



## Imperialist Desires in English-Only Language Policy

This article tackles the questions around the efficacy of the English language in educational contexts.<sup>1</sup> The author argues that the answer to these questions has nothing to do with whether English is a more viable language of instruction or whether it promises non-English-speaking students full participation both in school and the society at large. This position, in the author's view, would point to an assumption that English is, in fact, a superior language and that we live in a classless, race-blind society. He proposes, instead, that the attempt to institute proper and effective methods of educating non-English-speaking students rests on a full understanding of the ideological elements that generate and sustain linguistic, cultural, and racial discrimination, which represent vestiges of a colonial legacy in our democracy.

While the issue of language of instruction remains one of the major challenges in public education in the US, the incessant debate over education reform, more often than not, pays little attention to the direct relationship between the imposition of English as the only viable language of instruction and the unacceptable failure rate experienced by students whose dominant language is not English. The rate is improving slightly, but “Latino students in Boston have the lowest graduation rate at 60% and the highest drop-out rate of 18% as compared to all other ethno-racial groups in the district” (Berardino, 2015, p. 9), while the ongoing educational-reform debate remains deformed to the degree that it almost always ignores the role of language in academic success. In fact, the current national educational-reform debate never acknowledges “one of the last [civil rights] victories in the *Lau v. Nichols* case, which held that offering language-minority children only instruction in a language they could not understand violated the Civil Rights Act” (Orfield, 2014, p. 276).

The dismissal of language in educational policy and implementation has traditionally been part of an education planning that excludes rather than includes an ever-increasing number of non-English speakers who populate most urban public schools. In some schools, more than 90% of students are classified as nondominant English speakers (ELLs) and yet the recipe for addressing the academic failure of these students is more high-stakes testing and more obsession with English instruction that borders on the ridiculous. For instance, the State of Massachusetts promulgates a law that not only abolished bilingual education, but that made instruction in a language other than English illegal. In the meantime, white male students in the Boston Public Schools are “40 percent more likely than Latino males” (*The Boston Globe*, 2015, p. A10) to graduate from high school. Given the systematic high failure rate of Latina(o) students in the Boston Public Schools, a *Boston Globe* editorial highlighted that “parents and members of the community listed [one of] the characteristics they want in a new superintendent [of schools]: someone who has experience dealing with English language learners” (2015, p. A10). At the same time that parents and members of the community are protesting the criminally high failure rate of nondominant English speakers, policy makers and educational leaders are demanding more high-stakes testing in English-only and more accountability while they operate with total impunity and remain unaccountable to the long-term damage their English-only educational policies are doing to what are now called *majority minority* schools and to society in general. In the meanwhile, the prison pipeline is increasing daily with the very students who are victims of the manufactured failure of the supposedly democratic public schools.

Part of the reason language is never considered as a major factor to be taken seriously in educational policy making is the imperialist view of English that dominates all sectors of US society—an imperialist view that ranges from the imposition of English as a patriotic act to the obscene accommodation of most educators and a very large segment of society to the general failure of foreign language education in the US. It is not at all uncommon to hear educated Americans say that they took four years of Spanish in high school and/or college but all they remember is: “*Cómo está usted?*” (“How are you?”). This comment is never made as an experience of failure or shame but as a dismissal of the school foreign language requirement and a confirmation of its unimportance. The superiority complex of viewing English as the international language, the language of commerce, the language of technology that everyone wants or needs to learn, is part and parcel of the imperialist desire that even critical authors such as George

Orwell betrayed in his otherwise progressive posture by overglorifying and overprotecting the “purity” of the English language when he complained that “English is ‘in a bad way’ and in a state of temporary decadence, and protests against such ‘abuses’ as foreign diction [and] ‘American [English] is a bad influence and has already had a debasing effect’” (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979, p. 7) on the English language. Orwell conveniently forgot to mention the massive influence that French, as an imperial language, had on English and the massive Latinization that English experienced in the history of its development. Latin as an imperial language also has had a lasting imprint on the psyches of those who remain shackled by imperial desires that create the myth that if one majors in Latin, one must have superior intelligence—a proposition that writes off billions of people who are not part of the Western world and who are not affected by Latin. What these mythmakers and those who reproduce the myth fail to understand is the role of self-selection of Latin students given the small number of Latin majors and the questionable applicability in terms of employability. The smaller number of Latin majors as compared to majors in other disciplines contributes to small classes in which Latin instructors can devote individualized attention to students, leading to greater academic achievement and enhanced student motivation. Hence, those students who choose to major in Latin partly select this specialization because of a high level of motivation to pursue Latin studies. This higher motivation level can also account for the seriousness with which Latin majors approach their studies. This same phenomenon is also observed in people who choose esoteric topics to study. They generally excel in their academic pursuits.

