INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 5: BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The term bilingual education refers to the use of two (or more) languages of instruction at some point in a student’s school career. The languages are used to teach subject matter content rather than just the language itself. This apparently simple description entails considerable complexity deriving from a multitude of sociopolitical, sociolinguistic, psychological, economic, administrative, and instructional factors. Thus, the goals, implementation, and outcomes of bilingual education programs can be analyzed from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives.

Bilingual education can be traced back to Greek and Roman times and currently a large majority of countries throughout the world offer some form of bilingual education either in public or private school settings. Formal academic research has been conducted on bilingualism and bilingual education since the 1920s and a voluminous academic literature has accumulated on these topics. Since the publication of the first edition of the Encyclopedia of Language and Education in 1997, the psychoeducational research on bilingual education has been synthesized and evaluated by several independent research teams (e.g., August and Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 2001; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, and Christian, 2005) and considerable confidence can be placed in some general conclusions about the outcomes of bilingual education. However, controversy surrounding bilingual education continues unabated in a number of countries.

To take just one example, the level of antipathy towards bilingual education in the USA over a 25-year period is reflected in the views of prominent politicians and social commentators. President Reagan characterized bilingual education in 1981 as “absolutely wrong and against American concepts.” Ten years later, historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. opined that “bilingualism shuts doors” and “monolingual education opens doors to the larger world” (see Cummins, 2001). In early 2007, former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, characterized bilingual education as “stunningly destructive” and argued that American civilization will “decay” unless the government declares English the nation’s official language.

These conclusions are contradicted by the outcomes of all recent research reviews on the effects of bilingual education, including the
August and Shanahan volume that reported the findings of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth set up by the US government to evaluate the scientific evidence on this topic. The oppositional hyperbole clearly reflects the sociopolitical and ideological dimensions of bilingual education rather than its educational outcomes. The use of a language as a medium of instruction in state-funded school systems confers recognition and status on that language and its speakers. Consequently, bilingual education is not simply a politically neutral instructional phenomenon but rather is implicated in national and international competition between groups for material and symbolic resources.

Bilingual programs are usually minimally controversial when they are implemented to serve the interests of dominant groups in the society. In Canada, for example, little controversy exists in relation either to French immersion programs intended to support anglophone students in learning French or French language programs intended to help minority francophone students outside of Quebec maintain French. These programs serve the interests of the two official language groups. However, only in the province of Alberta and the territory of Nunavut in the Arctic region has there been widespread implementation of bilingual programs involving languages other than English and French. Similarly, in Europe, there have been very few bilingual programs set up to serve migrant populations in comparison to those that teach the languages of national minorities whose status has been formally recognized within the society.

Thus, the controversy in the USA can be seen in the context of the fact that it is one of the few countries in the world that has implemented bilingual education on a reasonably large scale for minority groups that do not have legally recognized status as national minorities or as official language groups.

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As noted above, there is considerable consensus among applied linguists regarding the outcomes of bilingual programs. The research on bilingual education supports the following conclusions:

1. Bilingual programs for minority and majority language students have been successfully implemented in countries around the world. As documented in the reviews in this volume and its first edition predecessor, students educated for part of the day through a minority language do not suffer adverse consequences in the development of academic skills in the majority language. As one example, there are more than 300,000 English-background students in various forms of French–English bilingual programs.
in Canada (see Fred Genesee and Kathryn Lindholm-Leary, North American Experiences with Immersion and Dual Language Education, Volume 5).

2. The development of literacy in two languages entails linguistic and cognitive advantages for bilingual students. There are hundreds of research studies carried out since the early 1960s that report significant advantages for bilingual students on a variety of metalinguistic and cognitive tasks (reviewed in Cummins, 2001). Bilingual students get more practice in learning language resulting in greater attentional control and higher levels of metalinguistic awareness.

