ashamed of using their native language in these meetings" (*Ibid.*). This new relationship is present in the following testimony of a Guaraní boy:

My mother asks how this thing and that thing are written in Guaraní, and I show her saying, 'This way, this way' because they have taught me. My father goes to the school and chats and laughs with the teacher. Other times the *mburuvicha* [traditional leader] goes and chats with the teacher (Gottret *et al.*, 1995:188, as quoted in D'Emilio, 2001:34).

In Niger, 90 percent of the 724 parents, school personnel and community members Hovens (2003) interviewed agreed that the home and school environments were brought closer together by bilingual programs. Closeness often means support, as in the case of Niger where those parents interviewed said they contributed money (69 percent) or labor (80 percent) so that their schools could function (Hovens, 2003). Similarly, the Xichangana-speaking classes in Mozambique benefited from the spontaneous organization of a parent group that was quite active in supporting project activities as well as initiating their own (Benson, 2000:

49). Guinean teachers also reported having developed positive relationships with the communities; one teacher in Bará said that the bilingual teachers were considered '*fijus di Bará*' ('sons/daughters of Bará') and that a parent would give them loans when their salaries did not come, while another teacher in Uno said that a parent offered the equivalent of about three months' pay for a party for bilingual students (Benson, 1994:272).

Parental support also came in the form of demands. In Guinea-Bissau, bilingual teachers reported that parents were beginning to demand bilingual schooling for all of their children, not just those participating in the experiment (Benson, 1994). Similarly, after five years Mozambican parents started calling for post-experimental bilingual schooling: according to two school directors, many families in their communities took in children of relatives or friends in anticipation of their being able to attend bilingual classrooms in those regions (Benson, 2000).

6. Increased participation of girls

As I have discussed elsewhere (Benson, 2002a), there are a number of indications that girls' school participation even more than that of all children of marginalized groups may be enhanced by bilingual programs. The international research indicates that girls never get to school, or stop attending after only one to three years, due to various factors such as perceptions that they are less able than boys, or lack of trust in male teachers (Chowdhury, 1993). While findings remain preliminary and hypotheses abound, it appears that use of the mother tongue in school may directly or indirectly affect some of these factors, since there are clear signs that girls are positively influenced by bilingual programs.

First, it appears that more girls may be sent to school if the program is bilingual. Increased parent-teacher communication may help parents see the need for their daughters as well as their sons to attend school. Since bilingual teachers are more likely than other teachers to originate from the community, social controls are more likely to be in place; this and better communication could mean that parents can trust the teacher not to take advantage of their daughters sexually or otherwise (Benson, 2002a).

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Because most of my experience is with experimental programs, where equal numbers of girls and boys are selected, it is difficult to confirm or disprove the hypothesis that more girls might attend bilingual schools. What has been found in all four countries is high (virtually 100 percent) parental support of bilingual programs, and strong confidence in the bilingual teachers. For example, 91 percent of Mozambican parents said that they knew the teacher well and found him/her to be a good speaker of the L1.

There is slightly more evidence that girls may stay in school longer if they attend bilingual programs. It is logical to believe that use of the mother tongue should ease the home-school transition, facilitate learning and increase positive affect, as mentioned above. Since girls are often more closely associated with home tasks, they may have less contact than boys do with outside languages, and they may feel more comfortable speaking the L1. Better communication with the teacher means that girls can demonstrate what they know and teachers can make more realistic assessments of their progress, so that both teachers and girls themselves may see that girls are more capable than thought, defying traditional stereotypes. Higher teacher expectations may raise girls' performance and self-confidence, and thus their happiness relative to school.

For the Mozambique study, I analyzed student data from Tete - the more disadvantaged of the two provinces where the bilingual experiment took place - by looking at student lists from grades 1 through 4 and using names to distinguish their sex. By my count, bilingual girls in grade 1 numbered 49 of 129 students, or 38 percent of the bilingual cohort. By grade 4, girls numbered 23 of 52, or 44 percent of the students remaining. The percentage of female bilingual students who remained in school through Class 4 was 11 percent higher than for bilingual boys, and 39 percent higher than the national average for girls (Benson, 2001, 2002a). This could indicate that girls gained more benefit from the use of the mother tongue.

