Fluency in Two or More Languages in Bilingual Education

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Abstract: *The bilingual practices adapted in many countries show that it is very viable to maintain the first language and the culture in multilingual and multiethnic societies. As the bilingual education ensures that one can assert his/her fundamental rights of language and culture, the countries which have language majorities and language minorities prefer to adapt bilingual education to make sure that language majorities and language minorities live in harmony and peace. This paper captures some of theoretical aspects of bilingual education and relates it to Sri Lankan context.*

1. Introduction

The use of two languages is not uncommon in education. Mackey (1978) cited in Garcia (2009) points out that bilingual schooling is at least four to five thousand years old. Glyn Lewis (1977) cited in Garcia(2009)has portrayed how in the west, from the second century onward, Greek-Latin bilingual education was the way to educate boys from Roman aristocratic homes who were supposed to study the languages of the admired Hellenic civilization. All through the history, two languages have been used to teach the prestigious social and religious groups. Nevertheless, people gave a scholarly attention to bilingual education in the half of the twentieth century (Garcia, 2009). Baker (1993) cited in Garcia (2009) is of the opinion that the term 'bilingual education' is used to refer to the education of the students who are already speakers of two languages, and at other times to the education of those who are learning additional languages.

2. Beneficiaries of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is good for all, that is say, language majorities, and language minorities will benefit by bilingual education tremendously. Garcia (2009:11) views education "an education that is bilingual is good for the rich and the poor, for the powerful and/or lowly, for indigenous peoples and immigrants, for speakers of official and /or national languages, and for those who speak regional languages. Bilingual education is not only good for children in gifted and talented programs but also good for children in vocational and technical education, as well as for those in special education". It is proved that bilingual education is also beneficial for adults in lifelong language learning situations, since bilingual individuals enjoy cognitive and social advantages over monolinguals (Garcia, 2009). Fishman (1986:47) cited in Garcia (2009:12) also endorses the above fact: "In a multilingual world, it is obviously more efficient and rational to be

multilingual than not, and not truism increasingly applies to the whales, as well as the minnows". Even if the state and particular ethno-linguistic groups may benefit collectively from bilingual education, the value of bilingual education is in what it gives to children, youths and adults in general. Bilingual education embodies a potential which brings in transformative school practices and which educates all children in ways that emulate and develop their intellect and imagination to different ways of expression and access in the world (Garcia, 2009).

There has been a common notion that school text needs to be written in a language or a register different from that spoken by the school children. It is observed that teachers, irrespective of whether they are bilingual themselves or not, teach in a language other than the one the children use to talk with each other. The goal of schooling has been generally connected to the oscillation between the language practices of the home and community and those of the sacred and classical texts learnt in school (Garcia, 2009). Bilingual education has come into its own from the second half of the twentieth century, as schools have identified the heterogeneity of children, and, concurrently, positions and ideologies towards bilingualism in school change in different contexts, even at the same historical juncture (Garcia, 2009). Ruiz (1984) cited in Garcia (2009) has talked about a framework that is used to examine different language orientations: 1) language as a problem, 2) language as a right and 3) language as a resource.

3. Bilingual Education as a Problem

We are supposed to use lens of language orientations to deal with the geopolitical forces that have promoted one or another perspective on bilingualism, and, henceforth, bilingual education is very essential for the masses, because "modernist development ideological frameworks that imagined, constructed, and narrated a "nation-state" into being in one language, and thus considered bilingualism to be a problem" (Garcia.2009:14). Subsequent to the worldwide economic downfall of the 1970s, and the ensuing widening of social inequity made the authorities acknowledge the fact that modernization had failed and that decolonization did not sufficiently translate into self-determination or sovereignty(Pepper,1996; Tsai,2005 cited in Garcia,2009). The ability of state's bilingual education policies to transform citizens and societies anticipated by the theories of modernization was questioned. The vital role the socio-historical process played in shaping particular forms of bilingual education, and in particular the role of class, ethnicity, race, language and gender in such shaping, was given much attention (Skutnabb-kangas and Phillipson, 1994; Tollefson, 1991, 2002; Wiley, 1996b, 1999; Wright, 2002 cited in Garcia, 2009).

