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ABSTRACT

The key role that language and language policy play in relation to education, culture, and multiculturalism was emphasized throughout the plenary and workshop discussions of the 43rd Session of the International Conference on Education, convened by UNESCO in September, 1992. This paper reports the roundtable discussions of this meeting. The chapter by William F. Mackey examines differences among these three concepts in context, content, and the constraints that their treatment imposes on national and/or educational policy. Ayo Bamgbose describes policy options for language policies in basic education in Africa and argues that the need to associate language policy more closely with educational objectives is key when considering policy options. Mary Clay uses case study examples to show the effects that some language policies have had on language learning. Children's literacy in Latin America is discussed in a chapter by Emilia Ferreiro. Official recognition of plurilingualism in the Asian region and language policy is the focus of the chapter by D. P. Pattanayak. Brian V. Street provides a social anthropological view of literacy and culture, describes new approaches to the study of literacy and policy implications of these approaches, and details ethnographic examples of what people actually do with literacy in their everyday lives. (JP)

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LANGUAGE POLICY, LITERACY AND CULTURE

ROUND TABLE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION, GENEVA,

18 SEPTEMBER 1992

Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed chapters and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization

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PREFACE

During the 42nd International Conference on Education in 1990, International Literacy Year, the International Literacy Year Secretariat and the Division of Higher Education of the Education Sector at UNESCO Headquarters organized a *Roundtable on Literacy and the Role of the University*. This first roundtable was intended as a thoughtprovoking examination of the role of a major potential actor in the promotion of a fully literate world, the university. Due to the success of that independent forum within the regular framework of this ministers of education conference, another such roundtable was identified to provide light on a major dimension of the 43rd International Conference on Education's overall theme, Education and Cultural Development. On this occasion, the Division of Basic Education selected the theme, *Language Policy, Literacy and Culture* as a major issue of increasing international concern.

The Canadian government graciously provided a grant to enable Leslie Limage, of the Division of Basic Education to organize this roundtable with the participation of world-class specialists in fields closely concerned with this theme. The roundtable was attended by representatives of ministries of education from all regions of the world as well as nongovernmental organizations and regional offices and institutes of UNESCO. This volume contains an introduction by Dr. Francis Whyte, Director-General of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, who chaired the roundtable. Each of the six presentations has been developed into full papers.

The ultimate usefulness of this roundtable and the present volume resides in their ability to catalyze and stimulate thoughtful and coherent language policies in individual countries as well as to point out the close linkage between language choices, the educational performance of children and adults, and reasonable but effective respect for linguistic diversity in a multilingual, multicultural world. As Professor William Mackey wrote some years ago in a special issue of UNESCO's quarterly review of education, *Prospects*,: "All languages are equal before God and the linguist" (no. 49, 1984). In other words, all languages have the potential for conveying the full range of human experience regardless of the number of speakers or their relative prestige. It is up to each local community, educational system, national or regional authority and the international community to identify the appropriate complementary relations for language usage in the public and private domains to ensure such respect. UNESCO will certainly continue its longstanding efforts to provide leadership and technical advice in issues of language choice and management and we hope that this volume will be one more such contribution.

Colin N. Power
Assistant Director General for Education

INTRODUCTION

The 43rd Session of the International Conference on Education was convened by UNESCO in Geneva from the 14th to the 19th September, 1992. Since this Conference fell approximately at the mid-point of the World Decade for Cultural Development, it was most appropriate that its overall theme deal with *The Contribution of Education to Cultural Development*. The key role that language and language policy play in relation to education, culture and multiculturalism was strongly emphasized throughout the plenary and workshop discussions of the Conference. The UNESCO Secretariat is to be commended for having provided a particularly valuable opportunity for delegates to pursue these themes in greater depth with experts in the field by organizing the Round Table on Language Policy, Literacy and Culture during the Conference.

The Round Table brought together experts from widely different regions of the world, each presenting their reflections on the interactions among the three elements of the Round Table theme. The complexity and diversity of situations, responses and perceived future directions was one of the most striking elements of the presentations and discussion. Indeed, one of the points that Brian Street made in concluding his paper was that "*in reality the world is becoming more, not less, diverse*" and that policy challenges in the areas of language and culture are therefore becoming harder, not easier. This observation serves to underline why questions of culture and language, the primary vehicles to establish communication and understanding between diverse realities, are rising to the very top of international, national and sub-national policy agendas, even at this time when economic preoccupations weigh so heavily in the decision-making process throughout the world. It also underlines the fundamental importance, as another speaker put it, of "*closely associating language policy with educational objectives*".

I am particularly honoured to have been asked by UNESCO to chair this Round Table, which all participants agreed made a significant contribution to the Conference as a whole. The merit for this must go entirely to our distinguished presenters, who addressed a challenging theme with perceptive analyses drawn from a lifetime of scholarship, wide-ranging experience and very different backgrounds. On behalf of all involved, I would therefore like to express my appreciation to Professors William Mackey, Laval University, Canada; Ayo Bamgbose, Ibadan University, Nigeria; Marie Clay, University of Auckland, New Zealand; Emilia Ferreiro, the National Polytechnical Institute, Mexico; D.P. Pattanayak, Indian Institute of Applied Language Sciences, India; and Brian Street, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.

William Mackey, who gave the principal communication to the Round Table, pointed out in summing up that the questions raised around education policy, language and culture were fundamentally of two closely-related orders: questions concerning language itself and questions concerning people and their cultural identity. Certainly, during the course of the discussions, cultural identity emerged as a driving concept behind language policy.

When looking at the realities of language in the various regions of the world, the overwhelming portrait painted by the presenters was one of diversity and complexity -

creating challenges of the highest order for aspiring policy makers. This was strongly brought out in Dr. Pattanayak's portrait of the linguistic realities of India: 1652 mother tongues, up to 700 languages belonging to 4 language families, and 10 major writing systems. Furthermore, William Mackey pointed out that, in the global context, there is no correspondence between language boundaries and the nation states which make policy. More than half of the world's languages are concentrated in only seven sovereign states, and the official languages of some 125 sovereign states belong to a restricted group of four languages. There are some 86 languages with under a hundred speakers.

The situation relates to the double movement of diversity and globalization. We live in a world where electronic media in particular are tending to propagate a uniform set of values over wide areas, to such an extent that, in the West, at any rate, culture was presented as becoming progressively less "national" and more "generational". On the other hand, we witness a concurrent tendency in many parts of the world towards strengthening local and regional identity, preserving and revitalizing heritage and indigenous languages and reaffirming their corresponding cultural values.

This complex context leads to a fundamental policy dilemma in the language field for most states, as was brought out by almost all the presenters: the need on the one hand to strengthen minority or local languages for literacy and school purposes, while, at the same time, meeting increasing demands for linguistic competence in one or more of the international languages.

The question of initial literacy instruction was also a thorny one. There was general agreement that mother tongue literacy was an important and desirable concept, and a major element in building the individual's identity and self-esteem.

Ayo Bamgbose dwelt in some detail on this issue when discussing the experience in Africa, where mother tongue has usually been the language of choice for literacy instruction. It is the most feasible in a multilingual situation with no commonly accepted lingua franca; it makes possible a sufficient supply of teachers and favours integration of language skills with the everyday experiences of the learner.

However, in many situations, the very definition of "mother tongue" poses serious problems. One presenter pointed out that he had known children in his country who could have claimed any one of six languages as their mother tongue! The point was also made that mother tongue literacy, if not carried out for its own sake, but purely as a bridging mechanism to subsequent literacy in a national or international language, could have a negative effect on the child's identity. Furthermore, literacy training, to be effective, requires an extensive corpus of reading material, but the written languages with sufficient reading material are relatively few in number. Availability of appropriate reading materials is of fundamental importance, not only linguistically, but also culturally.

Even in New Zealand, as Marie Clay told us, there have been difficulties in procuring English-language texts which adequately portray the language and culture of that country to its children. For many states, there may be little alternative to shouldering the high cost of providing written materials in mother tongues for the purposes of supporting literacy.

Literacy teaching, and the development of written materials, immediately raise the question of language standardization, always fraught with controversy. Emilia Ferreiro described the situation in Latin America, where different national variants of the Spanish

language have not always been considered equal. Bias in favour of one form of standardization has a negative effect on literacy work, since the learner feels rejected by having family and group language patterns deemed inappropriate for acquiring literacy skills. Furthermore, the crucial factors for acquiring literacy competency reside, not in the type of language spoken by the learner, but in the presence of reading materials, exposure to oral reading and the availability of appropriate help and advice.

The very concept of language standardization was seen as questionable. Should not a language be flexible and growing in order to survive? Dr. Pattanayak concluded his remarks by observing that standardization must be understood as a range, not a point, and that the wider the range, the greater the acceptability of the language. This view corresponded to William Mackey's concern that by standardizing a language to preserve it, one may very well be sowing the seeds of its eventual demise.

Allow me to conclude this brief introduction by referring to an observation made by the Director General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, at the opening of the conference. He emphasized, "*The preservation of cultural diversity is crucial for the future of mankind, and education has an important contribution to make to the specific problem of multicultural living.*"

All who participated in the debate at the Round Table surely left convinced, if they were not before, that the front line of the struggle for cultural diversity and multicultural harmony is drawn squarely through fundamental questions of literacy, language policy and education.

Francis R. Whyte
Director General, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

CHAPTER I

LANGUAGE POLICY, LITERACY AND CULTURE: CONTEXTS, CONTENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

by William F. Mackey

Language policy, literacy and culture are three faces of the same reality - the language culture complex. Before treating them separately, let us take a quick look at how they relate one with the other.

Language, before it can become a system of communication, is first and foremost a system of representation. It is the way a people has conceived its universe of perception and experiences and organized it into a system of culture concepts. These have been fashioned by its common and cumulative experience. Language is not only the mind of a culture, it is also its most exclusive vehicle. Take it away and what remains is folklore. If culture is what you acquire as a social being, language enables you to acquire it.

Let us not confuse language and literacy. Until the invention of writing, everything one had to learn as a member of a family or community (its culture) was transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the next. And it continued to be thus for most people until the beginning of the last century. Writing was often regarded with fear, suspicion, or at times, contempt. Even the philosopher Plato seems to have been against too much literacy on the grounds that it would atrophy the faculties of memory on which the oral transmission of culture depended. Indeed that seems to be what has happened since we no longer commit to memory all the great texts of our culture. Even learning poetry by heart has long been out of fashion as part of our education.

In many societies what is learned now depends almost exclusively on the written word, to such an extent that we tend to equate advanced cultures with great writings and advanced societies with high rates of literacy. Culture is now associated with literacy. That is why any policy whose objective is the preservation or revival of an ancestral culture is now oriented toward literacy in the ancestral tongue which may never have been the vehicle of a written literature. Most of the 170 or so sovereign states have education policies which include the literacy of all citizens in an official or national language. In this way literacy is related to language policy just as language policy is related to culture.

While keeping in mind the interrelations of language policy, literacy and culture, one can focus on any one of these concepts as sources of social and political action, especially in the field of education. So let us take them one at a time.

Let us look at them separately as to their differences in context, in content and also as to the constraints which their treatment impose today on any national or educational policy. In so doing we will see why public language education policies which had been moulded in the context of 19th Century nationalism are rapidly becoming

irrelevant.¹ We can also try to understand why the sovereign state is no longer sovereign in matters of language and culture. We will observe how the inertia of traditional thinking in matters of language education is being shaken by the social realities of a new age, by the opposing forces of cultural diversity and socio-economic globalism, giving new meaning to the concepts of language, literacy, culture and education. This is the framework into which must fit our language policy options in the area of public education.

First, let us take a look at language policy. Language policy is the accommodation of society to language diversity.² As such, its options depend on the nature and structure of the society for which the policy is intended - its people and the relative development and potential of each of their languages. These options are also dependent on the context, content and constraints imposed on the policy by the languages themselves. Since the frontiers of language are rarely congruent with the borders of the state and those who speak them are not all and always confined within fixed language boundaries, the context in which one can understand the implications of a language policy must extend beyond the state, often beyond the region and sometimes beyond the continent in which a language is or may be used.

Let us look at this. If we were to take a physical map of the world and locate each of the world's languages (exclusive of dialects and regional varieties), we would see that more than half of them (3,500) are situated in the Asia-Oceania continuum, about a third of them (1,900) in Africa, a fifth in the Americas (900) and only a tenth in Europe and the Middle East (275). If we now superimpose national boundaries on this language map, we find that these 6,200 languages are located in only 170 sovereign states.

It is not surprising therefore, if most of these states house more than one language and that the distribution of the world languages among the states is not equal.³ And thirdly that the distribution is unrelated either to land mass or population. With almost equal land mass, the difference can go as high as 800 to 1 if we compare, for example, the number of languages in Papua-New Guinea with the number of languages in Japan. In fact, more than half the world's languages are concentrated in only seven sovereign states: Papua-New Guinea (850), Indonesia (670), Nigeria (410), India (380), Cameroon (270), Australia (250), Mexico (240). Going down the list of the most multilingual sovereign states, we find that the next 14 states each harbour more than 100 different languages (Zaire, Brazil, Philippines, the ex-USSR, Malaysia, USA, China, Sudan, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Chad, New Hebrides, Central African Republic, Burma and Nepal). More than 852 of the world's languages are native to only 127 of its states. The language policy problems of these states will obviously be of a different order than those of most other states.

What makes their problems even more complex is that many of the world's languages are shared by two or more states, so that the majority language of one state may be the minority language of its neighbour. In fact, most languages are minority languages somewhere, and most states have language minorities of different types: indigenous, transnational, colonial, imperial, immigrant and nomadic. Each of these may be the object of a different language policy.

What complicates language policy planning even further is that people may belong to two or more of these minorities at one and the same time if they are plurilingual in these languages. And their degree of traditional bilinguality may also be an element in the language policy which will affect them, especially if their individual rights conflict with

those of the two or more groups to which they may belong.

Although a state may have many languages of the types just mentioned, the number of languages in which it conducts its business are few indeed. Most have only one official language. Less than 15 % of them have more than one and only a few states have more than two. These official languages, however, are not always different languages. Each state does not have its own exclusive official language. The official languages of some 125 sovereign states belong to a restricted group of four languages, namely, English (45 states) French (30), Spanish (30), Arabic (20). Official languages in the remaining states include some 50 different tongues. If we add to this 45 regional languages with official status, we get less than a hundred of the world's 6,200 tongues which operate as official languages of a state.

So far, we have been looking at the distribution of language on the surface of the globe. Let us now look at the people who speak them. If we place the languages on a demographic map of the world, we get another picture. Looking at languages in terms of numbers of speakers, we find that only one percent of the world's languages can count more than half a million speakers, only ten percent of the languages have more than a hundred thousand speakers, some 20 % to 30 % have no young speakers and a final 10 % are almost extinct.