The proposition that Latin majors are inherently smarter gives rise to vacuous generalizations such as “if you study Latin, you can think more logically.” This claim not only reflects a form of academic mush thinking, but it also points to the illogicality of this distorted logic. As Lilia Bartolomé (personal communication) so insightfully noted, if one follows the illogicality that Latin is a superior language that make learners more intelligent and more logical, it would follow that one must view native speakers of Romance languages (French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish), which were derived from and maintain closer proximity to Latin, as inherently smarter than speakers of English. This proposition would be summarily dismissed as illogical and proponents of English-only language policy who view English as education itself would also contest this unverifiable claim, since their assumption that English is a superior language of instruction constitutes the bedrock of the English-only policy which, in Massachusetts, for example, makes it illegal to use Spanish as a language of

instruction. There are, however, concrete advantages to continuing to use Spanish in the process of acquiring English as a second language. Continued literacy in Spanish would provide English language learners with greater access to the Latinized English terms that are considered higher-order vocabulary in standardized tests such as the SAT.

To generalize that Latin majors are innately and uniquely smart is to accept that all Catholic priests are also innately and uniquely more intelligent than the general population by virtue of the many years they study Latin, which, until Vatican II, was the only language used in Roman Catholic Mass and other rituals. If one is to accept this line of argument, that the superior intelligence of priests is due to their mastery of Latin, then one must also conclude that the only way to explain the behavior of the many priests who molest children, as has been widely documented, is to argue that they are an exception—a subset of priests who were untouched by the superior sophistication of the Latin language and culture. However, this rationalization would constitute a selective understanding of history that blindly celebrates the exceptional contributions to the world made by the Roman Empire while willfully ignoring the debauchery, the carnage of its conquests, and the decadence that accelerated, shaped, and determined its end.

The imperialist desire remains so seductive to the present day that some Latin specialists teach oral Latin, a language that has been dead for centuries. At the same time, some of these same specialists remain indifferent to the current linguisticism taking place with the imposition of English-only mandates throughout the US. In some cases, many of these same specialists, who want to teach their students to speak a dead language in a Herculean attempt to revive spoken Latin, also support the English-only laws that prohibit the use of languages other than English in schools. These specialists fail to understand that their classist and elitist posture that considers Latin majors as smarter and Latin as a superior language refuse to recognize that the belief in the superiority and/or inferiority of languages already points to a form of imperialism that colonizes the mind, which, in turn, prevents those who have been colonized from seeing “the colonizer’s predatory presence, his unrestrained desire to overpower not only the physical space but also the historic and cultural spaces of the invaded ... his unbridled ambition to destroy the cultural identity of the indigenous, regarded as inferior quasi-beasts” (Freire, 2014, pp. xxiii-xxiv). Consequently, the assumption made by many Latin specialists who consider Latin superior to other languages attests to a mystified way of seeing the cultural penetration of the Roman Empire “as some sort of civilizing gift from the so-called Old World” (Freire, 2014, pp. xxiv). In their mystified way of perceiving the world, some of these Latin specialists

attempt to rewrite history in such a way that they are no longer able to understand the significance and the deep meaning of Bertolt Brecht's poem "A Worker Reads History," in which his seemingly simple and accessible verses provoke deeper rethinking about the selective selection of what history we teach, what history we learn, and how we conveniently interpret history through a social construction that willfully refuses to see the obvious, as Brecht's verses gently challenge readers to think beyond heroes and emperors who are usually celebrated in textbooks that erase the people's history:

*Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome  
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up?*  
(as cited in Bigelow, 1997, p. 1)

One of the mechanisms that contributes to our disinterest in foreign language learning, in general, and our ignorance regarding the role of language in identity formation, in particular, is the technicist overemphasis on language structures cultivated by most language specialists—an overemphasis that prevents us from understanding language beyond its structure—that is, our inability to conceive language, as Anna Kim Reilly, a graduate student in my Sociolinguistics class, suggests, as "soul, self, communal and individual identity ... [as] a constant internal struggle between belonging and oppression that breathes, speaks, thinks and acts ... [as a] ... fiber of a human soul and the purest and most creative aspect of social existence. Language is never innocent, innocuous or polite but that's exactly how it should be: Human" (n.d.).

