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ABSTRACT

Nontraditional Hispanic students, though often pedagogically problematic in other ways, possess language resources that should not be overlooked and that ought to provide a model for other language learners. The paper illustrates: (1) the resources needed for foreign language capacity that exist in non-English-speaking sectors of U.S. society; (2) how the nondevelopment of these resources has counterproductive consequences for minority children, foreign language instruction, and national educational needs; (3) what progress and promise bilingual education offers to remedy the situation and bring about more positive educational outcomes; and (4) some practical steps teachers might take in utilizing the language resources around them. The adoption of language resources in the home and community involves both language skills and culture. Learning culture gives content to language lessons and provides insight into the lives of non-English speakers that is so essential to attitudinal change. For younger students, use of make-believe or role playing and show-and-tell in Spanish aids vocabulary and syntax building and the development of oral fluency. For older students, these activities can be modified to help the student focus on lexicon, phrasing, intonation, expressions, and career experiences or plans. (Author/JK)

FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT HOME:
USING NON-ENGLISH RESOURCES IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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Introduction

The premise of this presentation is that non-traditional Hispanic students, though often pedagogically problematic in other ways, possess language resources that should not be overlooked and might provide a model for other language learners.

The perspective here is that of trainers of teachers who will staff elementary and secondary bilingual education programs, but these remarks apply to any classroom situation in which oral and written skills of a home language other than English are being developed.

The Problem

The task of the language teacher is frequently mechanical, teaching about a language system as a preliminary to the pragmatic functions of using the langauage to communicate in a variety of everday contexts. More specialized still are the academic uses of langauge, to conceptualize regarding culture and literature, and to reflect critically upon language itself.

Part of the task of language arts teachers revolves around the mechanical work of langauage teaching and drilling, frequently without seeing much pragmatic outcome. Thus, the desire to engage students in using the language for academic pursuits is often precluded. With the instructional emphasis placed so heavily on literate capacity in those three functions, the cycle becomes viscious and self-defeating when it is assumed that the three functions - mechanical, pragmatic, academic - must come in that sequence, and the oral and non-academic language

resources of Hispanic and other minority children are unheeded or regarded as unimportant (Penalosa 1980:160).

Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and other Hispanic groups vary greatly in class background, time of residence in the U.S. and in degrees of Spanish and bilingual proficiency. Research and observation in New York community and school setting has indicated some of these complexities on a microcosmic scale among Puerto Ricans in El Barrio (Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos, CUNY 1978-1981). Therefore although it is erroneous to claim that all Hispanics have the same langauge resources, it is disastrous to neglect them. The New York research and some recent evidence from the Midwest indicate the presence of certain skills and some directions for the development of language competencies.

Diagnostic Evidence

In 1981, as part of a bilingual teacher training program at Indiana University Northwest (just outside Chicago), the authors developed and administered a four-part diagnostic test in Spanish. Since forty-three individuals were examined, both qualitative and quantitative analysis were possible. Most of the students were Hispanics, and a majority are married and have children. These students are too old to have benefitted from bilingual education, but are committed to participate in it professionally as teachers. Both Puerto Ricans and Mexicans are represented.

The Spanish language skills in the results of the diagnostic test range widely, from educated speakers with literacy and formalized skills to Hispanics for whom Spanish is nearly a completely foreign language. Rather than mechanically present the results, it will be more instructive to speak about the total profile of several key individuals in a qualitative way. (The names have been changed).

Elena (#40) and Gloria (#20) are both older women, they vary greatly in political outlook. Both began speaking Spanish as infants, but neither have had

an academic background, rather they share a history of being suppressed in regard to using Spanish in school. Nonetheless, both have a positive attitude toward developing literate skills, and a willingness to speak and write the language, despite formal inaccuracies.