It has been estimated that if the present rate of language shift continues, half the world's languages will not survive the next century. Most of the disappearing languages are located in areas which can least afford to support them. For people whose main worry is where their next meal will come from, language survival is seldom a top priority. At the other end of the spectrum we find that economic development, modernization, higher and more specialized education tolerate fewer and fewer languages. What is incomplete about our picture, however, is that it is static. Speakers are continually shifting languages, states are shifting boundaries and people are changing countries.

Economic priorities have been inciting more and more people to move further and further from their place of birth, converging on large far-away cities where opportunities may be greater.⁴ So that the number of different languages which children bring to school has been on the increase. In Central London, for example, the LCC has found more than 175 different home languages in the schools under its jurisdiction. Cities as diverse as Yaoundé, New York, Rio and Los Angeles have counted more than a hundred home languages in elementary schools.⁵ Some cities report that more than half the children entering school do not understand the language of instruction.

Faced with such language diversity and increasing mobility, what language and education policies should the state adopt? It is hard to imagine any single policy for all. For language policy depends on many factors: on the languages themselves, their viability, their historical presence, their geopolitical importance and their demographic and political status. The making of a language policy is not a mere academic exercise. It is most often a practical response to social, economic and political pressures. These are becoming stronger and more evident. They now reach the nation-state from the outside - from supranational bodies and powerful groupings of stateless minorities, what has been called the Fourth World or "la force des faibles".

For example, just a few months ago (22 June 1992), the Council of Europe (with only one dissenting voice and four abstentions) passed the Charter of Regional and

Minority Languages of Europe later incorporated as a chapter of the Maastricht Treaty. This charter would give legal status to the indigenous regional languages within the European states, especially in matters of media and education.

Language charters like this one have been and will be enacted in other parts of the world. What we are dealing with here are, for the most part, written languages - some with literary traditions ante-dating that of the nation state - languages which could have become official were it not for the hazards of history.

In converting the principles of a language charter into national policy and regional practice, each region concerned, no less than its sovereign state, has to understand the facts and the issues facing each of the languages. What action UNESCO as an international body and each of its member states will take will also depend on a clear understanding of the facts and the issues. These would include:

- A complete inventory of the number of languages represented within the political boundaries of the state, their geographic and social distribution, their mutual intelligibility, their degrees of written and oral standardization, the nearness of local varieties to written standards, the proportion, type and degree of bilinguality of the speakers of each language variety.
- The transnational or supranational prestige, status and functions of each language within the state.⁶
- The people for whom a language policy would be intended, their social structure, their political development and their cultural differences.
- The relative importance of language within political, economic and national education policies and priorities in the use of resources.
- The relation of border varieties with one another and the possibilities of bilateral language treaties.⁷

Only on the basis of such information can a state properly assess its language policy options. The constraints on the implementation of any language policy can be both cultural and political. The state cannot legislate a language into being, for it does not create the great creators of its language - a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Manzoni. It can, however, refrain from suppressing the language of a future Mistral. In sum, it can give its languages a chance to develop. In some parts of the world with dozens of native vernaculars, it may be politically expedient to refrain from favouring one language over another. A country whose official language is exogenous (and there are more than a hundred) cannot arbitrarily elevate any local vernacular to official status without inviting opposition. Nor can a region within the state. If a region with a dozen or so indigenous languages proposed to give official status to anyone of them, the eleven others will object. If the chosen language has five varieties (and there are many such languages) the one chosen as the basis for the written standard will not necessarily attract the adherence of the speakers of the other four.

In this context, there was a resolution passed recently (14 August 1992), by one of UNESCO's international scientific and cultural affiliates, the CIPL, to be submitted to the general conference of UNESCO at a later date. This resolution is of a different order both in scope and implication. It reads as follows:

As the disappearance of any one language constitutes
an irretrievable loss to mankind, it is for UNESCO a task of

great urgency to respond to this situation by promoting and, if possible, sponsoring programmes of linguistic organisations for the description - in the form of grammars, dictionaries and texts including the recording of the oral literatures - of hitherto unstudied or inadequately documented endangered and dying languages.⁸

This resolution is of a different order because it concerns hundreds of languages with little or no writing vernaculars which, like all languages in the past, have been the sole vehicle of the oral transmission of culture and knowledge from one generation to the next.

When the transmission of knowledge to the young became the function of national school systems, this educational activity often took place in a different language, sometimes an official or exogenous language of the states. The vernacular, thus deprived of its most important function, became largely redundant, gradually moribund and finally classed as an endangered language - the object of resolutions such as the one cited.

The purpose of the resolution and others like it, is oriented toward the conservation of species of language forms, rather than the preservation of their social and educational function. Let us not then at the outset confuse language archives with language education. The nature of any link between them is however a matter for language policy. To study the possible relation, it is necessary to separate into two what appears in the resolution as a single activity, that is, the making of grammars and dictionaries as opposed to the recording of oral literatures.

Which of these will have priority in time, order and resources is a policy decision. It is true that archives of oral literature can be used for further grammatical, lexical, stylistic and dialectical description such as those which have been made for languages like French and English - and are still being made by hundreds of linguistic scholars in search of more complete or more theoretical grammars. Indeed, there is no end. How long it would take all the unwritten languages of the world to catch up is anybody's guess.⁹ How many years would it take if all the resources were available to convert hundreds of vernaculars into written languages in which there would be enough material in print to feed the first years of primary school? It is likely that by the time the materials were available many of the moribund languages would have disappeared.

There are many languages in the world with less than ten speakers, most of whom are past middle age. A survey a few decades ago counted 35 of these languages in North America alone and 86 languages with under a hundred speakers. Some of these languages have been studied at the expense of others with a hundred times the number of speakers.

Lacking a language policy, governments may invest their resources into the least viable languages. The scenario goes something like this. A young graduate student from a continent with hundreds of unwritten languages is sent abroad to study linguistics. The student spends several years doing a doctorate under a linguist with an academic interest in an indigenous language of the far-off continent with so few speakers that it has hitherto gone unnoticed. The new doctor of linguistics, now back home, continues working on this language with the encouragement and guidance of his mentor who provides access to the international circuit of conferences. Meanwhile other languages in the region with far more speakers and potential remain unattended.

Even when a language has been sufficiently analysed, there is little evidence that the existence of written grammars and dictionaries are what determine the transmission and survival of oral languages. Languages have survived for centuries without benefit of written grammars and they do so today, since it is not through these means that languages are usually transmitted.

It is true that some languages have been analysed to death and purified beyond recognition. Languages - especially the unwritten ones - are transmitted orally in the family, in the community or in the school. But schools, as part of education systems, have had little use for purely oral languages - for the vernaculars. One went to school to learn to read and write a language of importance. As more children from oral cultures went to school and stayed longer, the importance of their oral home language decreased. For there was no place in the curriculum for unwritten languages. All public education was based - not on orality - but on literacy. That is why vernaculars in the school have traditionally been denigrated if not suppressed.

Should the school now assume the task of transmitting the oral tradition of its pupils, it would do best to respect the orality of their language. This can now become feasible even with many different vernaculars in the same class. Today, young people can have the very best versions of their oral traditions spoken by the most prestigious speakers - better than before - when we think that high-fidelity audiocassettes have now become cheaper than books in print. What has therefore become urgent is the recording of the best models of spoken oral literature and history and their transmission directly to the ears of the young as part of their daily school curriculum.¹⁰ An orality curriculum does not detract from literacy objectives; it is simply that the objectives, the content and the medium may be different.

Literacy on the other hand can only be achieved with what exists, not with what may become available. Although phonic alphabets based on the speech of the home have successfully been used as an introduction to alphabetic reading, the literature in them is rarely sufficient to maintain an adequate level of literacy.¹¹

Written languages with sufficient reading material are relatively few in number. As we go up the education ladder from primary to secondary school to college, university, technical and professional schools, we find fewer and fewer languages that can supply our needs. At the technical and professional levels students who will already have accumulated a few years of literacy in one or more of these languages have a definite advantage over those who must learn to read them after they enter technical school. That is why the languages in which most of the technical, scientific and professional literature is available are those that appear as the first foreign languages taught in school. When, where, how and how long they should be taught are questions on which much has been written - in general, inconclusively, since policy objectives in this area have been vague or vaguely stated.

Today these same languages may have to compete for school time with the regional, ethnic and ancestral tongues now being added to the curriculum. Some will be displaced as a medium of instruction for reasons that may be less educational than ideological. Yet more and more new languages are being used for science and technology at a time when an increasingly greater proportion of scientific publication is appearing in fewer and fewer languages. Both these opposing tendencies are putting a squeeze on the

traditional monopoly of many national languages.

In some cases, the only compromise is a policy of basic trilingual education, whereby each language is acquired within its own context and for its relevant and specific purpose. The context of the vernacular may be that of local identity, which may be the chief motivating force for its preservation and survival. Language survival, however, is often seen in terms of modernisation. In some languages, this has meant that half the vocabulary of modern everyday discourse has had to be imported. In fact, some languages may have to be creolized in order to survive. Language species that fail to adapt are doomed to extinction. Even so, the vernacular cannot take modern youths as far as they may want to go. It is true that the regional or national language may be indispensable. It may be the language in which one learns to write.¹²

For specialized or more advanced study neither the vernacular nor the national language may suffice. Needed may be one of the few international languages in which so much of the world's knowledge has been stored. But in order to have access to this storehouse, we do not need to speak or write these languages; we do have to be able to read and understand them.¹³

A feasible policy of trilingual education would in addition to the national language include an oral comprehension of the spoken vernacular and a reading comprehension of an academic language. This requires unaccustomed efficiency in the acquisition of specific language skills.

Bilingual or trilingual education has a necessary effect upon the culture of those who become literate in one or two languages. If there is no literacy without literature, there is no literature without the context of culture. Literature in its widest sense is the main vehicle for the transmission of the accumulated culture of a people from one generation to the next. Literature as the best that was thought and said by a people is moulded by its language which segments the universe of perception into cultural concepts representing a particular world view. This world view of concepts, values and patterns of behaviour is acquired gradually as the child matures into adulthood. If this maturation takes place in the context or another culture through its language, the concepts, values and patterns of behaviour may be variable or entirely different, depending on which norms are dominant.¹⁴

The imposition of the norms of one culture on the priorities of another culture will necessarily rate some people as backward. In bicultural contexts, that is why the educational notion of backwardness in basic subjects has functioned as institutionalized discrimination. Cultural minorities have contested the notion that everyone should learn the same thing at the same time in the same way and to the same level.

Yet the ideal of cultural diversity in education is continually being subverted by cultural contact on a world scale. What is being superimposed on both national, regional and local cultures is an extranational culture which places all cultures in the same boat - or more exactly in the same theatre before the same screen. Many studies indicate that in Western countries the total hours per year before the screen for most school-age children exceed by a factor of 5 to 4 the number of hours spent before a teacher. One cannot discount this as mere extra-curricular entertainment. What a family sees and hears most often at home, day in and day out, has got to become part of its culture. Since their literary culture must stay unread, and their oral literature remains unheard, people are no longer

aware of their own history, no longer think the thoughts of their past or share the beliefs of their ancestors.

What has happened is that the video generation, in the Western world at least, share a culture quite different from that of their parents or grandparents. Their culture is not that of their homeland but that of their generation. Since they share the same feelings, the same values, the same icons and even wear the same uniform, national and cultural frontiers are for them irrelevant.

This globalisation of culture became possible only through the extension of mass media networks which opened up immense marketing areas. Once a market was made it was not long before culture was transformed into a commodity which could benefit from the economics of scale. Anyone anywhere could soon buy a Hollywood film for a fraction of what it would cost to make one. Simply the production over-run of a few mass media giants is now recycled abroad thanks to a sort of dumping of culture products by entrepreneurs. This is not a two-way street; it is not transnational, international or even supranational. It is simply a global commodity transaction.

Since this is a commodity, the economics of marketing requires that it be targeted at the widest possible public, meaning the lowest common intellectual denominator and the most basic emotions. The result is a synthetic fabricated culture. It is a culture of mass entertainment, of artificially manipulated emotions, of spectacle, of hyped-up conflict, vicarious violence and programmed reactions. Most of this takes place not so much through language but through pictures. The selection of the pictures programmes the attitudes and opinions of the audiences by imprinting the unconscious with them. Through the use of communications satellites, the control of these global networks has now become a monopoly. There is now even a word for it. It is called "technopoly" - monopolizing the uses of technologies (David Postman). This technology is used mainly to market entertainment - to entertain not in order to educate, but in order to attract and fascinate with products and lifestyles that, through attention-grabbing, gimmicks, unrelated to any culture on earth, make viewers attentive to what they see and discontented with what they have.

So that the young are becoming more familiar with this artificial world of video than they are with what is happening in their own community. Massive loud-speakers of global media drown out the small voices of local cultures. What happens in distant places becomes better known than what happens around us. The velocity of communication and one-way broadcasting push out all that is merely regional. The far erodes the near and eventually eliminates it.

The net result of all this has been an erosion of national cultures, a downgrading of literacy and a silencing of local languages. Today this is the context in which any system of education must now try to function. Whether any one state can alone counter these global forces of acculturation is doubtful. Countering them together is the challenge which now faces our international conference of education.

Notes

1. The 19th Century expansion of standard speech to all parts of the sovereign state has not been the result of language policy or edict. It is due rather to increased communication through roads and rails, airways and airlines, radio, telephone, television, bringing simultaneously into even the remotest homes a daily avalanche of sound and print.
2. Language policy is an aspect of the politics of accommodation which like all politics is the art of the possible. It is often an accommodation of three different principles, the principle of personality whereby the state accommodates to the language of the individual, the principle of territoriality whereby the individual uses the language of the state, and the principle of self-determination whereby each identifies with the language of one's chosen group. Examples are Canada, the Swiss Cantons and Austria (Volksgruppengesetz). Before implementing a policy, one should calculate the cost-benefit of language bureaucracies, whose capacities for growth may become unlimited, especially if given the task of modifying language behaviour in the public service. In this context, see my "La modification par la loi du comportement langagier" In: Paul Pupier & J. Woehrling, *Language Law*, Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, 1989, pp. 45-54.
3. The term "minority language" does not have the same meaning in every country. A population of ten thousand speakers among a billion in Asia may not be given the importance as it would in a small European country. And again numerical minorities are not the same as functional minorities using "minorized" vernaculars - languages deprived of their social functions as part of a language policy. When the prestige of a minorized language is equal to that of the state, the potential for conflict may be found mostly in the field of education. The most expedient language policy may then be one of language maintenance through a balanced and complete bilingual education programme. This may be associated with a bilateral language treaty to maintain standards. When the minorization is perceived as the result of a policy of long-standing cultural suppression depriving an ethnic tongue of its potential for development, movements of cultural, linguistic and even political irredentism may arise within the state. Foresight and a policy of accommodation in the content, structure and control of school programmes, enacted early enough can obviate the need for conflict management in a climate of resentment.
4. As a result, during these last decades of our century, the social structures have become so different from those of the past that we question some of the basic assumptions about language in society. Most countries have already felt some, if not all, of the effects of mass movements which began with the century - the dominance of technologies and secular ideologies, mobile populations, people's armies, mass media with vicarious participation in public political debate, the local and international expansion of the press, and the extension of compulsory primary education for all. As mass literacy has spread, the popular press has had great influence both on the maintenance of language standards and on their adaptation to changing needs. And its influence has extended beyond the borders of the state as has much of the scientific and technical literature. The greater the spread the fewer the standards, and the fewer the languages. Most international communications since the beginning of the century have taken place in proportionately fewer languages.