3. Significant positive relationships exist between the development of academic skills in first and second languages (L1 and L2). This is true even for languages that are dissimilar (e.g., Spanish and Basque; English and Chinese; Dutch and Turkish). These cross-lingual relationships provide evidence for a common underlying proficiency (or what Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, and Christian (2005) call a cross-linguistic reservoir of abilities) that permits transfer of academic and conceptual knowledge across languages. This transfer of skills and knowledge explains why spending instructional time through a minority language entails no adverse consequences for the development of the majority language.

4. The most successful bilingual programs are those that aim to develop bilingualism and biliteracy. Transitional bilingual programs provide some L1 instruction as a short-term bridge to mainstream instruction in the dominant language. However, these short-term programs are less successful, in general, than programs that continue to promote both L1 and L2 literacy throughout elementary school. Particularly successful (in the USA) are dual-language programs that serve majority-language dominant students in the same classes as minority students with each group acting as linguistic models for the other.

5. Bilingual education for minority students is, in many situations, more effective in developing L2 literacy skills than monolingual education in the dominant language but it is not, by itself, a panacea for underachievement. Francis, Lesaux, and August (2006), writing in the August and Shanahan volume, summarize the outcomes of the bilingual programs they reviewed:
In summary, there is no indication that bilingual instruction impedes academic achievement in either the native language or English, whether for language-minority students, students receiving heritage language instruction, or those enrolled in French immersion programs. Where differences were
observed, on average they favored the students in a bilingual program. The meta-analytic results clearly suggest a positive effect for bilingual instruction that is moderate in size. (2006, p. 397)

However, underachievement derives from many sources and simply providing some first language instruction will not, by itself, transform students’ educational experience. As outlined in many of the papers in this volume, effective instruction will affirm student identities and build on the cultural and linguistic knowledge they bring to the classroom.

OVERVIEW

The first ten chapters analyze a range of conceptual issues in bilingual education while the remaining chapters focus on bilingual programs in specific geographical contexts. McCarty and Skutnabb-Kangas initially clarify the terminology, distinctions, and definitions that clutter the bilingual education landscape. They pay particular attention to the ideological underpinnings of terminology evident in the ways in which issues and debates are framed.

May elaborates on some of the relevant types of bilingual education and reviews some of the major research studies supporting the positive outcomes of L1 instruction for minority language students. He cautions, however, that research results cannot be interpreted in a vacuum—the social and educational context is always relevant in determining what types of program will be appropriate and successful.

Lo Bianco reviews some of the early findings that suggested positive cognitive and linguistic effects of bilingualism and which opened the field of discourse to the implementation of enrichment, as opposed to compensatory, bilingual education. He then goes on to examine the intersection of sociopolitical and educational factors in the ways bilingual programs have been implemented in the USA, Australia, and Sri Lanka.

Schwinge focuses on the development of biliteracy within bilingual programs. She adopts Hornberger’s (1990, p. 213) definition of biliteracy as “any and all instances in which communication occurs in two (or more) languages in or around writing.” The research she reviews is primarily ethnographic in nature, some of which is framed explicitly within Hornberger’s (2003) Continua of Biliteracy framework. Schwinge’s review emphasizes the importance of students’ linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge as a basis for learning, the reality of transfer across languages as revealed by qualitative research, and instructional approaches that have shown promise in promoting biliteracy.

Cummins highlights the fact that monolingual instructional assumptions continue to dominate pedagogy in bilingual programs. These
assumptions are reflected in the rigid separation of languages in many bilingual programs and the rejection of translation as a potential instructional strategy (e.g., in the writing and web-publication of dual-language books by students). These assumptions have resulted in minimal teaching for transfer (L1 to L2, L2 to L1) within bilingual programs and lost opportunities to optimize both language accomplishments and academic achievement.

Freeman’s paper examines how broader societal power relations among local and global communities shape the forms of bilingual education that are implemented and the teacher–student interactions that occur within bilingual programs. The historical and current power relations operating in any particular society can affect how the term bilingual education is perceived by different groups. In New Zealand, for example, the term has negative connotations for Maori educators and communities attempting to revitalize the Maori language through Maori-medium schooling. In this context, bilingual education implies a dilution of the emphasis on Maori language and culture. Freeman points out that student identities are constantly being negotiated and shaped within all forms of schooling and thus different forms of bilingual or monolingual instruction are never neutral with respect to the intersection of student/community identities and societal power relations.