4. Bilingual Education as a Right

Garcia (2009:15) critically comments on the issues of bilingual education as a right :

"Some forms of bilingual education, especially transitional bilingual education, were increasingly criticized, as language minorities claimed their language rights and developed their

own forms of bilingual schooling. Language minorities who had lost their home languages developed bilingual education programs that supported the revitalization of these languages. Other language minorities who felt threatened linguistically were able to set up programs to develop their home language."

With regard to language right, Ricento(2000:208) cited in Garcia(2009:15) says " it seems that the key variable which separates the older, positivistic/technicist approaches from the newer critical/postmodern ones is agency, that is, the role(s) of individuals and collectivities in the processes of language use, attitude, and ultimately policies". Language difference is treated more and more as a right that has to be negotiated and language minorities have begun getting agency in shaping their own language policies and practices in the education of their children (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

At the end of Cold War, the development of globalization, and the growing role of international organizations made the movement of peoples accelerate and threatened the sovereignty of states in the twenty-first century. Due to the increasing awareness of other languages, and the dominance of English, bilingual education has taken yet another turn. Now, it is growing without the direct interference of the state, and a much more dynamic language use (Garcia, 2009). With respect to bilingual education or multilingual education for all in the globe, UNECO (2003:17-18) cited in Garcia (2009:15) emphasizes the vitality of both the global and the national and declared:

The requirements of global and national participation and the specific needs of particular, culturally and linguistically distinct communities can only be addressed by multilingual education. In regions where the language of the learner is not the official or national language of the country, bilingual and multilingual education can make mother tongue instruction possible while providing at the same time the acquisition of languages used in larger areas of the country and the world.

UNESCO(2003:30) cited in Garcia (2009:15-16) also stresses three basic guiding principles which not only focus on the mother tongue but also on the intercultural multilingual education for all:

1) Mother tongue interaction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers;

2) Bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies;

3) Language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

5. Bilingual Education as a Resource

The biggest change in the globalized community of the twenty first century is the blurring of territory that was unequivocally demarcated by language and culture. Even though many territories were provided the appearance of being homogeneous, we are aware of the linguistic intricacies of the world where monolingual schooling seems to be inappropriate. All in all, language differences are observed as a source, and bilingual education, in all its complexity and forms, appears to be the only way to educate the children. When we consider bilingual education as a right or as a resource, we need to pay attention to language ideologies and identity. Nationalist ideologies throughout the world link the language to identity unidimensionally. Wright (2004:44) cited in Garcia (2009:82) gives several examples:

Kurdish speakers in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria are still battling for the right to use their language. Macedonian speakers have been recently prosecuted by the Greek state. Russian speakers in Estonia are denied citizenship until they acquire some competence in Estonian.[…] The English only Movement in the United States employs these arguments. The Conseil Constitutionnel in France did so recently too.

In the rootlessness that has come about as result of globalization, language and identity occupied the center stage. Aspects of identity beyond attitudes have become foregrounded in the study of bilingualism: emotions, performance, anxiety, personality, and social influence (Dorian, 1999; Liebkind, 1999; Pavenko, 2005, 2006 cited in Garcia, 2009). So far as the postcolonial identity is concerned, it not only involves sameness but by extension otherness and the development of hybrid identities that entail plural language practices. In view of hybrid identity, Holt and Gabbins(2002:2) cited in Garcia(2009:83) says " an attention to link or acknowledge the past in the light of a different cultural environment rather than a mark of disloyalty". Sri Lanka is a nation which was a colony under British rule and former presidents of the state also reverted their language policies in favour of British and American agencies. One way of showing their respect and loyalty was to go back to English medium education which makes the people adopt some lifestyles of the British and American people, as language learning is inseparable from the culture (Mickan, 2006).The construction of state multiple and hybrid identities rest on multiple factors beyond language, such as race, social class, age generation, social orientation, geopolitical situation and institutional affiliation(Bhabha,1990;Pavenko and blackledge,2004 cited in Garcia,2009). According to Cummins (2000, 2009), identity is very essential in bilingual education, as negotiation of identity is seen as the most significant principle when teaching language to minority students. The study of language ideologies focuses on socio-historical, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic conditions that influence the production and social meaning in relationship to language and to discourses. The social situation could prevent individuals from accessing certain linguistic resources or adopting new identities (Heller, 1982, 1995; Pavenko, 2002; Woolard, 1998 cited in Garcia, 2009). The choice of language available to children and parents, as well as the discursive practices which are encouraged and promoted in school has a