5. It has become increasingly difficult in some cities to create linguistically homogeneous classes. And there is no guarantee that those who teach them will convey the best models of the standard speech.
6. Although these concepts are interdependent, the meaning of prestige, function and status in language can be seen in the difference between past, present and future - between what has been done, what is being done (all the actual uses of the language) and what can be done legally, culturally and scientifically. See my "Determining the Status and Function of Languages in Multinational Societies" In: Ulrich Ammon (ed) *Status and Function of Languages in Multinational Societies*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989, pp. 68-79.
7. An example is the Nederlandse Taalunie, the language treaty between Belgium and the Netherlands. Official minorities can get help for the standard version of their language from adjacent states where the language is stronger or more standardized.
8. Appended to this proposal are the following points:
 - A. Each individual language and the diversity of mankind's languages are of inestimable value to mankind in general and to linguistics in particular.
 - B. We recognize that the great majority of mankind's languages are gravely endangered or even dying.
 - C. Therefore linguists should recognize their urgent obligation to respond to this situation in the following ways:
 - a) Ascertain the status of languages in order to deploy scarce resources in rational ways.
 - b) Document not yet well studied dying languages according to their imminence of extinction, their genetic position and their typological isolation.
 - c) Work for the strengthening and revitalization of endangered languages, not only through linguistic research but also by working for and with the speakers themselves, to establish and train local personnel and to maintain educational and cultural programmes which will promote the survival of their languages.
 - d) Raise the awareness of the linguistic profession concerning the enormity and imminence of the loss, and encourage departments of linguistics to give training and award degrees, positions, and promotions for linguistic work appropriate to this situation.
 - e) Encourage linguists to raise the awareness of the general public concerning this situation, and also to raise the awareness of the language groups concerned that their languages are of very high value and that linguists can help to preserve them.

- f) Linguists should, wherever possible, work with governments to advocate legislation and measures to promote the survival of endangered languages.
9. The standardization and implementation of modern European languages has been the work not of a few years but of centuries. Even after the French language had reached its golden age of classicism, its most classic writer (Racine) had to complain that at a hundred leagues from Paris he could not make himself understood.
 10. Nor does this have to take place in class. Long distance and satellite broadcasting have been used to hold together scattered language minorities. For example, Canadian satellites (the Anik System) have been used since the late sixties to broadcast programmes in official and aboriginal minority languages, including those of the Arctic peoples.
 11. School languages, however, do not satisfy the needs of intimate interpersonal relations in the home, in the community and indeed in the school. Most modern states, harbouring as they do many local languages, are faced with a language policy dilemma - to develop more minority languages for schooling while maintaining increasingly demanding standards in one or more of the supranational languages of science, technology and commerce. Both of these conflicting demands can quite often be met only at the expense of the national tongue.
 12. Regional languages may have to be added as a matter of policy. One principle sometimes evoked is that each state should teach the language of its neighbours. Although this would seem equitable, it is not always feasible. One has to decide which neighbours and which variety of their languages.
 13. One can learn to understand a spoken language and to read it fluently in a fraction of the time that it would take to speak it with equal competence.
 14. The elaboration of an exclusive norm was the ideal of the nation-state. Little more than a century ago on the occasion of national unification, one of its authors, the Count Cavour, was to remark: "Now that we have created Italy our next job is to create Italians."

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CHAPTER II

LANGUAGE POLICY OPTIONS IN BASIC EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY FORMULATION

by Ayo Bamgbose

Language is without doubt the most important factor in the learning process. For the transfer of knowledge or skills which it entails, whether in teacher-pupil interaction or in self-instruction, is generally mediated through the spoken or the written word. The paradox, however, is that educational programmes and schemes are often designed to pay more attention to structures and curricula than to language policy.

In discussing the role of language in education, certain basic assumptions must be made. First, education must be seen as an aspect of national development in which the liberation of the human potential forms the major focus. Second, in contrast to existing situations in the developing countries in which education is considered as a privilege available only to a small proportion of children of school-going age, the objective should be "education for all". Third, while education should widen the learner's horizon and expose him or her to knowledge and experiences beyond his or her immediate environment, this should not be at the expense of cultural awareness and authenticity. Fourth, we accept the definition of basic education as

"education intended to meet basic learning needs; it includes instruction at the first or foundation level, on which subsequent learning can be based; it encompasses early childhood and primary (or elementary) education for children as well as education in literacy, general knowledge and life skills for youth and adults ..." (WCEFA 1990).

Arising from differences in language situations and socio-cultural conditions, a variety of language policies exist in the different regions of the world. For the purpose of this presentation, experience in the African region will serve as the main focus. Furthermore, although levels of education range from pre-primary and primary through secondary and post-secondary, the focus in this presentation will be on the levels involved in basic education as defined above. The rationale for this is that the greatest challenges to choice of medium of instruction arise at these levels, since for historical reasons, media of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels are largely predetermined.

Policy Questions

The context in which language policy decisions have to be taken in most developing countries is a multilingual one. Concerns such as what language to choose as a medium of instruction and for which level of education, therefore, tend to loom large. An

added complication is that most of these countries have, at one point or another, been subjected to colonial rule with the result that the language imposed for education during such rule continues to limit the freedom of choice.

Basic to any educational language policy decision are three questions: what language? for which purpose? and at which level?

It is well-known that for any educational system, even in a predominantly monolingual country, decisions have to be made on language choice. It may well be, for instance, that the country's language is not a language of wider communication (LWC), such as English or French. In such a case, there will be need for the introduction of a LWC in the curriculum; but even if it were, consideration may still have to be given to the study of a foreign language.

In a multilingual situation, the question of language choice assumes an even wider dimension because of the range of possible languages to choose from. Basically six types of languages are available:

- (a) A mother tongue which is the child's first language and the medium of informal education in the home as well as socialization processes among the peer group.
- (b) A language of the immediate community which speakers of small-group or minority languages usually acquire, since such a language usually serves as a local or regional lingua franca.
- (c) A widely-spoken lingua franca which is regarded as a national language in the sense that it is recognized by the government as an instrument for achieving socio-cultural integration, particularly at the national level. (Note that, in this sense, not all the languages that are native to a country are regarded as national languages).
- (d) An official language which is used for government, administration and education at certain levels. For most African countries such an official language is non-indigenous and it is generally the same as the erstwhile official language of colonial administration (i.e. English, French, Portuguese and Spanish). Where an official language is indigenous, it is not different from a national language as described in (c) above.
- (e) A foreign language which is generally a LWC acquired for instrumental purposes, such as overseas contact or education, research, trade and tourism.
- (f) A language of religion such as Classical Arabic in several black African countries with Muslim populations where this language is associated with the Koran and the teachings of Islam. In the Arab countries of North Africa, Classical Arabic is much more than a language of religion. It is also an official and national language.

The next policy question is that of purpose, and, in this connection, three purposes may be identified: literacy, subject and medium of instruction. Literacy is taken here to refer not only to initial literacy in which children are introduced to the rudiments of reading, writing and counting, but also to adult literacy. A language is taught as a subject when it has no further implication of being used as a medium for teaching other subjects. Needless to say, the use of a language as a medium of instruction is the highest possible status and no language can be so used unless it has been, or is also, taught as a subject.

The third policy question is that of level, and it is concerned with when a language can be introduced. As has been mentioned earlier, in addition to non-formal education, there are several levels of formal education each calling for discrimination in the choice of language subject or medium. These are pre-primary, primary, secondary (divided in some countries into junior secondary and senior secondary) and post-secondary or tertiary. It is not only the levels that matter in the choice of language, even classes within the levels also matter. For instance, a common practice in many countries is to use a mother tongue as a medium for the first three classes of primary school while changing to the official language as a medium in the last three classes.

Although in theory there are almost limitless possibilities of combination of language, function and level, in practice there are limitations that may be traced to four factors:

- (a) Overlap of language types, such that the choice of one type includes the choice of the other. Examples are identity of national and official language, of language of the immediate community and national language, of mother tongue and language of the immediate community, and of foreign language and language of religion. These cases of overlap will, however, depend on each language situation and several different possibilities may exist even within the same country.
- (b) Overlap of language function such that the use of language for one function automatically includes its use for another function. For example, the use of a language as a medium of instruction necessarily involves its being taught as subject.
- (c) Incompatibility of language and function such that a given type of language cannot be used in a given type of function. For example, a foreign language cannot be used for initial literacy nor as a medium of instruction for teaching subjects other than the language itself. Similarly, a language of religion can only be taught as a subject but never used as a medium of instruction for teaching other subjects.
- (d) Incompatibility of language and level such that a given language type is more appropriately taught at a given level. For example, a foreign language is hardly appropriate as a subject at pre-primary or even primary level, even though this practice may be found in some private fee-paying urban schools in some African countries.

Policy Options

The net result of the above factors is a limitation of the languages that are available in basic education. Of the six language types, two i.e. Foreign Language and Language of Religion are restricted to the function of subject only while the other four can be used in literacy, as subject and as medium of instruction. These four language types are Mother Tongue, Language of the Immediate Community, National Language and Official Language. Since, for all practical purposes, an indigenous official language is also likely to be a national language, no distinction will be made between these two and both will be discussed as national language. On the other hand, a non-indigenous official language will be treated separately as a LWC.

In adult literacy, the mother tongue has usually been the language of choice for three reasons: First, given the multilingual situation of most African countries and the absence of a widely-spoken lingua franca in many countries, it stands to reason that the mother tongue is the most feasible language for adult literacy. Second, considering the magnitude of the problem of provision of teachers, it is a lot easier to draw on a ready pool of native-speaker literacy instructors than to find such instructors in a second language. Third, given the need to integrate literacy skills with the practical concerns of work-life in the community, the spoken language of the community is also the most useful instrument for literacy. A good example of a successful literacy programme based on the mother tongue is the Ethiopian Literacy Programme which involved the use of fifteen languages. At the commencement of the programme in 1979, the illiteracy rate which was estimated at 93 % in 1974 decreased significantly to 40.6 % in 1984 and further to 24 % in 1989. In effect, the literacy rate rose from 7 % in 1974 to 76 % in 1989 (Ministry of Education Ethiopia 1990).

As an alternative to the use of the mother tongue for literacy, a language of the immediate community or a widely-spoken lingua franca may be used for adult literacy. This option is viable only in a situation where the learners concerned already have a good mastery of the spoken form of the language, otherwise learners are faced with the problem of learning a new sound system at the same time as they are learning to represent such sounds on paper. In Tanzania where the national language, Swahili, is used as a medium for adult literacy, not all the adult learners are proficient in the language of literacy. The result is that learners who are not proficient in Swahili are at a disadvantage in comparison with other adult learners who have a native-speaker-like proficiency in the language.

The objection to the use of a second language for literacy applies even more forcefully in the case of a LWC such as English or French. Experiments in the use of either for adult literacy in Western Nigeria and Mali respectively did not yield any fruitful results. In Mozambique, where the official language is Portuguese, it is reported that "it is very difficult to carry out literacy in the official language when it is not the mother tongue of the adult learners" (UNESCO 1990). It is to be expected, of course, that neo-literates in a mother tongue medium may aspire to acquire an official language especially so they can look as educated as their children in the formal school system. This is a legitimate aspiration which can rightly be provided for in post-literacy programmes.

Another alternative that has been proposed to literacy is oracy. Given the multiplicity of mother tongues wouldn't it be better if most languages continue "to be practised only orally in order to allow for a more far-reaching study of one widely spoken local vehicular language in written form ..." (UNESCO 1992: 15)? While oracy has always been associated with traditional verbal art, it is a false dichotomy to divide languages into those good enough for literacy and those only deserving of oracy. In any case, where there is the will and felt need for literacy in a language, why should learners be deprived of the permanence that goes with the written word?

Initial literacy for children is in a way related to the use of a language as a medium of instruction for, in many cases, such literacy paves the way for such use of language whether as a transitional or permanent measure in primary education. For this reason, this aspect of literacy will be taken in conjunction with the use of language as a medium of instruction.

The option of teaching a language as a subject is, in effect, no option at all, as all

relevant language types can, and ought to, be taught as subjects at the appropriate level. There is usually no question about the desirability of teaching as subjects those languages that are likely to be used as media of instruction. These include the official language and, in certain situations, the mother tongue. The national language is also a priority language to be taught as a subject. Even in situations where a LWC is used exclusively as the medium of instruction, it is still desirable for the purpose of cultural authenticity that the mother tongue be taught as a subject.

In Africa, the use of the mother tongue for initial literacy and as a medium of instruction in general reflects colonial practices. Broadly speaking, there are two groups: the former British colonies (except Sierra Leone) had a tradition of mother tongue education, while the former French and Portuguese colonies did not. With minor modifications, this colonial practice has survived to the present. These modifications include the introduction of African languages as media of early primary education in Togo and Guinea (although it is reported in Barry (1985) that this policy has now been abandoned in Guinea following the military coup in 1984), and experimentation in the introduction of indigenous languages as media of instruction in several countries including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania and Sierra Leone (Guegan 1983, Bamgbose 1991).

The predominant practice in mother tongue education is the use of a language for initial literacy and as a medium of instruction for early primary education, which, in most countries, is the first three years. Where the language concerned is a dominant language of the area, the practice presents few problems. The only serious question that arises is whether it is adequate to limit the use of African languages as media of instruction to early primary education only. Does this imply that such languages cannot support instruction in subjects beyond this level? As an illustration that this is not the case, there are examples of countries such as Tanzania which uses Swahili as a full primary education medium, Somalia which uses Somali in primary and secondary education, and some states in Nigeria which use Yoruba on an experimental basis for selected schools following the positive results from the now famous Six-Year Primary Project.

Where the language concerned is a non-dominant language, problems may arise according to the groups involved. Basically the following groups may be identified:

- (a) *Speakers of small group (or minority) languages for whom small numbers may pose a problem of viability.*

Experience with some projects such as the Rivers Readers Project in Nigeria and the PROPELCA Project in Cameroon has shown that these problems are not insurmountable, given the will and the active support of the speakers themselves. One avenue for assuring such support is through language committees or associations established for the promotion of the languages concerned.

- (b) *Urban minorities found in linguistically mixed classes.*

In some cases children in such classes may have acquired the dominant languages sufficiently to be able to profit from instruction in them. In other cases, no such additional language is available and recourse is often had to a LWC such as English or French. Although it is tempting to consider the establishment of ethnic neighbourhood schools for urban minority children, such a proposal is likely to prove unworkable.