Jessner reviews recent challenges to the implicit conceptualization of the bilingual as a “double monolingual.” The term multicompetence has been adopted to highlight the fact that L2 users have a different mental structure than monolinguals. The dynamic model of multilingualism described by Jessner goes beyond just positing an overlap or interdependence between L1 and L2; rather a complete metamorphosis of the cognitive systems of the bi/multilingual individual is involved. This approach adopts a holistic view of L2/L3 users, and argues for the establishment of multilingual rather than monolingual norms within sociolinguistic and educational contexts. This orientation has important implications for both instruction and assessment of L2 users.

Francis presents an alternative approach to conceptualizing the cognitive structure of bi/multilingual individuals. He points out that modular approaches to the study of bilingualism attempt to analyze the cognitive components that make up a person’s knowledge of two languages and his or her ability to use them. To what extent are these components autonomous domains and in what ways do they interact with other components? Francis discusses the possibility that there may be degrees of modularity in which some aspects of language development might unfold in a highly modular or “closed” way while others may be more interactive or open-ended. He relates this discussion to the notion of a cross-linguistic common underlying proficiency as well as to a number of practical issues in instruction and testing.
Skutnabb-Kangas analyzes the intersections between language rights and bilingual education. Linguistic minorities are protected by specific language rights in certain countries and, in addition, all are provided with some general protections under various United Nations charters and other conventions. However, there are relatively few binding positive rights to mother-tongue medium education or bilingual education in present international law. Most language-related human rights are negative rights designed to promote equality by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of language. Skutnabb-Kangas suggests that the resistance by national governments to the implementation of maintenance-oriented mother-tongue education derives from the fact that these programs are capable of reproducing minorities as minorities—in other words, they operate to counteract assimilation and the disappearance of the minority group as a distinct entity.

The final chapter of this initial section illustrates the struggle for linguistic human rights by means of a case study of the implementation of bilingual-bicultural education for Deaf students in Ontario, Canada. Small and Mason point out that the Education Act in Ontario allows the use of American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes quebecois (LSQ) as languages of instruction in schools. However, the legislation is only permissive insofar as it does not require schools serving Deaf students to use ASL nor does it require teachers to have ASL proficiency. The Deaf community has mobilized to pressure the province to strengthen ASL regulations and also to ensure that all Deaf children have the opportunity to gain access to a strong first language. Currently, children who receive a cochlear implant are effectively prohibited from learning ASL by provincial regulations despite the fact that there is no research evidence to support this policy. In fact, the research clearly shows that Deaf children who develop strong ASL proficiency perform better in English literacy skills.

The remaining chapters focus on illustrative bilingual education programs and policies in different regions of the world. Obondo reviews the situation in several post-colonial African countries where policymakers have struggled with the decision of whether to continue with programs that use the colonial language as the medium of instruction in schools or to implement initial mother tongue or bilingual instruction. Research data suggest that significantly better outcomes are attained in mother-tongue medium programs. However, the sociolinguistic complexities of the relationships between local, regional, and national languages in many countries create challenges for implementing mother tongue programs.

Similar multilingual complexities exist in India. Mohanty traces the development of multilingual education from the inception of the “three-language policy” in 1957. This policy envisaged a regional
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language or mother tongue as the language of instruction for the first five years of schooling followed by Hindi (in non-Hindi areas) or another Indian language (in Hindi areas) from the sixth to the eighth year of schooling, with English taking over as the language of instruction after that point. This policy has evolved such that currently the majority language of each state has become the first language and medium of instruction in state-sponsored schools with English as the most common second language subject followed by either Hindi or Sanskrit as a third language subject. Mohanty concludes that application of the three-language formula has been erratic and that there has been a lack of coherent language planning in the Indian context.