Luis (#104), Viola (#50), and Ana (#43) represent a continuum of increasing skills of conceptualization and comprehension, but with different limitations in the mastery of orthographic conventions. All of these students live in Spanish speaking home environmentswith extended or nuclear families, and again, their attitudes are very positive. Another student feels she "lost her Spanisn" when she entered elementary school. Guadalupe (#101) spoke no English in the home, but the Spanish she knew atrophied in the schools and Anglo environment of her later childhood. She is actively struggling as a young adult to increase the use of Spanish through formal study and involvement in community councils and organizations, as was observed among young adults in New York who began at about age 18 to reverse their monolingual adolescent habits in English for a more active bilingualism (Flores, Attinasi, and Pedraza 1981).

The crucial variables in these differing Spanish language abilities seen at the university level -- beyond the economic and educational factors, and the migration history of the family -- are those of attitude and home environment.

Underutilized Language Resources

Attitudinally, the support for bilingualism and bilingual education of a maintenance type appears to be quite strong among Hispanics in the various regions of the United States (for research on East Harlem and a review of literature see Language Policy Task Force, forthcoming, for the Northwest Indiana area see Attinasi 1981). Although there are some differences by region, the process of complete language shift seems to be headed off by attitudes favoring both languages in literate development. Such attitudes not only bode well for scholastic success,

but also for the one certain economic advantage Hispanics can count on: technical and professional bilingualism.

Home usage, the other crucial factor is certainly interdependent with attitudes, but in ways that are pervasive and not easily measured. Certainly, persons with whom to speak the language, frequency of interaction, comfort and topics in language interchange are crucial measures of language resources. Research in bilingual community settings and the schools they serve has shown that these resources are under-utilized (Trueba, Guthrie, Au 1981).

The home environment is not just a language laboratory. It is the multi-stylistic environment for practice that the language laboratory simulates and formalizes. The interaction with speakers who narrate, ask, scold, play, praise, promise, exclaim and negotiate in a foreign language is worth much more in terms of language intuitions than the possible disadvantages of mistakes, regionalisms and code-switching.

More positively, the resources in Spanish that exist in homes, from what has been observes and offered by teachers in interviews are intuitions at many levels of grammatical structure:

> Phonologically, the vocalic system, unique consonant sounds, patterns of intonation, elision and rhythm, are features of language that are very difficult to master by foreign language students, but occur in the daily usage of Hispanics, even with limited vocabulary and literacy in the language.
>
> Morphologically, gender, agreement, irregular patterns of articles, vowel shifts, and tense formation, are the topic of many reinforcing lessons to develop habits that are akin to the intuitions held by native Speakers, Contact with these categories in the home should make learning conventions associated with them much easier.
>
> Syntactically, the placement of adjectives, verb-subject-object order, and sematic aspects of syntax such as the distinctions between imperfect and preterite, the use of the infinitive and participle, por vs para, ser vs estar and related structures are, again, developed habits that the purely foreign language learner finds difficult. These distinctions cross into the level of the lexicon.

Lexically, other distinctions could be added, such as saber/conocer, and terminology related to the social and natural environment. The nuances of emotionally laden items are aspects of vocabulary that bridge over to the social and cultural arenas that languages serve.

Pragmatics. Perhaps the hardest and most subtle aspect of using a language for communication involves stylistic registers, and speech events that allow a person to use a language appropriately, and non-verbal accompaniment to speech. These are, again, resources that should be seen as existing at least as raw material in the classroom and call for curriculum to be adjusted accordingly.

Metalinguistically, the use of language for findings about langauge itself, about thought processes, and for academic and cognitive skills, is rare, but still may be found in critical or intellectual home environments

In sum, language resources may facilitate instruction in language arts and enable a more diversified treatment of content areas. In addition to foreign language development, the use of language resources can improve the learning of English -- admittedly a goal in educational programs, whether bilingual or not.

Bilingual Education

Preliminary reports on the effectiveness of bilingual education vary greatly; there is no consensus as to which of the many models and designs is the most effective. Nonetheless, continued bilingual education has been shown to be more effective than short-term programs. Evidence from Navajo programs in the Southwest, Finnish programs in Sweden, and Spanish programs in East Chicago, Indiana, provide hard data that over time children in bilingual maintenance programs achieve more.