- (c) *Immigrant populations for whom special schemes may have to be devised at least as a transition to instruction in the dominant language of the area or country.*

Perhaps the education of immigrant children is not such a major problem in African countries but it certainly is in other parts of the world. For example in the London area 64,987 (or 22.7 %) of the 286,102 children in schools have a home language other than English, and in 1987, a total of 172 languages were identified as home languages (ILEA 1987). The problem this situation poses is enormous as steps have to be taken to ensure a smooth transition from the home language to English.

- (d) *Refugees for whom special programmes will have to be designed according to their status and long-term aspirations.*

Where the refugees see their stay as temporary, they are likely to prefer instruction in their own language. Where, however, they have come to accept that they may never return to their countries, they are likely to want to learn the language of the host country. In recent times, Africa has had its share of refugees as a result of civil war or famine in such countries as Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Somalia etc. Information available points to continuation of the practice of the home country at least initially (Long 1989). In the case of both Mozambique and Angola such home practice is not a mother tongue medium, but Portuguese.

- (e) *Nomads for whom again a special scheme may have to be devised.*

For example in Nigeria, there is special provision for nomadic education including mobile schools and teachers.

Arising from some of the problems associated with small-group languages and the languages of urban minorities, it is often proposed that a language of the immediate community or an indigenous national language should replace a mother tongue as the medium of instruction. There is nothing basically wrong with this as long as the languages in question are already spoken by the pupils concerned. It must be noted that a high degree of bilingualism exists in situations where speakers of small-group languages have to interact with those of dominant languages. The only caveat that must be entered is that where a language of the immediate community or a national language has to be used as a medium for children who are not proficient in the language, a suitable period of transition must be allowed in which there is a gradual introduction to the language concerned. While the ideal situation may be mother tongue medium for every language, it must be accepted that this is certainly impracticable. When everything possible has been done, there will be small languages which cannot feature in formal education. There will also be others which can support use for initial literacy only in transition to the use of another language as a medium. This is the reality of the situation in many African countries and no appeal to language rights or theories of literacy can change this situation.

The use of a LWC as a medium of instruction is the widespread practice in late primary education where there is a practice of early mother tongue medium and for the entire primary education where there is no such practice. Arguments have been advanced in favour of a LWC medium in terms of efficiency and the need for an early introduction of a language which will be used in secondary and tertiary education. Such arguments must, however, be balanced against the cultural deprivation involved in condemning the mother tongue perpetually to a subsidiary role. Besides some experiments have shown a better

grasp of concepts when presented in a child's first language. Given the current conditions for LWC teaching in many primary schools (including the existence of poorly-trained teachers, inadequate materials and high drop-out rates), it is not surprising that the outcome of a LWC medium is often high wastage and drop-out rates among primary school cohorts. If primary education is to be available to all children of school-going age, a language medium that produces few competent graduates cannot be considered satisfactory. The alternative would seem to be a judicious mixture of media in a bilingual education programme.

Policy Implications

The main issue that arises in considering the policy options outlined above is the need to associate language policy more closely with educational objectives. In choosing one practice or another, the implications have to be borne in mind. Will the practice achieve the objective of mass education or will it simply produce an elite? Will the adopted policy enhance national development? Will it also enhance the culture of the products of the system or will it lead to cultural alienation? Will it help in the rapid eradication of illiteracy?

In the light of these considerations, one of the policy implications is the need to identify priority languages. In my view, these are the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community, the official language, and the national language. The mother tongue or the language of the immediate community is essential for initial literacy even where the objective is a transition to another language as medium of instruction. One will even go as far as to suggest that where numbers and resources justify it, it should be used as a medium for the entire primary education.

The official language is required in administrative, legislative and legal transactions. It, therefore, has to occupy pride of place in education. Usually it will feature as a subject from the earliest classes of primary education and become the medium of instruction either at late primary or early secondary level. Where the official language is different from the national language, the latter will also have to be introduced first as a subject and increased instruction provided for it until sufficient mastery is achieved.

The existence of several languages in education at the same level underlines the need for a coordinated bilingual educational policy. Although there are different practices in bilingual education, what they all have in common is the need to instruct learners in more than one language. In the African context, this should mean a recognition of the need to use both the indigenous languages and LWCs as a media of instruction.

Above all, the pivotal role of the mother tongue needs to be recognized especially in the eradication of illiteracy. Far too often, literacy programmes are designed by education experts with little reference to the language medium. Given projections of adult illiteracy in Africa estimated to be 133.8 million by 1990 for populations aged 15 and above (UNESCO-UNICEF 1990), there is no doubt that a massive effort is required to make the eradication of illiteracy possible and such effort is bound to have as its point of departure serious attention to the mother tongues as the most viable media for literacy.

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CHAPTER III

LANGUAGE POLICY AND LITERACY LEARNING

by Marie Clay

Theorists and researchers have not yet solved the problems of monolingual literacy instruction. When educators plan programmes for bilingual literacy or trilingual literacy in countries which have many different home languages we are not likely to find clear solutions in research for the complex questions posed. Individual countries are like individual learners; they have their own particular mix of language issues.

If we take a position which respects cultural factors, then we must assume that individual countries will create language policies because of linguistic, historical, social and economic realities, and such policies will be different in each country. When a language policy has been formulated psychological and educational research on language learning can make important contributions to the challenges of putting that policy into practice and making it work in three ways:

- it can help with difficult choices that must be made between the ideal and what is possible at a particular time, and
- it can monitor what is occurring as a result of the language policy and
- it can increase success in literacy learning by pointing to factors which need to be varied to achieve better results.

Research is also needed to monitor how effective language policies are in particular cultural contexts so that language policy can be adjusted, or the delivery processes changed. Language policy and research should interact to gradually enhance learning outcomes.

A national language policy has two major thrusts:

- what is planned for the individual learner, and
- what is planned across society.

The goal for individual learners may be one, two or more languages, and the goal for the society may be to support several languages for different purposes. To ensure that the language policy is effective, individual learners have to be successful in their learning.

Two recent reports to the Minister of Education in my country, New Zealand, recommended that our country adopt its first language policy. The emphasis would be on the individual learner having two languages, any two languages (Peddie, 1991; Waite, 1992). Such a policy would allow government to provide maintenance services for home languages while also supporting the teaching of international languages. It would address many different bilingual situations in my country such as

- a majority language, English, with a heritage language, Maori;
- or a majority language with any one of several immigrant languages or foreign languages;
- or a majority language with any one of several international languages such as French or Japanese.

This policy (not yet adopted) would respect the home language spoken by individuals and cultural minorities and address commercial needs. Five priorities in language policy were ranked by these two reports as follows:

- (for the country) revitalisation of the Maori heritage language
- (for the country) second chance adult literacy
- (for children and adults) English as a second language together with first language maintenance
- (for children and adults) national capability in international languages for international communication
- (for the country) provision of social and community services in languages other than English.

These priorities do not arise from research on literacy learning; they make linguistic, sociological or economic sense. Acting on such priorities, a government would deploy educational resources to achieve the goals.

Note, however, the very high priority one report writer gave to **adult literacy** in the majority language, placing it ahead of all but one of the other language issues. "In a technology-oriented democracy ... the inability to deal with the written word is an obstacle to achievement in personal, vocational and community life." (Waite, 1992)

BRIEF CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

This chapter draws attention to some specific examples of language policies and the effects they have had on language learning.

A Small Minority Indigenous Language

Maori is a heritage language supporting the culture of the indigenous Polynesian people in New Zealand. They make up 12.5 % of the population, but 20 % of the primary school population. The continued existence of the Maori language is threatened which is serious because it is integral to the oral culture and it is spoken only in New Zealand. It was faced with falling numbers of speakers of the language by the 1970's, despite increasing numbers of Maoris. This is the most politically sensitive, and individually important, issue in the development of language policies in New Zealand. It is complicated by a problem of low achievement of some Maoris in schools and in society, and there are efforts of all kinds to change this situation.

Maori people see language, culture and education as interlocked in this problem and central to improving this situation. The revitalization of the Maori language is a national concern, recognized as part of a wider cultural revitalization movement. Several strategies are operating in education to increase the use of the Maori language and to support the dynamic growth of the culture. My example refers only to a preschool

movement and its consequences.

Maori language/culture preschools, called Kohanga Reo or "language nests" were invented and controlled by Maori communities. To stop the loss of the language, grandparents who spoke it and had time to share were brought into these new preschools where Maori was the only language spoken. There has been a rapid growth of these centres and children were learning what preschoolers learn from interacting with adults, and the heritage language embedded in culturally accepted activities. Parents who spoke little Maori themselves paid for the privilege of having their children attend.

These children then transferred to school speaking Maori well but they began to lose it rapidly in English-language programmes of the schools. Two new initiatives appeared to maintain the Maori language control.

- A small number of bilingual primary schools were started, and
- a small number of total immersion schools (kura kaupapa Maori) were created, schools where "the Maori ways" were paramount and all teaching was in Maori.

These developments increased the demand for fluent Maori-speaking teachers and Maori language teaching materials.

The major issues are not resolved because the educational resources made available by government are too few to sustain the heritage language initiative that works so well with the preschool children. Have we learned anything about saving heritage languages? Giving Maori language the status of a national language and acknowledging it with great respect has not been enough. On the side of effective language learning:

- the early years are crucial;
- the adults/teachers must be fluent speakers of the language, well-qualified and working in well-resourced programmes;
- opportunities to speak the language must be abundant;
- preschool initiatives need to continue on into the primary school;
- materials in the language must be produced;
- and, as every priority cannot be addressed at once the heritage language group must have a major say in the priority listing and utilization of resources.

A Difficult Transition on Entry to School

Dina Feitelson spent her career in Israel working on many literacy problems. She recently died and one of her last reports gave the results of research on the literacy learning problems of immigrant Arab children in Israel. She worked with children who spoke local vernacular Arabic, who learned to read literary Arabic but who did not make very good progress. The children entered school without knowledge of the literary language because there were no books for parents to read to them in this language form. In the trial programme new entrants to school were read to daily by their teachers using stories written in literary Arabic, this language they did not know. At the end of the study these children performed better than the control groups who had spent an equivalent amount of time on a programme to enhance their talking. The children read better, with understanding and they also showed more active use of oral language. They used literary language in their daily speech. Feitelson wrote, "children can acquire a second register through exposure in school without their home language being stigmatized or

abandoned”.

This is a very specific problem, but there is a general implication in this example. Children are learning in the preschool years responses which they will use in their literacy learning. They learn a great deal about the language of books by hearing stories told and books read. There are many, many situations around the world where that one piece of information could be applied with good results. Competent speakers can tell stories and allow their listeners to retell those stories. Storytelling prepares for literacy learning. Competent speakers who can read to people material which they can later try to read for themselves. These activities prepare learners for literacy learning in any language.

Immigrant Groups: Spanish-speaking Children in Tucson, USA

In several English-speaking countries a programme called Reading Recovery gives effective supplementary help to young children who make poor progress in their first year of school. In Tucson, Arizona, bilingual educators have spent three years developing a Spanish-language version of Reading Recovery so that bilingual teachers can deliver it to very low-achieving children in either Spanish or English. The problem is when do we use which programme?

In Tucson, there is a clear answer. The education system has a language policy which classifies children who enter school according to their dominant language. Then it provides three years of classroom instruction in that language before the minority language group are expected to make the transition to classroom instruction in English. So, the programme of special help for low-achieving children follows the language policy and is delivered either in Spanish or in English.

On the other hand, in one part of Texas we faced the same question and got a different answer, because they had a different language policy. Spanish-speaking children may receive instruction in Spanish when they first enter school but they must make the transition into English teaching within three months. In this case, it makes more sense to provide the support programme in English after the transition.

In both these situations we have learned to value bilingual teachers who have permission to switch languages at any time a) to help understanding, b) to link to background experience, or c) to make a teaching point clear. The fluently bilingual teacher is worth investing in for s/he provides two effective language models for the learner.

General Effects

In planning for language policies and literacy programmes it is important to recognize a common finding that language usage does shift across three generations. Another New Zealand example will help me here. In the 1950's a significant number of Dutch people settled in New Zealand. One of the second generation, a Masters degree student, completed a three-generation study of grandparents, children and grandchildren for her research thesis. I found the study fascinating, though a little sad. Strong-willed Dutch immigrants were usually determined that Dutch would be the language of the home, but they did not set up Dutch culture schools, and they supported their children to perform well in the English-medium schools. They were a socially and educationally successful group. The researcher was bilingual and conducted the interviews in Dutch or English as

appropriate, gathering a fine set of data on language use in home and community. The grandparent generation insisted on the use of Dutch in the home for speaking, writing, telephoning and socializing. The breakdown appeared when teenage children brought English-speaking friends into the house, for, out of courtesy to their guests, the family then spoke English. The second generation used Dutch with their parents if required to, used mostly English outside the home, and succeeded in the majority language culture. The third generation of children from 1 to 7 years were monolingual in English, knowing a mere handful of Dutch words. This is not surprising in a majority culture where English is dominant.

Language policies and literacy planning must take into account whether major generational shifts are likely to occur. If it is important to sustain some immigrant languages then society should provide the necessary resources and incentives and also monitor for generational changes. Language policies can then be adjusted as required.

The more general implications of this study are that it matters who is talking to whom, and which language they feel most at ease in. It matters where the speaker is trying to make his way in the society and with which groups.

Challenging an Entrenched Programme in the South Pacific: Mother Tongue Literacy followed by English Instruction

In the 1960's a programme to teach English as a second language was developed for the South Pacific region, based on the linguistic knowledge of the day. It worked on the principle that children would learn to use syntactic patterns of English orally before they would be allowed to read and write these structures. Over the years it became apparent that English examination scores in the area were not good, and children were learning English slowly, and not very well.

Professor Warwick Elley conducted several studies on different islands, including Fiji, and subsequently worked in Singapore with a programme called a Book Flood programme. In brief, children began literacy learning in their home language and came in the third and fourth year of school to learn English. They made rapid progress when they learned to speak and read and write all at the same time, about stories which they enjoyed. The books and their stories provided many opportunities for using English in the classroom, for reading and re-reading and retelling and rewriting the stories, and for new writing. The results were assessed in a careful research study against children in the traditional programme and the Book Flood condition was found to produce more literacy learning faster, and produce gains in the oral control of English. Book Flood projects have now been tried in different countries and under different conditions with similar results but the individual reports should be studied because they contain warnings and helpful guidance about what worked, what did not work and why. Book Flood is not a panacea for literacy learning: it must be introduced thoughtfully, and many factors operating in the school contexts carefully appraised and adjusted appropriately.

A successful programme was discovered, but how do you get successful dissemination on a large scale of a successful trial programme? How do you help teachers who have been trained to develop the older programme to change their ways of teaching, for the programme is more than the supply of books. First you have to convince the Ministers of Education and the administrators, but then, how do you change the teachers?