To the extent that language is human and reflects and refracts our soul, educators and policy makers need to understand the centrality of language in subjectivity formation and the adverse effect its prohibition and its relegation to an inferior status have on a person's psyche, as poignantly captured by Gloria Anzaldúa: "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language" (1987, p. 81). If Anzaldúa is correct when she states that "I am my language," it follows that I am also my culture to the degree that language is infinitely culture so if you devalue my language, you also devalue my culture since I am my culture—a space, a location where I am and, more important, as Paulo Freire suggested, in addition to being, I become—a process that cannot take place outside language, outside culture, for these entities are signposts that guide my journey of becoming as they enable me to understand what it means to be in my world so that I can also make meaning in other people's worlds. Hence, we need "to recognize that we touch one another in language ... [a recognition

that is] ... particularly difficult in a society that would have us believe that there is no dignity in the experience of passion, that to feel deeply is to be inferior, for within the dualism of Western metaphysical thought, ideas are always more important than language” (hooks, 1994, pp. 174-175). Given this preponderance to disarticulate cognition from emotion, educators and policy makers need to understand that my language is not only “a map of my failures” (Adrienne Rich, as cited in hooks, 1994, p. 174). It is also a map of my joy, a map of my humanity, a map that teachers can use to make an enormous difference in the lives of immigrant students whose dreams, aspirations, and desires are often bottled up in a temporary English language barrier. I say temporary because we all know that, given the opportunity and appropriate instruction, all immigrant students can learn English because, as research has shown us, what distinguishes humans from other animals is the capacity to learn multiple languages. This capacity involves not only one’s first language but additional languages as well. The myth that Americans are not good at learning languages has a great deal more to do with social attitudes than with the biological capacity with which all humans are endowed. It is hard to believe that in most African countries, even those individuals who have been excluded from schooling and literacy speak two or more languages. In what are referred to as “more developed countries,” such as Germany and Sweden, most students graduate from high school speaking multiple languages. If fact, in these countries, one would be considered ill educated if one spoke only one’s native language.

I provide this short background to highlight the impact of social attitudes on language learning and teaching and how the policy of English-only in schools represents vestiges of Western imperialist thought that disarticulates the world of ideas from language which, in turn, dichotomizes cognition from emotional self. I am sure that Americans do not suffer from a language disability gene that causes the disease of monolingualism, which, according to the late Mexican author Carlos Fuentes, is a curable disease. What is operative in the lack of interest in other languages in the US is a disinterest that needs to be understood within the general xenophobia that is now shaping the national dialogue, in which language is now the last refuge where one can practice racism with impunity. In other words, English-only in schools is promoted as being for ELL students’ own good and not as a violation of one’s right to literacy in one’s language. What is important to highlight is the connection between English-only policy, the anti-immigrant law that legalizes racial profiling, and the closing down of ethnic studies in Tucson schools in Arizona. How would white Americans react if Arizona proposed closing down women’s

studies programs? This is not too far-fetched when you consider that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia once declared that “women’s rights and gay rights are not protected under the U.S. Constitution.”

Against a landscape of language and cultural discrimination, most immigrant students do not feel welcome in either US society or in schools. Hence, teachers who consider themselves agents of change and who want to make a difference in their students’ lives need to factor into their pedagogy issues of language and cultural discrimination. If you accept that motivation is one of the most important factors in second language learning, teachers need to critically understand that a society that is so blatantly unwelcoming to immigrants cannot expect these same immigrants to be highly motivated to embrace a culture that, for many of them, particularly immigrants of color, devalues their cultural identity, their language, and, too often, their dignity.

