

Review

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Ofelia García
(2009).
*Bilingual
Education in the
21st Century:
A Global
Perspective*.
Malden, MA:
Wiley-Blackwell.
481 pages.

Even before opening the book, the greenish cover of Ofelia García's volume and the photograph of a gnarled tree trunk in the background imply that the author's position on the global management of linguistic resources may be close to what is sometimes termed as the "ecology-of-language" paradigm, which promotes multilingualism and linguistic rights as opposed to the uncritical celebration of the perceived global triumph of English, frequently described as the "diffusion-of-English" paradigm (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996, p. 429).

The tree itself – as the uninitiated may find out on page 8 – is a South Asian banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*), representing the polydirectional language practices of bilingual persons, which are "interrelated and expand in different directions to include the different communicative contexts in which they exist" (Garcia, 2009, p. 8). Banyan trees may develop into different shapes, adjusting themselves to the multitude of local circumstances. Given their flexibility, resilience and vitality, no uniform, one-size-fits-all description of the plant is possible.

Challenging stereotypes

García's book aims to challenge several time-honored stereotypes that seem to be crumbling against the new realities of globalization. For the more technology-oriented audience she offers metaphors that highlight the evolving perceptions of bilingual education from the old, monoglossic interpretation, which treats the first language and the additional language as "bounded autonomous systems" (p. 7), to the heteroglossic view of bilingual competence, which,

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on the other hand, emphasizes the dynamic interrelationship of multiple language practices. The latter interpretation refutes the validity of simple monoglossic equations like $L1+L2-L1=L2$ or $L1+L2=L1+L2$, representing the subtractive and additive models of bilingualism, respectively. Consequently, monoglossic language practices are rather similar to a bicycle with two balanced wheels: fine for moving about on a smooth and even surface, yet bound to stumble and fall on an unpredictably rocky terrain. In order to negotiate the sometimes hidden snags of communicative situations successfully, the chosen means of transport should be a moon buggy-type all-terrain vehicle, representing the integrated plural vision and flexible deployability of multilingual competence.

Structure

The book consists of three major parts, with each intended for slightly different audiences (nevertheless, the author advises to read all parts in sequence).

The agenda of bilingualism

Part I (“Bilingual Education for All”) serves as a relatively short general introduction (comprising only one chapter out of the total of fifteen), detailing the most common definitions and characteristics of bilingual education, including the previously mentioned heteroglossic interpretation of bi- and multilingual communicative practices. The title also sets the agenda of the entire volume, whose thesis sentence is that bilingual education is the only fair, equitable (and competitive) way to educate children in the 21st century.

Sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives

Part II (encompassing chapters 2 to 5) may be most useful for scholars of bilingualism. The chapters that belong here explore aspects of bilingualism from several sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives: e.g., how languages are constructed by states and other political entities that want to consolidate their power; the effects of the inexorable forces of globalization and transnationalism; the

fragmentation of national identities; notions of “academic language,” “basic interpersonal communicative skills,” and “common underlying proficiency.”

“Languaging” and
“translanguaging”

García questions the usefulness of the concept of “language” *per se* in the bilingual context and proposes focusing on children’s “multiple discursive practices” that constitute “languaging” (p. 40). More often than not individuals and communities engage in bi- or multilingual discourse practices, i.e., they “translanguage” (p. 45). Yet, those who examine bilingualism from a monoglossic angle may stigmatize hybrid language use as code-mixing or an example of semilingualism. From the actual users’ (heteroglossic) perspective, however, this is nothing but normal practice.

A dynamic model of
bilingualism

Chapter 3 also outlines the four main models of bilingualism, ranging from the previously recognized subtractive and additive arrangements to the newly proposed recursive and dynamic models. Recursive models recognize that bilingual individuals often move back and forth along a bilingual continuum, whereas the more heteroglossic (and not at all linear) dynamic model is based on the fact that bilingual (or multilingual) competence continuously reflects the ubiquitous challenge of having to be able to use several languages to varying degrees and for various purposes. The acceptance of the dynamic model immediately raises questions concerning the validity of “semilingualism,” “mother tongue,” “heritage language” and other assumptions. Accordingly, the boundaries between second/foreign learners and bilinguals become blurred beyond recognition; that is why García prefers the term “emergent bilinguals” to describe all whose communicative practices include translanguaging.

Chapter 5 examines the cognitive and social

Programs and policies

advantages of bilingualism, and concludes Part II by discussing a series of intervening factors that may maximize or minimize the realization of these benefits.

Part III (chapters 6 to 11) presents monoglossic and heteroglossic bilingual education program types and policies around the globe. This part of the book is intended mainly for education policy makers and school administrators, and begins with the reconciliation of the four main theoretical models with particular program types. Consistent with the bulk of scientific literature, transitional bilingual education (TBE) is classified as a subtractive program type, while maintenance, prestigious (“elite”), and immersion BE constitute the additive group. The author considers developmental bilingual education to be a representative of the (heteroglossic) recursive model (along with immersion revitalization/heritage language immersion), whereas polydirectional types (two-way immersion/dual language education), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and multiple multilingual education (which includes at least three languages) belong to the dynamic model.

Chapters 7 and 9 were contributed by Hugo Baetens Beardsmore, who assesses the macro-factors and interdependent variables for BE policies, then describes the language promotion efforts by European Union institutions. This chapter forms a sharp contrast with chapter 8, which reviews the checkered past, at least controversial present and fairly uncertain future of bilingual education in the United States. The rest of Part III provides a comprehensive overview of monoglossic and heteroglossic BE policies worldwide. The uniqueness of chapters 10 and 11 lies partly in the global reach of the approach and the conscious abandonment of the almost traditional North American (and to a lesser degree: Western) perspectives that have largely characterized the relevant scholarship.

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Classroom practices

In Part IV (chapters 12 to 15) the generally theoretical trajectory of the book reaches the ground, i.e., the focus shifts to bilingual education practices, which include the evaluation of the proper role of bilingualism in the curriculum; bilingual arrangements; principles of BE pedagogy; biliteracy practices; and finally, the controversial aspects and unrealistic expectations concerning the testing and assessment of bilinguals are examined from a critical angle. The insights, recommendations, and conclusions of this part of the book are highly relevant for practicing classroom teachers.

Conclusion: Bilingual education and equity

Part V (titled “Bilingual Education for the 21st Century”) summarizes the findings of the previous chapters and reiterates the central message of the entire volume: bilingual education should be the only option to teach all children in equitable ways. However, this large scale educational and ideological transformation cannot take place until states are willing to abandon their “language-identity-allegiance associations, and allow children to build multiple identities” (p. 387).

This road ahead may be rockier than we think.

Reference:

Phillipson, R., & Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2006, Autumn). English Only Worldwide or Language Ecology? *TESOL Quarterly* 30(3), 429-452.