There is also evidence that girls are more likely to pass from year to year in bilingual programs. In Mozambique, repetition rates are extremely high for all students, and girls are kept back more often than boys (MINED, 1996). In an attempt to get a rough estimate of the difference, I looked at

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Grade 4 children's ages in bilingual and non-bilingual classrooms in the same schools (Benson, 2001, 2002a). Bilingual students were generally younger than the others, since the latter had repeated an average of 1.3 years. Non-bilingual girls were older than their male peers, suggesting either that more girls than boys had repeated grades, or that girls had repeated grades more often than boys. Bilingual girls were the youngest.

Related to passing rates, it appears that girls may be more academically successful in bilingual programs. For example, in the disadvantaged province of Tete in Mozambique, bilingual girls had the best test performance overall and in subject areas requiring a great deal of language (L2) both to understand and to demonstrate understanding (Benson, 2002a).

Implications for development policy

It should be clear by now that the implications of considering "the language question" go far beyond simply improving basic educational provision. The benefits of mother instruction radiate outward from providing instruction in a familiar language to facilitating bilingualism and biliteracy, increasing positive affect and self-esteem, re-valuing traditionally marginalized languages and cultures, and increasing parent and girls' participation. All of these benefits address aspects of development that low-income countries and donor agencies purport to address, yet as mentioned above their silence regarding language can be deafening.

A recent issue of the TESOL Quarterly, a journal directed toward English teaching worldwide, has problematized the status of English as a world language by focusing on the theme of "language in development," which is defined as:

... the resolution of practical language-related problems in the context of individual and societal development, where *language* is defined in terms of communicative competence...and *development*, as a reduction in participants' vulnerability to things they do not control (Markee, 2002: 265).

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Markee goes further to say that “questions of access to literacy, education or technology by the most disadvantaged members of society are high-profile issues,” and that “the younger or the more disadvantaged the participants are, the more likely it is that the L1 will provide the most viable means of access to development” (*Ibid.*: 272). This means that the poorest and most marginalized peoples, who are not coincidentally those whose access to the standard exoglossic language of their countries is extremely limited, have little use for that language because their future does not include integration into the global marketplace.

Bruthiaux (2002), writing in the same issue of the journal, reflects on the role of hegemonic languages such as English in perpetuating inequality in developing countries. He shows that the informal economy of low-income countries can involve 50 percent or more of the population, and that informal sectors appear to be growing rather than shrinking. Considering this reality, policy-makers should really be questioning whether educational systems should be teaching or using an exoglossic language at all, or whether it is an extreme waste of resources. In another article in the same issue, Williams and Cooke (2002) remind us that the “standard” language variety of the L2 has since colonial times been the language to which the dominant group has access. Seen in this way, language is directly responsible for the continued “marginalization from power of indigenous peoples and their languages,” and that is why decolonization failed to bring about any significant language policy changes (Williams & Cooke, 2002: 300).

Williams and Cooke also attempt to explain some of the difficulties and contradictions inherent in education for development. One problem is that of definition, whether development is seen as increased prosperity, which involves the strengthening of official structures in low-income countries so that services will eventually reach those who need them, or whether development is seen as the meeting of human needs, which involves more equitable resource distribution and implies more democratic participation, higher levels of education and health, improvement in the status of women, and so on. While most development agencies have stated

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goals that would correspond to the latter definition, their actions tend to cater for the former. Hornberger would agree; she feels that to “transform a standardizing education into a diversifying one” represents an ideological paradox that challenges implementation of more culturally and linguistically relevant programs (2002: 30). This paradox is reflected in the slow and inconsistent progress of educational transitions in low-income countries such as Namibia, about which Callewaert (1998) has written under the expressive title, “Which way Namibia—to decolonize the colonized mind of the anticolonial teacher?”

Attempting to eliminate the vestiges of traditional selectivism in schools is arguably an aim of educational development in the second sense mentioned above. Meanwhile, as the technical and administrative capacities of respective ministries of education have been built up, large donors like Sweden are moving away from a small-project orientation toward support of the entire sector, pending development and approval of strategic five- or ten-year plans by government agencies in “partner” countries (Sida, 1996, 2001). As a consequence there appears to be less support for grassroots-level innovations or experiments such as those involving community languages. From this perspective, many educational development agencies appear to be the unwitting partners of the elite by supporting their policies and further contributing to the official structures that perpetuate their power.