As agents of change, teachers need to move beyond the rigidity of the technicism of English-only instruction so as to be in communion with the very students they teach. That is, teachers should deeply understand the ever-increasing xenophobic sociocultural environment that adversely affects their students and their families—a negative impact that leads to real fear, as an adult immigrant learning English stated: “A lot of people are afraid of Trump” (Guerra, 2016, p. B4). As agents of change, teachers need to enlist other constituencies that are in solidarity with immigrant students so as to be able to advocate, not only for the well-being of their students, but also for their rights and dignity, which are trampled upon by racist comments that threaten to invite future racist action, such as those made by President Donald Trump when he referred to Mexicans as rapists. The development of a coalition that involves other stakeholders to protect immigrant students from discriminatory practices is the best way to ensure their safety, rights, and self-esteem. This is the case in Massachusetts, where teachers, community leaders, and politicians came together to assuage students’ fear and reaffirm their legal rights as exemplified by the attorney general, Maura Healey, who “emphasized her role in using the laws to protect their rights ... [stating] ‘I stand with immigrants and immigrant communities’” (Guerra, 2016, p. B4).

I always felt perplexed and disarmed when I was struggling to learn English because I wholeheartedly bought into the myth that the US was a nation of immigrants that offered shelter, equality, and freedom, yet I never felt free to speak my native language openly, particularly in institutional contexts. My Capeverdean culture was summarily devalued through the constant pressure to assimilate, which contradicts the very ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom. In other words, it is an oxymoron to celebrate the ideals of democracy

in a society that, at the same time, is pressuring you to stop being in order to be. That is, you are okay so long as you become like the rest of us (meaning white Americans), accept blindly our values even if these values mean accommodating racist attitudes and giving up your language and culture. In fact, there is often very little in school curricula that enables immigrant students to make sense of the ambivalence of their fractured cultural souls that yearn to make meaning out of the bittersweet existence of the diaspora. There is little in school curricula that allows immigrant students to recapture moments of their childhood, which have been frozen in time and space. On the contrary, what the curricula offer is a forced assimilatory process reflecting society's dominant values—values that constitute a quasicultural genocide designed to enable the dominant cultural group to consolidate its cultural hegemony. It is a process that, according to Amílcar Cabral, “succeeds in imposing itself without damage to the culture of the dominated people—that is, it harmonizes economic and political domination of immigrant groups with their cultural personality” (1973, p. 13).

The sad reality is that even when you blindly assimilate and give up most of your cultural values and speak English flawlessly, you are really never accepted as fully American, especially if you are nonwhite. This total lack of acceptance is normalized in the English language, which requires hyphenation when referring to certain nonwhite cultural and ethnic groups. Hence, it is common usage in American English to have African-American, Hispanic-American, and Asian-American, among other hyphenated Americans. Likewise, it would be uncommon to refer to European-American, German-American, British-American, and Belgian-American. Individuals belonging to these groups whose similarity is whiteness are simply referred to as European, German, British, and Belgian. In other words, the very imposition of assimilation is replete with false promises and limitations—false promises inherent in the myth that requires that once you give up your culture and language and assimilate, then you can become fully American, a myth that is disconfirmed by the use of hyphenation and the continued segregation of nonwhite ethnic groups in schools and in society in general. The limitations are demonstrated by the fact that only people with white European ancestry enjoy the privilege of being called American without the use of hyphenation as a marker of unwashed ethnicity. Thus, the dominant ideology that imposes blind assimilation also requires that we become immune to the dehumanization implicated in the use of hyphenation, which, in turn, coerces the implementation of a cruel cultural and ethnic ranking that shapes and normalizes inequality. Cultural hegemony is successful



when even the victims of the ranking see the process as natural and commonsensical to characterize themselves as hyphenated Americans. Even though the former president Barack Obama is 50% white, he will always be referred to as the first African American president or the first black president. It would, however, be unnatural to refer to John F. Kennedy as an Irish American president. Thus, to do otherwise and forcefully claim to be American without the hyphenated cultural and ethnicity qualifiers can be regarded as either not necessary or unnecessarily making a political statement that does not sit well with the dominant white ethnic group and that can also be regarded as wanting too much to be ideologically white. Even my use of “dominant white ethnic group” jolts people who consider themselves apolitical (this consideration is already a political act) and, most probably, would raise the following question: “What do you mean by dominant white ethnic group?”

As mentioned earlier, even though President Obama is half white, he could not escape the hyphenation process, which, in turn, diminishes the authenticity of his citizenship as demonstrated by incessant questions about his place of birth and his religious affiliation. Even though Obama was the president of the US, a sizable segment of the society expects him to constantly demonstrate his patriotism. Representative Darrell Issa from California has called him “one of the most corrupt presidents in modern times,” and because of the perception of President Obama’s compromised patriotism, Sarah Palin quipped that he apologizes for America and sees “America [as] the problem ... [rather than] as the solution.”