Currently, the South Pacific Literacy project is working on that challenge. A way of working with teachers in the region has been developed (and we are talking about different language and culture groups scattered across many islands around the South Pacific basin). A network of Key Literacy Workers to help people in their own areas is in place - in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga and Western Samoa. Their common language is English. In Phase I the network developed materials for children which allowed the new teaching to be undertaken and teachers learned from the Key Literacy workers how to improve these materials to suit their own local conditions. In Phase II they are developing a training course for teachers to be led by the Key Literacy workers. This is pivotal to improved educational outcomes in the region. It aims to

- improve literacy in the South Pacific;
- explore reading and writing processes;
- provide for differences, and accept differences, which may be individual, cultural or linguistic.

Workshops and seminars, and travelling tutors have provided stimulation to members of the network. The teacher training programme draws on the ideas of the local teachers, their discoveries and innovations. The learning is serial learning. Teachers come back having trialled new procedures and report back to other teachers. Tutors move around the islands supporting teachers in their implementation, and in their discoveries of what works well in different islands. The programme is being developed, trialled, evaluated and revised over time as more teachers are drawn into the network. The development is collaborative and gives teachers the power to go beyond what they already do.

Language differences have not prevented a very diverse group from making changes in the region. And the Literacy Education Course for teachers of the second language is having another payoff. The instructional methods they have developed for English as a second language are being applied by the teachers to the first language instruction in the local languages. It is interesting that they have found a way to build a bridge across diversity by working in the common language towards improvement of instruction in the local languages also.

This is another example of how bilingual teachers become the shifting gear, not only enabling individual children to lift up their performance in either language, but also helping the education system to improve its practices.

The Production of Literacy Materials

Believe it or not, New Zealand mainstream education has always had a problem with reading materials - there are plenty available from America or the United Kingdom but do we want to raise our children on a diet of "culturally foreign books"? Early this century we discovered that our Department of Education had to produce reading materials in our dialect, about our people and environment, our geography and history and our local stories. Over the decades our products have improved. In 1983 UNESCO held a seminar in New Zealand centred on the production of textbooks and reading materials in Asia and the Pacific, and those reports should still be available from UNESCO's Asian office.

However, and you may have guessed my reason for raising this, now that our

language policies expect us to begin to teach children in their home language, Maori for example, we have a great need for suitable books in that language. It is not as easy as it used to be because New Zealand educators now believe that one series of stories will not produce highly successful readers. We need many books so that, in addition to what the teacher teaches, children can teach themselves and practice reading and writing for themselves.

The availability of materials to support a language policy is crucial but more than that, the skills to produce such materials need to be built up in the community. Local storytellers, and authors and poets, editors, printers and book producers, and innovative teachers can create reading materials. Book production must back any language policy especially for early literacy learning. Materials published abroad do not tell about the things which the local children know about. First steps in literacy learning will be highly successful if you are asked to read about things you already know about. When you can read, then you can use the skill to read about things which you do not know about.

Related to the issue of reading materials are the extensive book donation programmes being run by some large agencies in the Western countries. In 1992 there was a conference of book donating organizations in Washington, D.C. to discuss the problems of donating books to countries to help their literacy efforts. Some donation attempts have been ineffective and great efforts have been made to donate the wrong books to the wrong people. Countries who want donations of reading materials must tell donors specifically what reading materials would be most helpful. They will not be the books from my academic collection when I retire, or those stacked in a warehouse of a publisher who wants to be rid of them, or the books from a reading instruction programme which has been rejected by some other country. The materials needed will be determined by a country's language policy and some agency has to determine what is required locally and make this known to donors.

A better move would be to ask for training, and for financial help to extend this kind of publishing in the country itself. This helps to solve the problem that imported materials are often culturally irrelevant for local learners but it also solves some other practical problems. The cost of transporting published material from country to country in donor programmes is high: publication at home solves that problem. Another problem of the donor programmes is the inappropriateness of the books for educational purposes - they do not tap into the experience of the learners. Publication at home solves that problem. Language, although apparently the same in several places, is used differently in different countries. That problem can also be solved by local publication.

To be literate one must read widely throughout a lifetime. Newspapers are part of the system which sustains literacy and the Newspapers in Education movement across the world makes a valuable contribution to the availability of materials for local schools and for new literates.

The International Evaluation of Educational Achievement 1992: A Study of Reading Literacy

How In The World Do Students Read? is the title of a new book, the first book in a series of reports of this study. It is written by the chairperson of the Steering Committee of this research, Warwick B. Elley. How in the world could they get 31 countries to cooperate on this international research with costs for work over nearly four years coming

from participating countries and from research foundations. It is an enormous international study of diverse policies and achievements in 31 countries as varied as Botswana, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Singapore and Zimbabwe together with Canada, France, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States. I want to make three brief references to the first report (Elley, 1992).

- (a) Success was not assured by having money and resources, and it was not directly limited by lack of finance. Finland, for example, exceeded the average score predicted by the nation's social and economic circumstances by a large margin. (The test scores are reported in ways which take differences in economic and social circumstances in the various countries into account.) Literacy learning clearly depends on getting many variables in the system right for effective learning. Social, economic and linguistic factors create different patterns in the education fabric of different countries and we should probably not focus on individual factors that contribute to success in literacy learning but rather on the pattern of factors which work towards success in a particular country.
- (b) Singapore's results are highly relevant to our discussion. Their children performed very well in the IEA study, yet 70 % of them began school speaking the Chinese, Malay or Tamil language and were taught at six years in English. Singapore's good results suggest that they have some lessons for us when students are acquiring literacy in a non-native language.
- (c) And lastly, the similarities of the achievements of children across the world in this study are vastly more interesting than the differences. For example, the relative competence in reading achievement which was described for the nine year old samples was usually confirmed in the results of 14 years olds. It therefore seems to be important to invest in good initial literacy instruction.

DRAWING SOME THREADS TOGETHER FROM THE EXAMPLES

Before School

- (a) The best preparation for literacy learning is learning to talk. A knowledge of one's community language is critical in the development of individual identity for a) it is the medium through which we make our closest contacts with our home communities (Waite, 1992) and b) it is the nature of language acquisition that young children learn their initial control over language in conversational exchange with the adults caring for them.

So we should ask "Does this child have to be educated in a language he does not speak?" If he does, then it will take time for him to jump the hurdles taken by the children who did not make that change and he is NOT a slow learner but a learner challenged by an invitation to become bilingual and empowered when a successful outcome is achieved. It just takes a little longer to learn two languages.

- (b) However, children under five years of age are amazingly good at learning and losing languages. They pick up new languages but they lose old ones in direct relation to the quantity of opportunities to use those languages. Take away the Amah from a three year old and the child may lose her control of her nurse's language in a matter of weeks. Before they get to school, children in natural

settings, and in conversation can add a dialect, change their register, use more than one language and not be very conscious of what they are doing. They can take immersion in a second language preschool, or being cared for by someone who speaks another language, but they need access to a speaker of their home language to help them solve their problems. Volunteer, untrained helpers can do this.

Entering School

- (c) The least complicated entry into literacy is to begin to read and write the language you already speak. What the child already knows about language will now be used to power literacy learning.

Usually homes and communities provide many opportunities to talk and entering school drastically reduces the opportunity to speak, and so reduces the opportunity to extend your oral language. The previously rich learning setting is lost when we group children together for instruction. One cannot therefore assume that going to school will be an enriching situation for oral language. Schools have to work very hard to provide situations which extend oral language learning.

- (d) However, children between five and eight years learn a second language quite easily if they move into good school programmes and have well-trained teachers who speak that second language well. Teachers who do not provide good language models make it difficult for the children to learn the second language. The programme needs to be rich in language experiences with opportunities for children to speak often and hear stories told and read. Some programmes are so formal that they do not provide the rich oral language experience needed to learn the second language.

Teachers' helpers who are volunteers may know little about teaching but if they can talk to children, read to children, sing songs and play games, and tell stories, they provide good models of the language and they are to be valued as an asset. Speakers as helpers enrich language acquisition environments.

- (e) When second language learning is introduced after two or three years of mother tongue literacy learning children still need to learn to use the new language in a classroom that is rich with oral language learning opportunities. However, because they can already read and write in their first language, they already have some concepts about literacy which they can apply to reading and writing the new language. They do not first have to learn the second language orally before they begin on second language literacy. There are advantages in learning to speak, read and write all at the same time: learning in one activity can help learning in the others.

There are always exceptions to guidance like the above; languages are so different and the interaction of any two languages is very specific.

- (f) Is the teacher competent in the language of instruction? For the language learner will be limited to acquiring the language of the model from whom he is learning. Literacy learning will proceed better in a second language if the teacher provides a good language model.

- (g) Are there quality materials in sufficient supply for reading in the language of instruction? This is a problem in many places, but language policies must back their decision with creation of a literacy resource to support language policies.
- (h) We should consider what writing contributes to literacy learning. Throughout my comments I have been weaving in the word "writing". In literacy learning speaking, reading and writing complement each other. Children try to write before they could be said to be reading. Writing teaches so much about how languages are written down, letters, spellings, how words are like other words. What is practised in reading today turns up in writing tomorrow and vice versa. The children's writing, or the teacher's writing down of children's story telling produces reading material for everybody. Forming letters teaches you about their shapes and differences. The movement helps the memory. Teaching reading and writing together as if they are part and parcel of the one literacy learning task takes less learning time than trying to programme each separately.

The most significant question to be asked is probably this one: Which particular pieces in a country's pattern of literacy learning factors need to be adjusted to maximise the outcomes of the language policy?

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CHAPTER IV

CHILDREN'S LITERACY IN LATIN AMERICA

by Emilia Ferreiro

The context

As a result of international attention focused currently on basic education, one of the most serious educational realities of the Latin America Region is now becoming known to the larger public: grade repetition.

As was stated in the recent CEPAL-UNESCO Report (1992), approximately one-half of all children in Latin America repeat the first year of primary school, which has consequences for the rest of a child's schooling. Thus, in 1988, nearly thirty per cent of the total of primary school children in the entire region were "not promoted". (As a comparison, the grade repetition rate in the more developed countries is around two per cent.) As a result, although these children remain nearly seven years in primary school, they only go through four school grades. Grade repetition also has economic consequences: in 1988, the cost of repetition was over 3,300 million U.S. dollars, nearly one-fifth of all public expenditure on primary education in the region (p.206-207 of the report mentioned above).

The grade repetition rate in the Latin America Region is one of the highest in the world and is massively concentrated in the first year of primary schooling. We, therefore, have a scandalous situation: we have nearly all children between six and eleven years (ninety per cent) actually attending primary schools but we are unable to provide for the learning of basic skills to such an extent that *school progress* is in fact a series of *failures*.

School failure at the beginning of primary education

Failure in the first year of primary schooling signifies the failure of initial literacy acquisition. And this, it is absolutely necessary to underscore, in a region whose linguistic context is very different that of Africa, for example. With the exception of the Caraiibbean area (very complex, but not treated in this chapter) and the situation of the indigenous peoples population, which is addressed later in this chapter, most of the continental population of Latin America speaks two closely-related languages: Spanish and Portuguese. These two languages are so close that regional meetings can take place without interpretation.

The orthography of Portuguese is undoubtedly more complex than that of Spanish and it is true that Brazil is the country which, in terms of its illiteracy rates, can truly weight the regional statistics. Nonetheless, the grade repetition figures referred to earlier are not only pertinent to Brazil. They are distributed throughout the region. Therefore, the problems with initial literacy acquisition cannot be simply attributed to the complexity

of Portuguese orthography in relation to a lesser degree of complexity for Spanish.

During the past fifteen years, a series of research studies has begun to show that the socio-economic factors are not the only ones to contribute to the failure of initial literacy acquisition. It is also necessary to look at what goes on within schools in order to unveil the institutional mechanisms and conceptual frameworks which prevent children's access to the written word. (Ferreiro, 1988a, 1991, 1992).

Failure of a certain view of the written word

The traditional vision of learning to read and to write consists of presenting this learning as the acquisition of a code of oral units transcribed into graphic units (writing) and of graphic units into oral ones (reading). This learning, in its first phases is conceived as purely instrumental and mechanical. If the "correct pronunciation" is not in place (children who speak non-standard dialects), one tends to think of an initial deficit (a socio-linguistic one perhaps) because the "oral units" are isolated in relation to an idealized view of the norm, a problem which is fraught with other consequences to which this chapter returns. Children who do not appear capable of making "the right associations" between letters (or minimal sequences of two letters) and phones (or syllables) after a few months of schooling will be judged deficient or slow learners (which amounts to the same thing) and will be obliged to repeat, that is to say, begin again at zero, as if they had learned nothing in the mean time.

Recent research shows that, instead of facilitating learning, this mechanistic view of literacy acquisition actually makes learning more difficult, precisely for the children who have the greatest need of school in order to learn to read and write: children from the most disadvantaged populations of society (Ferreiro, 1989).

In a number of countries, researchers have been able to show the importance of pre-school language skills acquisition. (Professor Clay, author of another chapter has made a major contribution in this area). These acquisitions are rather multifaceted and are shown by children who grow up amidst books and readers: knowledge of the difference between reading and commenting on images; the organization of graphic space; the distinction between what is drawing and what is not drawing; the sequential and varied aspects of written marks; of the special property of written marks (they "provoke" a special form of oral language, which in no way resembles the language of conversation); knowledge also of the social value attributed to writing through social acts which make some of the fundamental functions of writing in the modern world understandable, although in a rudimentary fashion (development of memory; transmission at a distance).

We have known for a long time that the simple presence of a certain object in the environment is not a sufficient guarantee that the properties of this object will be learned, but we also know that its absence can prevent learning. These pre-school acquisitions to which reference has just been made are not ensured for all children who grow up in a "literary" environment, but they are absent (except in rare cases) with children who have not had the opportunity to have books and readers near them, who have not had the opportunity to raise questions regarding writing and to obtain replies.; who have not had the opportunity to scribble except in the sand or on material other than paper.

We know now that children who grow up surrounded by writing and users of writing approach this writing as a conceptual object; they actively explore a series of

hypotheses concerning the nature of the relation between orality and graphic marks. Although the school does not yet recognize the legitimacy of such pre-school knowledge, it is a fact that these children arrive rather well-prepared to acquire school discourse concerning the written word, while the other children, who have not had the opportunity to develop pre-school consciousness of this object, the written word, are obliged to follow a mechanistic approach without understanding the meaning of what they are asked to do. (Ferreiro, 1985).

We say that it is the failure of a mechanistic view of literacy which is in question, because this vision which is devoid of any actual linguistic content regarding the written word, makes a systematic confusion between writing and the reproduction of graphic forms and also confuses a true reading act (which implies interpretation to be real) with the reproduction out loud of a series of letters. Worse yet, this traditional vision leaves children's cognitive capacities entirely aside, since it forbids reflection before the "correct" associations are established.

