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Language, Bilingualism and Education

Abstract: As the first chapter in Part II, this chapter turns its attention to education. Focusing on the growing multilingualism in schools, the chapter reviews traditional definitions and types of bilingual education. It frames foreign/second language education, as well as bilingual education, as ways of enacting parallel monolingualisms, and then reviews ways in which this is resisted in classrooms all over the world. It also presents ways in which educators are promoting flexible languaging in teaching, transgressing the strict structures of dual language bilingual classrooms, as well as going beyond the traditional view of separate languages literacies.

Keywords: bilingual education; CLIL; dual language education; foreign language education; immersion education; second language education

Multilingualism and language in education

Government-sponsored schools around the world, for the most part, continue to provide an education only in the powerful language of the state. And yet, most nations in the world today are multilingual, evident from the fact that there are only 196 countries, but seven billion inhabitants who speak close to what are considered 7,000 languages by *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Jones and Baker, 2013). As the Linguistic Society of America stated in 1995: ‘the vast majority of the world’s nations are at least bilingual, and most are multilingual, even if one ignores the impact of modern migrations’ (n.p.). In the 21st century, international migration has accelerated. It is estimated that in 2005 there were nearly 200 million international migrants around the world – a two-and-a-half-fold increase from 1970 (Sollors, 2009). Clearly the linguistic heterogeneity is great.

This greater movement of people and greater consciousness means that the countries of Europe and North America that in the 20th century were constructed as being monolingual (because their indigenous multilingualism was silenced by repression or massacre) are today recognized for being as highly multilingual as Asia, Africa and the Pacific. In Europe, 56 per cent of those polled in 2006 for a European Commission report were at least bilingual, with 28 per cent claiming trilingualism. Even in the UK, 38 per cent of the population is bilingual (Grosjean, 2012). In the US, where indigenous and immigrant languages have traditionally lost ground, 20 per cent of the population over five years of age, approximately 55 million, spoke a language other than English at home in 2007 (US Census Bureau, 2007). Urban centers have become openly super-diverse (Vertovec, 2007). In London, some 300 different languages are spoken. In New York City 52 per cent of the population over five years of age (3,712,467 people) speak a language other than English at home (US Census Bureau, 2009). And in Sub-Saharan Africa, urban vernaculars are spreading (Makoni, Makoni, Abdelhay and Mashiri, 2012).

But despite (and because of) the multilingual reality of the world, state schools continue to insist on monolingual ‘academic standard’ practices. Schools are permeated with institutional norms and practices that are complicit with the power structures of dominant societies (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Even when states are officially bilingual or when bilingual education systems of education are adopted, it is the constructed ‘standard academic language’ that is used in school.