Given these contradistinctions, teachers need to be able to teach more than correct English grammatical constructions. They need to also realize and share with their students that the bound grammatical morpheme *-ed* marks more than past tense. Its misplacement, its absence in certain environments, and its misuse also marks one’s foreignness and otherness. Unfortunately, the *otherness* identification seldom valorizes; instead, it is typically used to devalue, demonize, and dehumanize. In essence, immigrant students who face this level of discrimination cannot just focus on the appropriate acquisition of the past-tense marker. These students are confronted with a linguistic and cultural drama, as Albert Memmi so eloquently put it, which positions them to make imposed choices that, in the end, are really choiceless choices.

Having said all this, I know that it is always possible to learn English and succeed academically but this success is often tied to the humanity and quality of teachers whom one encounters in one’s English-learning journey. I was enormously fortunate that I crossed paths with

John O'Bryant, the first African American elected to the Boston Public School Committee. He was a guidance counselor at Boston English High School when I was a student there. When John O'Bryant heard that I had been told by my guidance counselor that I was not college material and that I should go to Franklin Institute to become a TV repairman, he approached me and said: "Pay no attention to him. You are going to college. I'm mad. Didn't he look at your grades? Come to see me in my office after school—you are going to college." That I spoke three languages and I had good grades mattered little to my guidance counselor. What mattered to him was the folk theory that equated my temporary English-language difficulty with my intellectual capacity. I always say that the fact that I am a writer and a professor today is an accident of history in that I was fortunate enough to have met John O'Bryant. Most of my friends were not as lucky and joined the ranks of school dropouts—a euphemism for those students who have been excluded from the school system. That is why I honestly believe teachers matter. They can make a difference, and I am who I am today because John O'Bryant saw a human soul behind my temporary English barrier. However, to make a difference, teachers need to go beyond good intentions and develop the necessary political clarity and understand the historicity that generates, shapes, and maintains the current xenophobia.

The vicious attacks on people of color, the demonization of immigrants, the dismantling of affirmative action, and the assault on welfare programs for the poor are part and parcel of an unapologetic dominant ideology that was unleashed during the Reagan Administration. It is the same ideology that has positioned itself against all public institutions, particularly those sectors that are perceived to serve mostly the poor and people of color. For example, public education in urban areas that now serves mostly nonwhite and poor students is under siege as public housing is struggling to survive its so-called reform.

Interestingly enough, when public funding is aimed to strengthen the dominant sphere, we hear little from the media, politicians, and political pundits who work zealously to "end welfare as we know it." These conservative mavericks take great pride in excoriating welfare mothers for cheating and not working as proof of social-program abuse but remain silent about the fraud rampant within the military-industrial complex, as shown in the Pentagon's paying \$700 for a toilet seat or \$350 for a screwdriver. It is the same silence that surrounded the welfare for the rich in the savings and loan bank scandal, which cost taxpayers more than \$250 billion. In this case, those cultural commissars find it convenient to embrace the public as a process to socialize losses as they pontificate on the worth of privatizing social

security and holding the poor responsible for creating a “social catastrophe” and blame the “great society programs not only for financial losses but also for drops in high school test scores, drug problems and ... [according to Patrick Buchanan] a generation of children and youth with no fathers, no faith and no dreams other than the lure of the streets” (Pertam, 1991, p. 1).

Against a landscape of selective assaults on some public institutions, the bilingual-education movement could not escape the wrath of the dominant ideology. However, the present attack on bilingual education should not be understood as a simple critique of methodologies. First, and foremost, the present assault on bilingual education is fundamentally political. The denial of the political nature of the debate concerning bilingual education constitutes, in itself, a political action. It is both academically dishonest and misleading to point out some failures of bilingual education without examining the lack of success of linguistic-minority students within the larger context of the general failure of public education in major urban areas, which has created minority-student dropout rates ranging from 50% to 65% in the Boston Public Schools to higher than 70% in larger metropolitan areas such as New York City.