Psycholinguistic research over the past fifteen years has entirely overturned our vision of the process by which young children approach the written word. Latin America, which has a long tradition of critical reflection concerning literacy (it is not for nothing that the name of Paulo Freire is well-known to all of us) has also made a significant contribution to basic research in this field.

In fact, written Spanish has provided the ideal framework for the discovery that, before any question of spelling, there is a preliminary and legitimate question which children raise on their own: the question of knowing the relation between the language which they already speak and the system of markings historically constituted by society. Children ask themselves questions which we could express in these terms: How does writing take the place of speech? How does it do so? These questions actually refer to the nature of the link between the object "language" and the particular type of representation used by society. These questions go way beyond what a simplistic reply might offer (for example, the reply which consists of presenting the pseudo-evidence of a literate adult: writing represents the sounds of speech). Written Spanish allows us to show the importance of these reflections, while other written languages hide this fact by the complexity of their spelling. (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1979; Ferreiro, 1988b).

The question is legitimate because different languages have furnished different solutions to this problem throughout history. In other words, we have (historically-speaking and even today) *writing systems*, all well-adapted to the structure of the original language in which they were created, systems which have served with varying degrees of success other languages which have borrowed from them without necessarily borrowing their basic principles. We are barely beginning to become aware of the dangers in seeing alphabetic writing as the culmination of the evolution of writing, as well as the dangers linked to an abusive linkage of universal literacy to the existence of alphabetic writing. (Sampson, 1985; Coulmas, 1989).

The demands of contemporary society

The relevance of this traditional mechanistic approach can be discussed from other points of view. Once the time passed when it was thought that the "culture of the image" was going to take the place of the writing culture, the rapid dissemination of computers has provided us with other challenges. Nonetheless, while the demands of literacy have

expanded and diversified, the school continues to train its apprentices as if it were dealing with scribes from antiquity or copyers from the Middle Ages. In a period when all technologies are changing, pedagogues continue the eternal debate about the relative virtues of cursive writing or that of printing, instead of asking how to introduce children as quickly as possible to a keyboard (keyboard of a typewriter or computer) since writing with a keyboard is obviously the writing of modern times and the labour market.

It is clear that it takes much more than possession of an alphabet to belong to a literate culture. It is not simply a matter of knowing how to read a single type of text but rather a large variety of written messages (narrative, informative, procedural, poetic, journalistic, etc); personal or institutional letters, billboards, dictionaries, decrees, various sections of newspapers, etc.).

It is not a question of a single reading strategy (that which corresponds to reading out loud); reading to find information, reading to learn details of journalistic news, reading to compare, reading for the pleasure of reading and so forth. These activities are very different one from the other, activities which the traditional school has put off to the higher grades, always for the same reason: first ensure acquisition of the phono-graphic system.

It is not a matter of having a single strategy for writing (that which corresponds to copying or dictation): writing to remind oneself, writing to make oneself better understood; to take rapid notes. Each type requires very different writing strategies, without mentioning different formats, when presenting a narration, an informative text, instructions to be followed and so forth.

It is of the highest importance to speak of writing (and not only reading) when we speak of literacy because writing has been (and remains, in traditional schools) the most repressed and misunderstood activity. Just as real language production (oral) is a construction of a linguistically codified message and not simple repetition, written production cannot be confused with an acceptable copy of a text produced by someone else. Reproduction of graphic forms is one thing, understanding of the means to compose these forms and their relation to an oral message is entirely another matter.

Literacy in indigenous languages

For reasons of simplicity, this section refers exclusively to literacy in mother tongues. We know that a certain number of schools for indigenous peoples provide literacy training in the dominant language of the region (and in spite of regulations to the contrary, a subject which is beyond the scope of this chapter). We also know that a certain number of schools for indigenous peoples provide a "minimal literacy" in indigenous languages (a few isolated words), in order to move on to the major language of instruction. Nonetheless, one might imagine that one is dealing with the ideal situation: literacy acquisition conducted in the indigenous language, for a population which is proud to maintain its language and culture. This will allow for a better analysis of the difficulties to be overcome, even in an ideal context. Discussions concerning literacy in indigenous languages have focused on the characteristics of the proposed alphabet (how many letters and which ones? How many diacritical marks and which ones? How should one segment writing?

It is well-known that enormous passion is expended on such questions as well as

bitter and endless debates. (As a reminder, one might cite the case of Quechua, divided between the penta-vocalists and the tri-vocalists. Cf. Hornberger, in press).

The various groups of linguistics in governmental and nongovernmental organizations, indigenous or not, have made a wide variety of proposals over the years and the publishing of reading material has faced major obstacles: lack of standardization of the language, particular history of certain graphic marks, history of sacred books, the Bible in particular, translated with one or another spelling (Cf. von Gleich and Wolff, 1991).

Suppose, for a moment, that such problems do not exist, that a good graphic solution might be found and there may not be a counter-proposition (real or historical) for at least one of the indigenous languages. This does not immediately resolve all the graphic problems, because a spelling norm established from outside is not comparable to one established over centuries of use (that of official languages). Even if graphic solutions are scientifically-based, it is difficult to know what they will truly become if the indigenous community begins to make assiduous use of them for multiple purposes.¹ Since a spelling proposition can only be conceived as a *proposal* and not as an imposition, it can only be validated by usage.

But, an excessively normative vision of spelling (by linguists or by a certain power group in the indigenous community) can inhibit rather than encourage potential users. Since living writing is that which is actually used (with the risk of being transformed and even deformed during usage), it is necessary, in this author's opinion, to think of strategies which aim to increase the number of producers and opportunities for writing production and *starting with the very youngest children*. This point will undoubtedly require a large quantity of research and a serious methodological discussion because it is a fact that the methods used to introduce writing to children who speak an indigenous language are extremely traditional (Cf. Amadio and D'Emilio, 1990). Innovative strategies which exist in the region only pertain to official languages. Indigenous children are introduced to writing *their* language through mechanistic procedures: reproduction (copying) and memorization. There is an entire new area for research in the Latin American region with two major concerns: how to overcome this mechanistic view of literacy in indigenous schools which constitutes an additional difficulty already for marginalized unilingual groups. How can one introduce tolerance regarding spelling, in order to increase as rapidly as possible the number of indigenous language writers? How can one legitimize the fact the pre-literate children can appropriate writing by *producing writing* rather than by simply copying it, just like children whose mother tongues are the dominant languages?

The use of indigenous languages as a "bridge" to arrive as quickly as possible at the official languages has been sufficiently criticized and yet, it continues to flourish. The ideal is that the indigenous language be used as a language of communication, a language of instruction but also as a language of reflection. The ideal is that it would have an important place throughout elementary education. But this recognition can only come from a change in priority themes of discussion. Debates regarding spelling should not slow down the renewal of educational practice regarding literacy in indigenous schools.

The Latin America region as a natural laboratory to evaluate the weight of dialect differences in literacy acquisition

Differences of vocabulary and pronunciation are very marked from one end of Spanish-speaking America to another. There are even morphological and syntactical differences. Without entering into a serious discussion of the dialects which can be distinguished in the region (cf. Moreno de Alba, 1988, chap. IV) it is evident that the manner of speaking, and even that of reading out loud the same text, in three different capitals of the region, presents very marked differences. Which one of these varieties is closer to what is written? (This question could be translated into even more naïve terms by asking who speaks "the best" Spanish?)

The linguistic consciousness acquired by a literate individual is very much influenced by the literacy process itself. When this individual speaks in a formal and solemn manner, it is thought that the individual is speaking "the way it is written". The linguistic consciousness of primary school teachers is very close to this "game of mirrors" which consists of taking the written word as *the* oral norm *par excellence*, and supposing that it is first necessary to learn to speak in this fashion in order to arrive at an understanding of what is written.

Nonetheless, when we consider the distribution of initial school failure, we see the same distribution everywhere: children from the more advantaged social classes learn to read and write without difficulty, while children in rural areas or in the periphery of large cities (or in the impoverished neighbourhoods of these same cities, in shantytowns) are those who fail. School failure is not distributed democratically in the population. It is selectively concentrated. And this takes place *for any variety of Spanish spoken in the region*. In other words, it is useful in pedagogical terms, to ask in which country or which geographic zone one might find "the purest Spanish" or "the spoken Spanish which is closest to the written language". All varieties of American Spanish lead children just as easily to acquisition of writing on the condition that they grow up surrounded by things to read, by people who can read out loud and reply to their questions, by appropriate material with which to try out graphic activities and the people to encourage them to do so.

Since teacher training at primary level rarely includes actual linguistic training, teachers tend to adopt, albeit unconsciously, the linguistic prejudices of dominant social groups. But, to reject the speech of a child as being inadequate for the acquisition of reading when that speech belongs to the child's entire family and closest community, is to reject the entire child. Each one of us carries a linguistic identity within us, just as we bear a first and family name. This type of rejection is fraught with consequences for the child and its family. This type of rejection is entirely unjustified; has no scientific basis and is contradicted every day by the empirical evidence Spanish-speaking America illustrates.

Note

1. Eugene Nida was probably one of the first to clearly show the differences between "ideal" graphic solutions and those which take users into account. Already in 1954 (reprinted in 1964), Nida indicated: "It is not what is easiest to learn, but what people want to learn and use which ultimately determines orthographies" (p.23). "There is a tendency to regard strictly phonemic alphabets as 'scientific' and all others as 'practical'. This is a false distinction....A practical orthography may be just as scientific as the strictly phonemic one - it is just that in the case of the practical alphabets we must employ not only linguistics, but also psychology and anthropology" (p.29-30)

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CHAPTER V

LANGUAGE POLICY AND NATIONAL COHESION

by D. P. Pattanayak

Language Policy

There is a growing awareness in the plural societies of the Asian region about the important role of language in the achievement of national development goals. Nationalistic, political, linguistic, cultural, educational and communicative status denial to the minority, weak, poor and powerless who form the majorities in these societies has heightened this awareness in recent times. However, there seems to be a strange reluctance on the part of the Governments and educational managers in these countries to recognize plurilingualism and articulate a well-defined language policy.

The entire South Asia region is an example of language conflict due either to lack of a language policy or a language policy in total disregard of grassroot reality. All these regions share a colonial past. The national elite nurtured in the monolingual tradition of the West see the many languages of their countries as administratively inconvenient, financially unfeasible and culturally inadmissible. They come in instant conflict with the regional and local elite who plead the cases of regional and local languages.

In Pakistan, the insistence on Urdu as the sole official language and status denial to Bengali resulted in the breaking up of the nation. The struggle of Sindhi, Baluchi and Pusto for recognition of their identities threatens further vivisection of the country. The euphoria for Bengali in Bangladesh has made them oblivious of the many languages especially of the Chittagong tract. There is constant and continuous language conflict in that country. Some of the tribal groups have taken to armed insurrection to force recognition. In Myanmar, suppression of democracy is the suppression of linguistic and cultural rights of the people. Beginning from the Kachin revolt until the present day, there is a long chain of movements of identity assertion by minority groups. In Nepal, the reluctant recognition to different degrees of a few languages like Newari, Limbu etc. has resulted in the annexation of many languages. In Sikkim, balancing between the Sikkimese and the Nepalese has been a substitute to a well articulated language policy. In Sri Lanka the overt armed conflict between the Indo-Aryan Singhalese and the Dravidian Tamils is a subject of history lengthening into contemporary times. In all these countries the ruling elite has failed to work out convivial relations among its pluricultural polity within the framework of national sovereignty. They have failed to appreciate that in multilingual and pluricultural societies, languages and ethnicities are not mapped in linear and binary terms. They have failed to see that in plural societies larger identities incorporate smaller identities without threat of assimilation. They have failed to articulate language policies which are inclusive and integrative.

India, the largest land mass in the region with astounding plurality (1652 mother tongues, between two hundred and seven hundred languages belonging to four language

families, ten major writing systems and a host of minor ones, three thousand castes and communities and equal number of faiths and beliefs) stands as a model for all the countries of the region. Here the reluctance to recognise plurality and the hesitation to articulate a language policy is phenomenal. Although in the U.K. three major commissions have submitted their reports during the past ten years, in India the New Education Policy of 1986 reiterated the language resolution adopted by the Parliament in 1968. According to the admission of the NEP Programme of Action 1986, "The decisions about language policy and development of languages are taken at various levels - Central and State Governments, Universities, Board of Secondary/School Education etc. Consequently, there is no uniformity on the language policy followed in education" (p. 170).

The "Programme of Action" (POA) in its chapters II. Elementary Education, Non-Formal Education and Operation Black Board, XIII. Education of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Sections, XIV. Minorities Education and XVI. Adult Education makes no reference to languages. And these are the areas where language use or lack of it could deny rank, status and wealth in society and give rise to social inequality. Although the Indian Constitution in Article 350 provides for primary education in the mother tongue of the child, the POA says, "although a number of difficulties are likely to be encountered: administrative and financial feasibility of providing instructional facilities through a variety of mother tongues, difficulty to use some tribal languages as media of education etc. In the context of these difficulties switch over to a modern Indian/Regional language has to be assured as early as possible." The confusion is confounded when the POA says that "for the purpose of providing instruction in the mothertongue of the linguistic minorities at the secondary stage of education, the Modern Indian Languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution as well as English should be used as Media" (POA, p. 161).

This confusion is at its worst in the case of literacy education. The National Literacy Mission has given a call for literacy in the mother tongue. But they are in a quandary as to how literacy in dialects/mother tongues will ensure literacy in the standard language. While talking about materials, a document of the NLM says, "The neo-literate material should be written in the standard language of the State. However, material could also be developed in the most widely-used dialects". (*Books for Post Literacy: Guidelines*, Directorate of Adult Education, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 10) The "switch over" holds the veiled threat of assimilation and the play on the mother tongue is displayed to achieve the same result. Even if mother tongue primary education is given recognition because of constitutional compulsions there is neither political will nor administrative and educational commitment to implement it. It would be clear by now that there is no coherent language policy either at the State or the Central Level. While the lack of Central Policy can be seen in the context of Konkani (Maharashtra), Bodo (Assam) or Urdu (UP). In all the three cases frequent discriminations were recorded by the Commissioner on Linguistic minorities. The policy of the State Governments have been particularly unsympathetic and it would appear there were efforts at virtual elimination of these languages. The State Government attitudes, as Paul Brass pointed out in the case of Urdu, have been guided by three considerations: minimization of the size and importance of the significant minorities; deliberate deviation from the Central Government guidelines and persistent deficiencies in providing facilities which the State Government conceded in principle. That Konkani finally managed to find a home state is a major commentary on national cohesion. The State Government attitudes towards tribal languages are testimony to the lack of coherent policy behind the slogans of national integration.

“The key to the effective removal of our current social and political conflicts lies in our ability to eliminate inequalities and to equalize opportunities, not eliminating tribes and languages.” Kashoki in this statement joins those who give primacy to economics in human development while brilliantly cutting through the maze of arguments against multiple languages. This is a stark reminder to planners and policy makers in the Third World countries to build upon plurality and work towards establishing a just and equitable plurality and work towards establishing a just and equitable world. This reminder in the context of Africa is as much valid for Asia.