great impact on children's identity and their possibilities of developing agency or resisting. Hence, bilingual education models and pedagogies need to take into account the more hybrid identities of the students, as bilingual students are situated in specific social, historical, and cultural situations, and they can result or accept the position given by those contexts(Norton and Toohey,2001 cited in Garcia,2009). In the case of Sri Lanka, the hybrid identities have not been articulated in the national charter of the country. Two indigenous languages, Tamil and Sinhala, have been given status in the charter. Malay which is now spoken by some younger and older members of the Malay community has been left out in the charter, and as a result the identity of Malays is lost in the country. In the current model of bilingual practice in the island, there is no room to incorporate Malay in the program, as the focus of the model is to enable students to raise their English proficiency while learning their native language.

1. **Maintenance Bilingual Model and its Implications in Sri Lanka**

A bilingual identity constitutes just one dimension of the many that make up a child's identity-their gender, social class, ethnicity, race, nationality, community. But, without the added dimension of bilingualism, some of these identities will never be constructed, developed and represented. It is quite obvious that bilingual children benefit from a greater range of expression and more freedom in construction or performing. When we analyze the advantages of the maintenance bilingual program practiced in the state- based schools in Sri Lanka, it provides enormous confidence to the students to speak and write in two languages creatively and effectively. The ability to communicate diversely in more than one language is very essential in the present day globalised world which is very much sophisticated and which is tied up with multiple relationships. Because technology has brought the world closer and enables global instantaneous interactions, the ability of children to speak, read and write in multi-discursive fashion is an increasingly prominent commodity in the present world's social, political, and economic development. Particularly, in Sri Lankan context the maintenance bilingual program enables the children to face the challenges that will come in future. In this model, children enhance their knowledge in English to a larger extent and continue to acquire the skills in their native language concurrently. This model, by and large, helps the children to attain social development, particularly in the multicultural setting as seen in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, Sinhalese, Tamils, Malays, and Burgers are living and the maintenance bilingual model helps the children to use English to communicate with the people from different ethnic groups in the island. Of course, the current model permits to preserve the culture and the language of two ethnic groups, Tamil and Sinhala. English, as a lingua-franca, bridges the gap between different ethnic groups. This model, unfortunately, is practiced in some select state-owned schools. The government of Sri Lanka gave permission to some schools to practice the maintenance bilingual model. The big hindrance to implement this model in all the schools across the island is shortage of competent teachers in English. Many teachers have knowledge in the respective subjects, but their competency in English is not adequate to teach the content area

in English. In the case of Jaffna where Tamil, the language of minorities, is used for daily communication, the students use English occasionally, when they interact with other, particularly outside the school. This results in some notions that children would find it difficult to acquire English in the monolingual speech community, as language learning is determined in terms of environment and culture where the target language is operated constantly (Mickan, 2006).But, a large number of children in Jaffna have proved that they could learn English in monolingual speech community. This is because of their motivation and attitude they have shown in acquiring English. There are instances where high motivation and attitude of the learners would get over the sociolinguistic and socio-cultural factors (Hakuta, 1993).

Conclusion

It is apparent that bilingual education helps us to preserve our identity in a multilingual society like Sri Lanka. Bilingual education certainly leads to biliteracy that integrates the multiethnic and multicultural communities and that results in peaceful co-existence of different ethnic groups in a country. In Sri Lanka, the maintenance bilingual education brought in some positive impact on the different language speaking communities of the island. Anyway, we need to monitor the progress of the bilingual practices carefully in order to find out the shortcomings of such practices and then the pertinent solutions should be proposed to offer more inclusive bilingual programs.

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