While conservative educators have been very vocal in their attempt to abolish bilingual education because of, according to them, its lack of academic success, these same educators have conspicuously remained silent about the well-documented failure of foreign language education. In spite of the general failure of foreign language education in the US, no one is advocating closing down foreign language departments in schools. Paradoxically, the same educators who propose the dismantling of bilingual education programs, which have a higher probability of producing bilingual speakers, reiterate their support for foreign language education with the aim of developing bilingualism even though the failure rate of becoming fully bilingual through foreign language education is exponentially greater than in bilingual programs.

The English-only movement’s position points to a pedagogy of exclusion that views the learning of English as education itself. What its proponents fail to question is under what conditions will English be taught and by whom. For example, insisting on immersing non-English-speaking students in English as a second language programs taught by untrained music, art, and social sciences grandfathered teachers (as is the case in Massachusetts with the grandfather clause in English as a Second Language (ESL) Certification), will do very little to accomplish the very goal of the English-only movement. In addition, the proponents of English-only also fail to raise two fundamental

questions: First, if English is the most effective educational language, how can we explain that more than 60 million Americans are illiterate or functionally illiterate? Second, if education in “English-only” can guarantee linguistic minorities a better future, as educators such as former US Secretary of Education William Bennett promise, why do the majority of black Americans, whose ancestors have been speaking English for more than 200 years, find themselves still relegated in the ghettos?

I want to argue in this article that the answer to these questions has nothing to do with whether English is a more viable language of instruction or whether it promises non-English-speaking students full participation both in school and the society at large. This position would point to an assumption that English is, in fact, a superior language and that we live in a classless, race-blind society. I want to propose that the attempt to institute proper and effective methods of educating non-English-speaking students cannot be reduced simply to issues of language but rests on a full understanding of the ideological elements that generate and sustain linguistic, cultural, and racial discrimination, which represent, in my view, vestiges of a colonial legacy in our democracy.

### **English-Only as a Form of Colonialism**

Many educators will object to the term *colonialism* to characterize the present attack on bilingual education by conservative as well as many liberal educators. Some liberals will go to great lengths to oppose my characterization of the attack on bilingual education as a form of colonialism, rationalizing that most educators who do not support bilingual education are just ignorant and need to be educated. This is tantamount to saying that racists do not really hate people of color; they are just ignorant. While one cannot argue that they are not ignorant, one has to realize that ignorance is never innocent and is always shaped by a particular ideological predisposition. On another level, the attack on bilingual education, or a racist act due to ignorance, does not make the victims of these acts feel any better about their victimization.

The apologetic stance of some liberals concerning the so-called ignorance on the part of those educators who blindly oppose bilingual education is not surprising, since classical liberalism, as a school of thought and as ideology, always prioritizes the right to private property while relegating human freedom and other rights to mere “epiphenomena or derivatives” (Markovic, Tadic, & Grlik, 1977, p. 19). A rigorous analysis of thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John

Locke will clearly show that the real essence of liberalism is the right to own property. The right to private property could be preserved only through self-conservation. This led Liubomir Tadic to pose the following question: “Isn’t conservatism a more determinant characteristic for liberalism than the tendency toward freedom?” (Markovic et al., 1977, p. 17). He concluded that owing to this insipid ambiguity, liberalism is always positioned ideologically between revolution and reactionarism. In other words, liberalism vacillates between two opposing poles.

It is this liberal position of vacillation that, on the one hand, propels many liberals to support bilingual education and, on the other hand, object to the linkage between the attack on bilingual education and colonial language policies.

As a colonized person who experienced firsthand the discriminatory language policies of Portuguese colonialism, I can readily see many similarities between the colonial ideology and the dominant values that inform the US English-only movement. Colonialism imposes “distinction” as an ideological yardstick against which all other cultural values are measured, including language. On the one hand, this ideological yardstick serves to overcelebrate the dominant group’s language to a level of mystification (i.e., viewing English as education itself and measuring the success of bilingual programs only in terms of success in English acquisition) and, on the other hand, it devalues other languages spoken by an ever-increasing number of students who now populate most urban public schools. The position of US English-only proponents is not very different from the Portuguese colonialism that tried to eradicate the use of African languages in institutional life and by inculcating Africans through the educational system in Portuguese only with myths and beliefs concerning the savage nature of their cultures.