Yu focuses on recent developments in English–Chinese bilingual education in the Chinese context. Programs have been implemented at the university level and in both public and private schools. At the university level the goal of English–Chinese bilingual education is to meet the challenge of economic globalization and technological expansion by ensuring that Chinese scholars have access to scientific developments which are predominantly published and discussed in English at this point in time. Yu points out that English–Chinese bilingual education is at a very early stage in the Chinese context. For example, the bilingual programs in secondary and primary schools in Shanghai do not have their own curriculum and the teachers who are teaching through English must adapt the regular Chinese-medium curriculum. No guidelines are available for how to improve English proficiency within the context of a bilingual program and thus teachers involved in these recent innovations are faced with multiple challenges.

Pakir provides a historical overview of the development of bilingual education policy in Singapore and evaluates its outcomes in light of international academic comparisons. English is the major medium of instruction in all Singapore schools but the mother tongues of the major groups (Chinese, Malay, Tamil) are also taught. In general, students from the major language backgrounds in Singapore have performed well in international comparisons, not only in mathematics and science but also on measures of English literacy where their scores are at similar levels to several countries where English is the first language of students and the medium of instruction in school (e.g., New Zealand, Scotland).

The chapter by Bahry, Niyozov, and Shamatov reviews the complex sociolinguistic situation in the Central Asian independent states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan all of which were republics of the USSR until 1991. The chapter traces developments in the types of schooling provided in Central Asia and outlines current and future challenges for bilingual education as an option for the education systems of this region. Despite the multilingualism that characterizes the entire region, there are relatively few
examples of genuine bilingual education at this point in time. Schools teaching through the major language of the country co-exist with Russian-medium schools and schools operating through the mediums of various minority languages in regions where those languages are spoken. Other languages (e.g., the majority language, Russian) are typically taught as subjects rather than being used as mediums of instruction. The authors point out that these newly independent countries are engaged in complex identity discourses and are likely to experiment cautiously with bilingual programs that might be seen as potentially disrupting a delicate balance in relations between social and ethnic groups.

Within the European context, support for “lesser used languages” within the European Union and the demise of autocratic regimes (e.g., Franco in Spain) has resulted in a variety of bilingual education programs for the languages of groups recognized as national minorities. Huguet, Lasagabaster, and Vila discuss the evolution of bilingual and immersion programs in the autonomous Spanish regions of Catalonia, the Basque Country, Aragon, and Asturias. Extensive research in the Basque Country and Catalonia, and to a lesser extent in other regions, has established the effectiveness of bilingual/immersion programs in developing and reinforcing students’ abilities in the minority language at no cost to their proficiency in Spanish. As in other parts of Europe and North America, however, policy-makers are also faced with the challenge of integrating significant numbers of migrant students into the school system and ensuring that they also have the opportunity to acquire the languages of the society.

In the North American context, McCarty reviews the shift that has taken place in the goals of bilingual programs involving indigenous populations. Whereas previously bilingual programs were seen as helping to maintain the indigenous language while supporting students in developing strong academic English skills, the rapid decline in transmission of indigenous languages in the home has given rise to programs that aim to revitalize and reclaim indigenous languages. Thus, immersion programs involving various languages have been established, often in opposition to restrictive state legislation that mandates English-only instruction. For example, the Navajo immersion program in Window Rock, Arizona, has been engaged in a protracted fight with the Arizona State Department of Education which has attempted to shut it down by withholding funds. Evaluations of indigenous language programs tend to show highly positive outcomes (on English tests) in comparison to monolingual English programs. McCarty notes an increase in activism and confidence among indigenous communities in demanding control over their educational futures.

Genesee and Lindholm-Leary review the outcomes of dual-language education (DLE) in the USA and Canada. They define DLE as
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schooling at the elementary and/or secondary levels in which English along with another language are used for at least 50% of academic instruction during at least one school year. In other words, the minority language must be used for at least 50% of the time for at least one school year but, in other years, the ratio of English to minority language might be 60:40 or 70:30. This definition also allows for the minority language to be used for 90% or more of the time at some stage of the program. Clearly DLE encompasses many forms of bilingual program for minority groups as well as immersion programs for majority groups. The authors note the convergence in findings across these different programs types and related sociolinguistic contexts. Specifically, within DLE, minority languages can be used as mediums of instruction at no long-term cost to students’ proficiency in the majority language.