In Northwest Indiana, East Chicago school children have been tested in reading, and those in the bilingual program (a locally-funded maintenance program) scored two years above U.S. national norms in English and on grade level (Mexican norms) in Spanish.

These achievements at the elementary school level need to be carried through to the secondary level, but only in a few areas (such as Milwaukee) are serious attempts being made at bilingual education beyond the narrow limits of mandated

programs. This, in effect, means that the resources developed by basic bilingual education are largely neglected by the secondary curriculum. Some initial efforts are being made in connection with the foreign language departments of high schools and colleges to promote langauge courses in Spanish for Spanish speakers. A report on them is subject for another subsequent presentation and discussion.

Using the Language Resources

What practical suggestions can be offered to teachers of potentially bilingual students to use the language resources outlined earlier? Using the example of Hispanic students, a set of horizontal activities will be proposed, but other situations are certainly not excluded. Horizontal activities differ from the teacher-centered, large-group coverage of a set curriculum (vertical learning activities). Rather, they are either directed by the Hispanic students, serving as teacher-aide or group leaders, or engage resource persons from home or community.

For younger students, the following ideas utilize resources with the purpose of vocabulary and syntax-building and developing oral fluency:

1. Make believe or role-playing. Under the guidance of one or two Spanish speaking students a small group could play store, dolls, school, etc., and thus learn appropriate verbal behavior, intonation and vocabulary.
2. Similarly, children could be models to teach songs to their peers. Songs in Spanish from the radio, from records, tapes or nursery rhymes would be apprpriate.
3. Show and tell in Spanish. The child talks about a favorite and familiar subject, but needs to learn vocabulary and phrasing to express him/herself. A peer can aid in the preparation of such a presentation.

For older students, the same activities suggested for elementary pupils may be modified in scope for secondary classrooms. Make-believe situations can become directed dialogues, such as two parents disciplining a child, dealing with a car breakdown or an electrical outage, or praising a child who brings home a good report card. In these cases the task is to replicate the lexicon, phrasing, intonation and expressions of adults. Show-and-tell could focus on hobbies, experiences or career plans.

The resources of ethnic communities, both personal and institutional should enter the classroom as well:

4. The media provide ample opportunities for listening or reading of news, features or soap operas, which could be summarized and reported to the class. Even learning a hit song in Spanish is a tremendous lesson.
5. Oral history, in brief interviews of persons who participate in or witnessed local or historical events, can provide an engaging contact with foreign language speakers. The Hispanic child can contact an appropriate adult, and with a cassette recorder and less than ten questions, a project can emerge that involves many language lessons.
6. A trip to the supermarket, especially an ethnic one may be a lesson in vocabulary and culture shared by a pair of students. Naming items in two languages, observing how people shop and interact and learning about food preparation are skills involved.
7. Talking with a child, perhaps the brother or sister of an Hispanic student can be a means for Anglo students to overcome inhibitions in speaking and to receive corrections without threat. The simpler phrasing and vocabulary of children also aids the learning process.

Summary

This paper has tried to illustrate (1) the resources for needed foreign language capacity that exist in the non-English speaking sectors of U.S. society; (2) how the non-development of them has counter-productive consequences for both minority children, foreign language instruction, and national educational needs; (3) what progress and promise bilingual bicultural education offers in the effort to remedy the situation and bring about more positive educational outcomes; and (4) some practical steps teachers might take in utilizing the language resources around them.

These few suggestions might be adapted as New Year's Resolutions by teachers looking for simple but effective ways to enliven the classroom and make use of language resources in the home and community. In every case not only language skills are involved, but the culture as well. Learning culture certainly gives content to language lessons and it also provides insight into the lives of non-English speakers that is so essential to attitudinal change.

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