If we analyze closely the ideology that informs the present debate over bilingual education—spearheaded by the conservative US English-only movement—and the present polemic over Western heritage versus multiculturalism, we can begin to see and understand that the ideological principles that sustain those debates are consonant with the structures and mechanisms of a colonial ideology as succinctly described below:

Culturally, colonialism has adopted a negation to the [native culture’s] symbolic systems [including the native language], forgetting or undervaluing them even when they manifest themselves in action. This way, the eradication of past and the idealization

and the desire to relive the cultural heritage of colonial societies constitute a situation and a system of ideas along with other elements that situate the colonial society as a class. (Navas-Davilla, 1978, p. 27).

If it were not for the colonial legacy, how could we explain the US's educational policies in the Philippines and Puerto Rico? English was imposed as the only language of instruction in the Philippines while the imposed American textbook presented the American culture not only as superior, but as a "model par excellence for the Philippine society" (Constantino, 1978, p. 66). This type of miseducation was so prevalent that it led T. H. Pardo de Tavera, an earlier collaborator of US colonialism, to write the following letter to General Douglas MacArthur:

After Peace is established all our efforts will be directed to Americanizing ourselves, to cause a knowledge of the English language to be extended and generalized in the Philippines, in order that through its agency we may adopt its principles, its political customs, and its peculiar civilization that our redemption may be complete and radical. (Constantino, 1978, p. 67)

It is the same complete and radical redemption that the US hoped to achieve in Puerto Rico when Theodore Roosevelt's commissioner of education in Puerto Rico, Rolland P. Faulkner, mandated in 1905 that instruction in public schools must be conducted in English and making Puerto Rican schools

agencies of Americanization in the entire country, and where [schools] would present the American ideal to our youth. Children born under the American flag and the American soil should have constantly present this ideal, so that they can feel proud of their citizenship and have the flag that represents the true symbol of liberty. (Lagunne, 1989, p. 17)

By leaving our colonial legacy unexamined, the choice to choose an effective methodology in which students are denied the choice to study their language and culture is, for all practical purposes, a choiceless choice. Instead of becoming enslaved by the management discourse of the present bilingual-educational reform that enhances the economic interests of the reformers while securing their privileged social and cultural positions, educators need to reconnect with our historical past so as to understand the colonial legacy that undermines

our democratic aspirations. Although Renato Constantino is writing about the colonial legacy in the Philippines, his thoughtful words are not only apropos but also illuminating regarding our present historical juncture in education:

We see our present with as little understanding as we view our past because of aspects of the past which could illumine the present have been concealed from us. This concealment has been effected by a systemic process of mis-education characterized by a thoroughgoing inculcation of colonial values and attitudes—a process which could not have been so effective had we not been denied access to the truth and to be part of our written history. As a consequence, we have become a people without a sense of history. We accept the present as given, bereft of historicity. Because we have so little comprehension of our past, we have no appreciation of its meaningful interrelation with the present. (Constantino, 1978, p. 1)

### **Scientism as Neocolonialism**

Oppressive dominant ideologies have throughout history resorted to science as a mechanism to rationalize crimes against humanity that vary from slavery to genocide by targeting race and other ethnic and cultural traits as markers that license all forms of dehumanization. If we did not suffer from historical amnesia, we would easily understand the ideology that informed Hans Eysenck's (1971) psychological proposal, which suggested that IQ differences between black and white people might be partly due to genetics. It is the same historical amnesia that veils dangerous memories, keeping us disconnected from Arthur Jensen's (1969) racist proposals published decades ago by the *Harvard Educational Review*.

One could argue that the above-cited incidents belong to the dusty archives of earlier generations, but I do not believe we have learned a great deal from historically dangerous memories considering our society's almost total embrace of scientism as characterized by the success of *The Bell Curve*, written by Charles Murray and former Harvard professor Richard J. Herrnstein. It is the same blind acceptance of "naive" empiricism that is providing fuel to the US English-only movement as it attempts to ban bilingual education in the US. Ironically, when empirical data are provided to demonstrate that bilingual education is an effective approach to educate non-English-speaking students, as amply demonstrated by researchers such as Zeynep Beykont (1994), Virginia Collier (1992), Kenji Hakuta (1986), David Ramirez (1991), Jim Cummings (1981), among others, the data are either ignored or

buried in endless debate over research design and often missing a fundamental point: the inequities that inform and shape most bilingual programs.