On the seventh May 1990, the Government of India’s resolution appointing a Committee to review the National Policy on Education, 1986, said:

“Despite efforts at social and economic development since attainment of independence, a majority of our people continued to remain deprived of education. It is also a matter of grave concern that our people comprise fifty percent of the world’s illiterates, and large sections of children have to go without acceptable level of the primary education. Government accords the highest priority to education both as human right and as the means for bringing about a transformation towards a more humane and enlightened society. There is need to make education an effective instrument for securing a status of equality for women, and persons belonging to the backward classes and minorities. Moreover, it is essential to give a work and employment orientation to education and to exclude from it the elitist aberrations which have the glaring characteristics of the educational scene. Educational institutions are increasingly being influenced by casteism, communalism and obscurantism and it is necessary to lay special emphasis on struggle against this phenomenon and to move towards a genuinely egalitarian and secular social order. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986, needs to be reviewed to evolve a framework which would enable the country to move towards this perspective of education.”

Language is a major factor in the identity formation of minorities, backward communities and scheduled tribes. It is a major factor in entering into the world of the illiterate masses of people and making them literate, giving them access to the modern modes of literate communication. Language use determines whether a child would be anchored to its culture or would be wrested out of its culture. Thus, language use in literacy and in primary education needs to form an important plank of a language policy. In the multilingual context of India where the school is called upon to assume greater responsibilities in the face of distancing of children from parents in the growing urban culture of India linking of one language with another is of paramount importance and yet we are repeating that many languages are a burden rather than treating many languages as opportunities in a multilingual world.

Historians of education will write about the whitewash over the *Acharya Ramamurthi Report* by the *Janardana Reddy Report* and subsequent exercises by the Central Advisory Board for Education, India, to return to the same assumptions, goals and values that were projected by the NPE, 1986. It is a sad commentary that in spite of radical protestations, there has been a singular lack of initiative in dealing with the language problems, and consequently, the sliding back in education continues.

National Cohesion

The concept of national cohesion has been viewed by the westernized Indian elite as a tension between the centralized authority and regional authorities, "between theocracy and secularism and between multiple languages and cultures and a constructed Indian identity". The centralized authority in India is established and entrenched as a result of acceptance of modernization as an equation with Westernization and as a result of transference of one aspect of traditional social relationships into modern politics. The substitution of Indian thoughts, norms, values, beliefs and practices by the Western being considered as modern, everything non-modern is defined and dubbed as pre-modern. From this the linear movement of liberation of the pre-modern by the modernizing elite becomes an easy step to posit. Secondly, the nagging fear of pollution of the Brahminical order by the lower classes is transferred as the nagging fear of the ruling elite for the unpredictable challenges of the lower formations of society. This provides a certain degree of cohesion to the ruling elite which works for the preservation of its privileges for itself and its progeny.

The centralized authority found support from secularism in a country where religion is deeply entrenched. Citizenship determined on an individual basis was given entitlement to equal rights and responsibilities irrespective of the citizen's other associations. As no preferential treatment was to be meted out to any group or community on religious grounds, it required a centralized authority to administer this equality. Remaining secular is an imperative of the composition of the Indian polity. India is the third largest Muslim country in the world and Hinduism is a cover term for a conglomerate of religions. Break away Hindus like the Buddhists, Jains and the Sikhs and the large body of converted Christians make it incumbent on the managers of the State to strengthen the principles of national cohesion on a non-theocratic basis. It is in this context that the statement of Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of the secular State of India, that "the Government of a country like India can never function satisfactorily in the modern age except on a secular basis ..." is to be viewed.

The construction of an Indian identity in the midst of a plethora of linguistic, ethnic, regional and religious identities is a major challenge to national cohesion. In spite of the prevailing diversity all travellers to India, Greek, Arab, Persian, Chinese, have recognised India as a single entity and talked about it. India as a single culture area in spite of its diverse political, linguistic and ethnic formations has escaped the attention of the modernizing elite who wanted to fashion India as a nation state in the Western model.

One can talk about national cohesion only in the context of localization as well as globalization. There are times when global or transnational submerges, subjugates or assimilates national culture. Under these conditions the basis of talking about national cohesion and national culture is lost. Fortunately, the human condition and human imagination do not permit wholesale homogenisation, variation being the characteristic of living entities. For example, even if English as a single language supplants and substitutes many languages, its varieties such as Australian English, Indian English and Caribbean English emerge dictating the description of the scenario of "Englishes" of the world. But the process of death of languages and cultures presents a painful and sorry spectacle.

The global and the national are so big and so inclusive that often they become incomprehensible at the grass roots. People who cannot cope with global and national modernity respond to it in terms of the local. Those who make use of the intermediate space can neither transcend it to capture the national and the global nor can they revert

back to the local. People create intermediate symbols and images and they get stuck with them. Unless they capture the local and the global, the particulars and the universal in a single sweep, it will be difficult if not impossible to transcend the intermediate spaces. The intermediate spaces have assumed importance in the clash between homogeneity and absorption and plurality and diversity. The emergence of new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, new communities have developed new paradigms, which properly apprehended could lead towards national cohesion and globalization. Mishandled, they can result in national as well as global disintegration.

In order to understand the nature of the relationship between the local and the national on the one hand and the local and the global on the other, it is necessary to see the local as a specific text and the world as a text. The relationship between these two texts cannot be seen as opposition but as a matter of more and more framing. If texts are seen as being inscribed within a specific environment called the institutional environment, then one can speak of stepping out of that environment only in a metaphorical sense. In actuality there is no non-institutional environment. More and more framing transforms the local into the global. There is no blank space between local as local, local as national and local as the global. The historical national and the historical global, which refused to see differences ended up becoming colonial and imperial. They saw the other as assimilated to the self. They rolled over everything, created similarities and tried to capture the world and make it in their own image.

When imperialism and colonialism became historical anachronism, they gave way to hegemony as the moving force of the new nation state and a new globalization. "Hegemony is not the disappearance or destruction of difference, it is construction of a collective will through difference. It is the articulation of differences that do not disappear. The subordinate groups know that they are still second on the ladder somewhere near the bottom." (Stuart Hall) In this sense hegemony is the other side of the colonial coin. What colonialism sought to achieve by underestimating difference, hegemony sought to achieve by giving token recognition and devaluing difference. In the contemporary discussion of nationalism and globalisation there needs to be a continuous dialectic between the local and the global. It is living through differences. It is recognizing multiple social identities bound by multiple networks of relations, definable by multiple categories, sometimes contradictory. This contradiction is created in the language. Language has positionality as well as motion. The old nationalism and globalization emphasised positionality and product. The contemporary nationalism as well as globalization must emphasize motion and process. In the process of connoting identification contemporary identities speak in multiple discourses and display unlimited semiosis of meaning. Identities at different levels have multiple points of intersection. It is through negotiation of space between different points and through management of particularities that one apprehends the national as well as the global.

Thus, it would be clear that both nationalism and globalization as contemporary processes mean co-existence of faiths, beliefs, customs, languages and cultures, each open to the other, free to learn from the other's experience and to modify and to be modified through internal motivation, without threat of being assimilated and homogenised by exterior forces. In short, national and global cohesion cannot be achieved by accepting the "melting pot", the "distant stranger" or the "salad bowl" theories suggesting assimilation and homogenization. National cohesion is only possible through structural incorporation of elements leading to convivial relations among the different units constituting a whole.

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CHAPTER VI

LITERACY AND CULTURE

by Brian V. Street

This chapter addresses the two last words of the symposium title, namely literacy and culture. As a social anthropologist by training, I have been working for the last two decades in a number of different cultural contexts, looking at variations in literacy and at the relationship between literacy practices and cultural practices. I would like first to summarize some of the research on this issue and to describe some of the new approaches to the study of literacy. I will then detail some specific ethnographic examples of what people actually do with literacy in their real everyday lives, and finally I will suggest one or two implications for policy of these approaches and these findings. I think a lot of what I have to say links very well with the other contributions in a number of ways.

First I will consider some of the new approaches to literacy in my own area. There has been a shift in both research and in some practice towards what we might call a more social conception of literacy. I want to resist dictionary definitions of literacy, but as a working concept I like to think of literacy as "the social practices of reading and/or writing" (Street, 1984). The research I am referring to focusses specifically on the fact that reading and/or writing are always involved in the social world. They are social practices and have social meanings. So one shift already in approaching the question of literacy from this perspective is not to start from education. We want eventually to put education back in, but in order to understand what education should be doing in this field it seems to me important first to start with what actually happens in society and in different societies around the everyday uses of reading and writing, outside of schooling, rather than to start from our own culture's educational assumptions.

One major assumption that it has been necessary to challenge in the last few years is what I have referred to as the "autonomous" model of literacy. This model assumes LITERACY as a single thing with a big L and a single Y - LITERACY. A whole series of consequences are supposed to follow from this independent variable, as it is acquired by either individuals or whole societies: social progress, personal improvement and mobility, better health, cognitive development and so forth. The list goes on and most agency documents on the need for literacy include some or all of these characteristics. Analyses of the ways in which reading and writing are taught or the way literacy skills are assessed have been largely in line with the autonomous model. These assumptions have been strongly challenged in recent years. As regards assessment, for instance, Hill and Parry (1990) have shown how texts get wrenched out of their cultural contexts and treated as though they had independent meaning. Similarly the reader is treated as though they are autonomous, as though they can be separated from the society that gives meaning to their uses of literacy. Likewise, the cognitive "skills" employed in decoding text and applying writing have been treated as autonomous of context, as though cognition could be abstracted from social persons and cultural locations. Assessment in

particular, then, has been an area where the autonomous model has been dominant but similar views underpin much practice in teaching and in programme design also.

The new approaches to literacy, on which Hill and Parry amongst others are drawing, reject the autonomous model and argue instead that literacy practices are in fact always embedded in social and cultural contexts and moreover they are not simply neutral artefacts but are always contested and "ideological". One has only to sit in an international conference, of the kind at which the papers in this collection were first delivered, to recognise the extent to which the meanings of concepts such as literacy are part of contests over power and resources - and over the meanings themselves. In order to examine these struggles over meaning and the role of literacy and culture in them, we need to develop some working concepts, both for research purposes but also in order to get a handle on policy issues. I will cite briefly some of the concepts that are being worked around in the field and that we need, I think, to elaborate in order to examine literacy more closely from within an ideological model. Firstly, the concept of "literacy events" was coined by Shirley Brice Heath, an analogy with a speech event in the socio-linguistic literature. A literacy event in which reading and/or writing has a role. If you're trying to do research on literacy, you have to find something to actually look at and this is what the concept of a "literacy event" facilitates. This is not true only for research; it also applies to curriculum development, development programmes, management of literacy programmes in the South, and such-like. The same issue is there. What is it we're actually looking at? And Heath's notion of literacy events is quite helpful in saying here is some concrete practice you can actually look at. Lectures represent a classic literacy event. The lecturer reads the odd note here and there; an overhead slide projects different types of notes; occasionally people take a note down; some of them might file it away somewhere in a bureaucracy; some of them might throw it in the waste-paper basket; the audience might look up at the overhead, and look down and write, read their own notes and listen again to the speaker. The whole is, in a sense, greater than the sum of its parts.

I was very struck when my children went to a school in America - the wholism of that writing and speaking activity in a literacy event was - quite clear: my children knew how to do the writing in the classroom, and they used some of the speech, but what was problematic was that when those two things were put together in a particular social context they had a different meaning as a whole. There isn't a neat word for talking about the speech-writing axis - the word discourse has already flown off in lots of other directions. Besnier uses register, but we all know that has other meanings. I refer to it as a mix which is a pretty crude concept. Maybin talks about the oral-literate continuum. There are different ways of handling that and it seems to me that the unit of study remains to some extent to be defined and developed.

But I'm not entirely satisfied with the notion of a literacy event because event seems to signal mainly the behaviour. And we know as anthropologists that what gives meaning to all the scribbling and the notes and suchlike are that we all have models in our mind of what this process means; in fact we've all been socialised into the particular conventions of the literacy event in which we are involved quite strongly, and we'd soon notice if someone was doing it wrong - if someone started interrupting at the wrong moment, or whatever. There are all kinds of conventions which people internalise. We all know in everyday literacy event such as encounters with bureaucracy, or in seminars or meetings how tightly controlled the conventions are. They are often more apparent at times of political resistances. Feminist and other movements, for instance, tend to resist dominant speech/writing conventions, to make them explicit and then find ways of changing and resisting them.

What I am arguing then is that we have models in our minds of the literacy event, which need also to be signalled. And I want to use the concept of literacy practices to indicate this level of the social uses and meanings of reading and writing. Literacy practices I would take as referring not only to the event itself but to the conceptions of the reading and writing process that people hold when they're engaged in the event. The distinction has been well summarized and further elaborated in a recent book called *Writing in the Community* (Barton & Ivanic, 1991). So armed with those two concepts, literacy events and literacy practices, within the framework of an ideological model, it seems to me possible to go out and start doing comparative research as well as to organize programmes and develop curricula in a more socially-conscious and explicit way.

Along with these shifts in the research agenda and in some areas of adult literacy practice (Mace 1992) towards a more qualitative, social and culturally specific understanding of literacy practice in their power contexts, there has also been a shift in the concept of culture. I am interested as a social anthropologist to see the ways in which concepts such as culture are used in a variety of international contexts (cf. Stephens, 1992). I think my own discipline has been responsible for some problems with this term. One traditional meaning of culture, of course, has been Culture with a big C, meaning high culture, art and literature. Within the social field there has always been a challenge to that notion (Williams, 1958). The word culture, with a small c has referred more to everyday practices of signification, of using signs, symbols and cultural artefacts to construct meaning in ordinary life. So culture in this sense belonged to everybody, not just an elite. That was the first battle to be won. But then what has happened is that the concept of culture has become reified, as though it were a thing, a fixed inventory of characteristics that people inherit from one generation to another (Street, 1993b; Roberts and Sarangi 1992). Very often it gets described at the most superficial level as those characteristics that are more observable: clothes, food fashion. People refer to cultures as sets of beliefs that people have in some way chosen, as though they were supermarkets and this or that culture could be pulled down off the shelf according to taste. Current views of culture in a number of disciplines have begun to resist the use of the term culture as a noun at all and to think of it more as a verb, that is a social process that is not fixed but always changing (Street, 1993). Anthropologists today talk about cultural processes. We are very conscious of the fact that any symbol or artefact in a cultural array may be used by members of particular social groups for political and economic purposes - to claim rights to resources, for instance. Whilst interested parties may claim that this particular bit of culture has been part of the tradition for centuries, in fact very often it is relatively recently that it has been articulated in that way (Smith, 1986, Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). One of the most striking examples that I have come across recently was in South Africa. The notion of a cultural weapon there is clearly a concept that is part of contemporary political and ideological struggle. Indeed, a civil rights lawyer was taking the government to court on the grounds that they were encouraging Inkhata to carry weapons thereby weakening the ANC, and drawing on spurious appeals to tradition and Zulu heritage to justify what was in fact a contemporary political strategy. I want to use that example to signal that we cannot use culture in a nice, neutral, free, non-ideological way. It is always part of contemporary processes, always part of a contest over resources and the meanings are always contested, not given.