The two chapters that focus on the Pacific region and Australasia address a wide range of topics and issues. Lotherington notes that the predominant program model in the South Pacific is transitional bilingual education which aims to develop functional proficiency in the second (colonial) language within primary school education. There is a trend in some Polynesian countries away from a purely transitional model towards maintenance bilingual but submersion programs conducted through the former colonial language predominate in polyglot Melanesian societies. Among the barriers to the implementation of more widespread bilingual education are the lack of materials in vernacular languages, the limited support available to strengthen instruction of both the vernacular and international languages, and ambivalent attitudes towards the value of vernacular languages.

Cruikshank focuses on the sociolinguistic situation of the Arabic-speaking community in Australia. He notes that the teaching of Arabic and other community languages was marked by “a dramatic flourishing in the early 1980s, some consolidation and then a period of neglect in the last decade.” Currently, Arabic is taught in community schools, in primary and secondary schools and in tertiary institutions. However, relatively few students continue to study Arabic throughout secondary school. Technological changes have exerted a significant impact on patterns of language use in the home. Many families have access to 24 h Arabic channels such as Al Jazeera through cable and satellite television, and children and most teenagers watch videos and various types of television programs in Arabic regularly. There is also regular communication with family members in the countries of origin. Thus, transmission of the oral language is relatively strong despite the limited literacy abilities that most second generation students attain.

The final three chapters address the implementation of bilingual education in Latin American countries. López and Sichra note that
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indigenous bilingual education dates from the early 1900s and initially was conceived as an instrument of assimilation. However, large-scale transitional bilingual projects carried out in countries such as Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Ecuador showed positive outcomes and reassured communities that use of the indigenous language was feasible and would not adversely affect students’ development of Spanish proficiency. This growth in legitimacy associated with indigenous language use in educational contexts resulted in a gradual evolution in the late twentieth century towards more maintenance models designed to help develop the indigenous language as well as Spanish. Indigenous organizations and leaders have assumed a much more prominent role in the planning and implementation of bilingual education and these programs are now seen as playing an important role in recuperating indigenous views and voices.

Hamel elaborates on this general picture with a detailed examination of indigenous education in Mexico. Although the focus has been traditionally on using the indigenous language as a means to better develop Spanish skills, a shift similar to that noted by López and Sichra is evident in some contexts. For example, in 1995 the P’urhepecha (Tarascan) teachers from two bilingual elementary schools in Michoacán, in the central Highlands of Mexico, changed the curriculum so that all subject matter including literacy and mathematics was taught in P’urhepecha, the children’s L1. Teachers had to create their own materials and develop a writing system. Comparative research several years later reported that students who had acquired literacy in their L1 achieved significantly higher scores in both languages than those who were taught reading and writing in Spanish.

In the final paper, de Mejia describes developments in enrichment bilingual education in South America. Most of these programs have been implemented in private schools with the same kinds of positive outcomes documented elsewhere. She notes that there have recently been attempts to connect the academic discourse on bilingual education across the majority/minority divide where the principles underlying programs for indigenous communities, Creole speakers, and Deaf communities are linked to those involving majority language speakers. De Mejia argues that there are significant areas of convergence between majority- and minority-oriented bilingual programs in relation to the maintenance of cultural identity, the status and development of the L1, and the importance of contextual factors in the design and modification of all bilingual education programs.

In conclusion, the chapters in this volume complement those in the corresponding volume of the first edition of the Encyclopedia in showing that bilingual education programs are expanding in contexts
around the globe, are highly successful in developing both L1 and L2 proficiency when implemented appropriately, and are always nested in contexts that are ideologically and sociopolitically complex.

Jim Cummins

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