Bruthiaux argues convincingly that the most important type of education needed by the poor is basic literacy and numeracy in a language they understand, and that the learning of these skills (whether as children or adults) “socializes participants into new and potentially life-transforming roles” (Bruthiaux, 2002: 285). It does this by providing access to information and “alerting participants to a range of interrelated economic, social and intellectual issues related to poverty...[including] the practical causes of vulnerability” (*Ibid.*: 286), thus transforming their perception of their own potential. Many of the effects of bilingual programs mentioned above could be seen as solid steps taken by traditionally marginalized people (children and parents) in this process:

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- Becoming literate in a familiar language
- Gaining access to communication and literacy skills in the L2
- Having a language and culture that are valued by formal institutions like the school
- Feeling good about the school and the teacher
- Being able and even encouraged to demonstrate what one knows
- Participating in one's own learning
- Having the courage to ask questions in class (students) or ask the teacher what is being done (parents)
- Attending school (children) and having an improved chance of succeeding (all children and especially girls)
- Not being taken advantage of (all children and especially girls)

Of the four countries used as examples in this paper, Bolivia has come the closest to implementing an educational reform that provides bilingual intercultural schooling for all, though practical limitations make its goals elusive. The policy has led D'Emilio to comment, "It will be interesting to see the qualitative results of this reform in terms of the tolerance, self-affirmation and self-confidence of children and adolescents in a country whose majority is indigenous" (1995: 83). Perhaps the case of Bolivia will provide a positive example of what can happen if "the language question" is taken more seriously.

The potential for CPI research

Critical Practitioner Inquiry, as developed by Lars Dahlström, is a forum for educators to reflect on and change their own practice, with an understanding of the broader contexts that shape that practice. Thinking critically about language use - whose languages are being used for what purposes and why -

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will help CPI researchers discover how power relations are played out in the classroom. Minds that are allowed to reflect may well discover that classroom use of a language that neither students nor teachers speak well is not conducive to learning nor to questioning dominant/subordinate relations. Consider the following questions:

- Would students be more likely to participate in class or in small groups if they were encouraged to speak the languages they knew best?
- If teachers and students were encouraged to use their languages instead of a foreign one in the teaching-learning process, would results improve? Would the entire population become better educated?
- If citizens were encouraged to use their languages in official contexts like government, would they participate more actively in decision-making?

CPI research provides an opportunity for practitioners to question the status quo, and the status quo as it relates to dominant and dominated languages urgently needs to be questioned. Designing interventions that use learners' languages will uncover new opportunities. As discussed above, changing the ways languages are used in the classroom can provide learners with more equitable opportunities to express themselves, become an active part of the learning process, gain self-esteem, and become empowered.

Conclusion

This paper has built a case for more serious consideration of the language of instruction in programs of educational development. A number of excuses for NOT dealing with language, including some linguistic myths, have been revealed. Further, it has been demonstrated that mother tongue instruction through a bilingual program offers a number of benefits beyond the pedagogical, and that these benefits are closely associated with a number of

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desirable indicators of social development, including alleviation of the effects of poverty and marginalization.

Educational developers in official institutions as well as those in international cooperation agencies need to take note of the potential for bilingual programs to address real development goals, and the potential for a change in language of instruction to address unequal power relations. For international agencies, especially those actively promoting democracy, the logical conclusion of this discussion is to actively support measures that truly reach the poorest and most marginalized populations in developing countries, without waiting for the elite decision-makers in their countries to put such measures on the agenda. For educational practitioners, the implication is to question the status quo with regard to the languages used in teaching and learning, and to construct interventions that determine how the use of learners' languages positively influences the learning process as well as many other aspects of their lives.

Bilingual programs cannot be implemented too soon. At this moment children, youth and adults who do not understand the language of their instruction are struggling to acquire basic skills that will improve their everyday lives, in contexts riddled with obstacles of every kind. The cost of failing to use their languages has already been revealed, and so have some concrete solutions.

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