Trying to look, then, at the cultural meanings of literacy practices in different societies, I think leads us to some rather different insights than viewing literacy or culture as autonomous things. I want briefly to indicate the kind of research that has gone on in a number of different parts of the world following these shifts in conceptual framework. That

research, I would argue, has considerable implications for policy, not just language policy but also literacy policy, a concept itself very new in the international arena. One area where a lot of research has been done recently has been around the question of what happens when new forms of literacy are added to the communicative repertoire (Street, 1993a). I am phrasing this carefully because I don't want to set up and reinforce the dichotomy of literate/illiterate that has plagued the development literature for too long. There are very few people in the world who don't have some conception of and some relationship to reading and/or writing, even if they themselves do not make much use of decoding or encoding skills. The notion that literacy programmes are taking literacy to people who are "tabula rasa" - who have blank minds in this area - and that the programme is going to inscribe literacy upon them, is not an accurate model of the social reality. The social reality is that practically everybody has some involvement in literacy practices. Whether or not they have high facility in the various levels and skills involved is not the question, when we are talking about the literate/illiterate dichotomy. If we take literacy practices as one of the central conceptual tools for understanding literacy, then we need to include not only technical skill but the fact that in using them we have conceptions about them. And this undermines the dichotomy, since most people do have such conceptions. Moreover, those conceptions are culturally constructed and vary from one context to another, so that broad international generalizations are fairly meaningless. People in villages in Iran, for instance, where I did anthropological field research in the 1970's, may not have passed the UNESCO literacy test, but to call them "illiterate" would be meaningless in the sense, firstly, of the kind of cognitive skills they could demonstrate, and secondly because they were in fact closely acquainted with a range of literacy practices. Moreover, cafe's and restaurant's displayed written signs, trucks were constantly driving by with labels and logs; visits to the city involved a whole range of signs and written insignia. So the people already had ideas about what literacy meant. When we take new forms of literacy to people, through schools and adult literacy programmes, then it is inaccurate to assume that the learners are devoid of literacy. Rather, we should start from the conceptions and uses of reading writing that people already have. That may involve quite different conceptions of literacy than those held in Agencies and in Western educational circles. Some of the research I want to cite has built upon this perspective: it has asked not, what is the impact of literacy but how do people "take hold" of literacy practices (Kulick & Stroud, 1990).

I will give one or two brief examples. One is taken from research in New Guinea, where missionaries in the nineteenth century brought printing presses and religious literacy. These forms of LITERACY were not simply treated as something wholly new, to be added on to a limited local culture: rather they were taken by villagers and absorbed into communicative practices that already existed (Kulick & Stroud, 1990). In speech making in that particular village, in the Sepik region of New Guinea, there were strong oral conventions about how you communicated with other people and how you represented yourself in speech. It was important, for instance, not to display "hed" - a pidgin term that roughly translated means "big-headedness", inappropriate assertiveness. Convention required that, although you wanted to get your own way, you should express it in ways that presented you as a vulnerable not a dominating or aggressive person. What this research suggests is that when people begin to make use of literacy, particularly for writing letters - which is one of the major uses of LITERACY around the world - exactly the same oral conventions were carried over into the written domain. So in that sense the acquisition of literacy did not represent a great break with the past at all: rather it was absorbed into past practices. One of the researchers, Don Kulick, received an interesting letter whilst he was away for a while from the village. A friend of his wrote describing what had been going on in the village while he was away

and saying that there was going to be a big party shortly. At first glance this seemed simply a factual account. But, knowing the communicative repertoire of this culture and the stylistic conventions, Kulick recognized that in fact on closer inspection the letter was a request for him to bring with him when he came huge amounts of beer to help the party along. But, just in speech making, it would have been inappropriate, indeed rude, to have asked directly. The oral conventions were carried over into the written.

There are other contexts where the inclusion of new literacy forms into the communicative repertoire does in fact lead to new forms of communicative practice. An example from Tuvalu, a Pacific atoll already cited by Marie Clay in her chapter, was described by Niko Besnier (1989). In this situation two literacies emerged, further evidence of the end to conceptualize multiple literacies rather than a single, monolithic literacy. The two literacies are associated with different notions of the person. One form of literacy is concerned with letter writing - a great many people from the island were travelling to Australia and New Zealand for work and writing letters back home. But there were strong conventions about what kind of person could be expressed in these letters. It had to be a person who was emotional, vulnerable, full of affect. Writers tell their readers how their heart bleeds for them, how difficult it is to live without them, etc. What is particularly interesting here is that this kind of affectual communication is not appropriate in the oral domain. The inclusion of literacy in the communicative repertoire has, then, shifted the registers, some of the forms of speech, some of the presentations of self that are possible. It also reminds those who might still believe literacy to be associated with detachment and objectivity - as much of the educational and development literature claims in arguing the case for the spread of LITERACY - that this is not universally true. In fact, the oral domain is often associated with these things whilst the written may be associated more with affect and personal intimacy. So a lot of myths about LITERACY get undermined by this kind of research (cf. also Shuman, 1983). The other literacy in this community was associated with giving sermons. People, lay preachers, would take notes or write out their sermon and circulate it for editing and then deliver it orally. In this context the appropriate convention was a strong assertive and demanding voice, telling people what they should be. A very different notion of person than that inscribed in letters.

One of the areas of research that I am particularly interested in at the moment, and that I believe has considerable implications for policy, concerns this relationship between specific literacy practices and specific notions of personhood, of identity and self. As a number of contributors to this volume make clear, when we are talking about literacy programmes and educational curricula, we are not just dealing with a technical transfer of skills - how to encode and decode the sign/sound relationship. We are actually dealing with very profound aspects of people's notions of self, of knowledge, of identity and of what is truth. A great many of the LITERACY programmes of the past, it seems to me, - particularly the ignominious era of the early UNESCO programmes, but also more recent Freireian approaches - failed precisely through not understanding these cultural and ideological dimensions of the transmission of literacy practices from one cultural group to another. The educational process of learning literacy was itself already part of a relationship - both of teacher to pupil but also of dominant and receiving cultures (Street, 1987).

I will now conclude by addressing some of the pedagogical implications of these new approaches: putting education back in, as it were. First, what appears to follow is that teachers, in teacher training programmes for instance, need to learn not only about educational matters, but they also need to know about language in its social context, they

need to know about LITERACY theory and they need to know about culture. But this applies not only to teachers, but also to policy makers and programme designers. They also need that kind of training. So that is one big shift, it seems to me, for which the resources may be massive. But the price of failure to do this has already proved too high, in the numerous programmes where learner drop out rates reach 60, 70, 80 per cent. Another issue is the question of what happens to all of the local literacies that we are talking about when they encounter central and national programmes of literacy based on a dominant literacy and language? We have been addressing this issue with respect to local languages for some time now (Hornberger, 1987a and b), but what I would like to see is the question of LITERACY policy - or rather literacies policy - being given equal attention. The question of how local literacies can be sustained and maintained needs to be addressed. The answers are not so readily available yet, but at least some of the following questions need to be asked: how are international languages, such as English, Arabic, French and Spanish to be used for literacy in local contexts. Do they operate as languages of revolution or of cultural imperialism? How are creoles related to standard languages for literacy and what are the advantages and disadvantages of trying to standardize creoles themselves in written form? Should we be concerned at the disappearance of small, local languages and literacies or is the analogy of a disappearing species a false (and romanticised) one that does not apply in this area? I do not think we know the answers to these questions, although we may all have instant responses according to past knowledge and ideology. But these are new questions and need careful consideration. It is important that they be put on the agenda for international conferences, such as the one from which this volume emerged.

I will conclude with one very contentious policy implication of the things I have just been saying, with respect to the mother tongue debate. The new theories of literacy seem to me to have new and radical implications for that debate. If you start from the assumption that learning literacies is in fact a process of cultural learning - that it is about epistemology, knowledge and identity - then learning one literacy will not necessarily help in learning another. If, on the other hand, you believe that learning literacy is a technical process in which you learn the relationship between sign and sound, then it does seem to follow that what you learn in the first LITERACY can carry over to learning the second. In that case it does appear sensible to provide mother tongue literacy first: people know their own language best, they can crack the LITERACY code in this familiar setting more easily and then move on to a second language with those technical skills under their belt. That has been the theory and it has driven a lot of policy. But, if you shift to an assumption that literacies are social practices, then this policy does not necessarily follow so straightforwardly. In fact, it may be that learning literacy in the mother tongue as a bridge to learning in a second language - such as Spanish or English - may actually interfere with learning it in the second language. For instance, language and literacy policy in South Africa, like many African and Third World countries, appear to be based on the autonomous model. Children spend the first three years in primary school learning their mother tongue literacy and then, at Standard Four, they switch to English as the medium of instruction. Now the mother tongues have mostly been written down by missionaries in English script, so a child learns Xhosa or various Nguni languages, which are non-cognate with English, in English writing. In the light of recent theories and research in LITERACY this process is likely to have numerous disadvantages (Bell, 1990). The relationship of sign to sound in English writing is different from that in Nguni, even though most of the "letters" appear to be the same: they obviously represent different sounds in each language and there are indeed different sound ranges that have to be covered by the same limited number of signs. In fact, a few signs are added for each local language, or diacritical marks are used. English, for instance, has about 15 vowel sounds, represented

by five vowel signs or letters. Xhosa has about 6. A child learning literacy first in Xhosa is going to need some explanation of this when they switch to English language literacy. Even at the technical level, the decoding skills of mother tongue LITERACY are not straightforwardly transferred to second language LITERACY. But the situation becomes even more complex when we consider the social meanings and uses of literacy will also be different from the mother tongue to English literacy. In the mother tongue literacy is associated with various local meanings, perhaps stories and immediate practical issues; in English the uses of LITERACY are associated with central administration, schooling, urbanization etc. This, then, casts some doubt on the notion that mother tongue literacy will provide a helpful "bridge" to learning the language and literacy of "power". Moreover, the notion that the local literacy is only good as a bridge is rather demeaning of that literacy.

So the new theories of literacy are forcing us to question this policy. The policy of mother tongue maintenance may well be important for political and cultural reasons. But this should involve using mother tongue literacy in its own rights as a significant form of literacy rather than simply as a channel to something else, another language and literacy. The issue of second language literacy can then be treated separately and the relationship between the two languages and the two literacies should be treated as problematic, leading to some disadvantages and to some advantages, rather than assumed to be inevitably good for the learner.

My conclusion is that, despite what we sometimes see as homogenization and globalization in different countries around the world - blue jeans are worn everywhere and everyone drinks coca cola - the social reality that we are observing when we look closely at life on the ground, is actually of diversity. I agree here with Dr. Pattanayak, that diversity is as much, if not more, part of the current reality as homogenization. That, I think, is a harder problem for policy makers and programme developers than if we were to assume that a great deal of the problem of diversity would go away because we would homogenize on a global scale. Once we have decided that in reality the world is becoming more, not less, diverse, then the policy issues become harder not easier.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

prepared by William Mackey

EDUCATION POLICY ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: PROBLEMS AND CONSTRAINS

Education has now become the focal point of most of our social and political issues. Those affecting language and culture have proven to be the most intractable. This is because each ethnolinguistic context generates its own web of intertwined concerns in each strand of which one can long remain entangled. Here are some of the most evident.

PROBLEMS AFFECTING LANGUAGE

1. Identification

What variety of speech is to be considered as THE language for which a policy is to be designed? What varieties are excluded and according to what criteria? How should conflicts between opposing regiolects or between different sociolects be managed?

2. Viability

Should the life-expectancy of a language be a factor in language policy? Can one establish a reliable threshold of survival - a point of no return? What level of language viability should justify public support?

3. Standardization

To what extent should a language variety be selected and standardized for speech and writing? On what basis: a prestige variety, a common denominator or a linguistic construct? Who chooses between conflicting standards of grammar, spelling and vocabulary? Should the state get involved?

4. Production of a corpus of materials

How is the material necessary for reading and/or listening to be produced?

PROBLEMS AFFECTING PEOPLE AND THEIR CULTURES

5. Identity

Who identifies whom in this continuum of parameters with differing degrees of belonging, belief and behaviour? Is self-identity the solution and if so, how will it operate? Does the right to be culturally different from the majority suppose the right to be the same? Does categorization of people by language and culture penalize the bilinguals who belong to two different cultures?

6. Legitimization

What counts for the legitimate representation of a language community? Is there division between native speakers and non-speakers, between second-languages speakers and would-be speakers? Are the claims of each of these groups legitimate?

7. Legalization

Who holds jurisdiction over language policy - the region or the central government? Which language should have its own territory? Should language rights be territorial, individual or collective? Should a language minority have more rights than the majority or should its language rights be subsumed? Should group rights include control of educational institutions? Who settles the conflicts between group rights that are inherent (sex and race) and those that are attributive (language and culture)? Are language rights limited to intra-national minorities or are they extended to extra-national (e.g. immigrants) populations? What duties do minority language rights impose upon members of the majority language group?

8. Institutionalization

In which institutions of the state is the other language (or languages) to function and to what extent - in education, public administration, the legislature, the courts? Is the presence of both languages governed by the principle of parity? Is there a bilingual bureaucratic infrastructure to make this possible?

9. Politicization

How does one deal with the pressures coming from different forces within a language group: ideology (for an ethnic state with its own language), activism (mobilization of the population to agitate for language rights cum social reform), elitism (union of language activists with local power brokers) networks (extra-territorial groupings of language minorities). Where does the impulse for change originate - from the centre or the periphery, from theoretical constructs or popular consensus?

10. Resource allocation

If a state lacks resources to educate the majority of its citizens should it get involved in minority language education? Or should each minority have its share of the limited resources? To what extent does the state finance a language for its own sake? What are the costs in terms of basic education? Is each family aware of the trade-off? Is their choice made under elite or group pressure?

11. Media and Technology

To what extent does technology liberate a language minority from its necessary isolation? Does the availability of mass-media lead to its acculturation?

12. Policy implementation

Does the implementation of an education policy account for differences in cultural values? Does the culture value identity over education? Is its norm of success different? Is social learning more valued than formal education? Does the language policy implementation account for different degrees of tolerance for deviation from the norm?

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...the theme of an interdisciplinary
round table composed of independent
scholars from the fields of sociology
of language, language planning/
management, pedagogy of reading and
writing, educational psychology, social
anthropology and linguistics.

This round table sought to stimulate
thought and discussion concerning
language choice throughout the public
and private domains in a dispassionate
and independent forum. The round
table was attended by delegates to
the 43rd International Conference
on Education held in Geneva on
18 September 1992.

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