By and large the present debate over bilingual education is informed by the positivistic and management models that hide their ideologies in the false call for objectivity, hard data, and scientific rigor. This can be seen, for example, in the comments addressed to a graduate student on his term paper about the political nature of bilingual education when the professor faulted the student for unsupported politically motivated claims and called for a more linguistic analysis (Leistyna, 1998). As this graduate student recounts, this same professor, who was dismissive of Freire's critical theories of education, told him: "I hope you have been reading some hard science." The false call for hard science in the social sciences represents a process through which "naive" empiricists hide their anti-intellectual posture—a posture that is manifested either through censorship of certain bodies of knowledge or through the disarticulation between theories of the discipline and the empirically driven and self-contained studies that enables the pseudoscientists to

not challenge the territorialization of university intellectual activity or in any way risk undermining the status and core beliefs of their fields. The difference, [for scientists], is that this blindness or reluctance often contradicts the intellectual imperatives of the very theories they espouse. Indeed, only a theorized discipline can be an effective site for general social critique—that is, a discipline actively engaged in self-criticism, a discipline that is a locus for struggle, a discipline that renews and revises its awareness of its history, a discipline that inquires into its differential relations with other academic fields, and a discipline that examines its place in the social formation and is willing to adapt its writing practices to suit different social functions. (Nelson, 1997, p. 19)

As these theoretical requirements make abundantly clear, the professor's arrogant dismissal of Freire's social critical theories unveils the ideology behind the prescription that this graduate student should have been "reading some hard science." The censorship of political analysis in the current debate over bilingual education exposes the almost illusory and schizophrenic educational practice in which "the object of interpretation and the content of the interpretive discourse are considered appropriate subjects for discussion and scrutiny, but the interests of the interpreter and the discipline and society he or she serves are not" (Nelson, 1997, p. 19).



The disarticulation between the interpretive discourse and the interests of the interpreter is often hidden in the false call for an objectivity that denies the dialectal relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. The false call for objectivity is deeply ingrained in a positivistic method of inquiry. In effect, this has resulted in an epistemological stance in which scientism and methodological refinement are celebrated while “theory and knowledge are subordinated to the imperatives of efficiency and technical mastery, and history is reduced to a minor footnote in the priorities of ‘empirical’ scientific inquiry” (Giroux, 2001, p. 87).

The blind celebration of empiricism has created a culture in which pseudoscientists, particularly in schools of education, who engage in a form of “naive empiricism,” believe “that facts are not human statements about the world but aspects of the world itself” (Schudson, 1978, p. 6). According to Michael Schudson:

This view was insensitive to the ways in which the “world” is something people construct by the active play of their minds and by their acceptance of conventional—not necessarily “true” ways of seeing and talking. Philosophy, the history of science, psychoanalysis, and the social sciences have taken great pains to demonstrate that human beings are cultural animals who know and see and hear the world through socially constructed filters. (1978, p. 6)

The socially constructed filters were evident when California voters passed a referendum banning bilingual education. While the school administrators and politicians were gearing up to disband bilingual programs, data from both San Francisco and San José school systems showed that bilingual graduates were outperforming their English-speaking counterparts (*San Diego Union Tribune*, 1998, p. 143). This revelation was met with total silence by the media, the proponents of English-only, and political pundits. This is where the call for objectivity and scientific rigor is subverted by the weight of its own ideology.

What these educators do not realize is that there is a large body of critical literature that interrogates the very nature of what they consider research. Critical writers such as Donna Haraway,<sup>2</sup> Linda Brodkey, Roger Fowler, and Greg Myers, among others, have painstakingly demonstrated the erroneous claim of “scientific” objectivity that permeates all forms of empirical work in social sciences. According to Linda Brodkey, “Scientific objectivity has too often and for too long been used as an excuse to ignore a social and hence, political practice

in which women and people of color, among others, are dismissed as legitimate subjects of research” (1966, p. 10). The blind belief in objectivity not only provides pseudoscientists with a safe haven from which they can attempt to prevent the emergence of counterdiscourses that interrogate “the hegemony of positivism and empiricism” (Brodkey, 1966, p. 8), but it is also a practice that generates a form of folk theory concerning objectivity believed only by nonscientists. In other words, as Linda Brodkey would so eloquently put it, “that any and all knowledge, including that arrived at empirically, is necessarily partial, that is, both an incomplete and an interested account of whatever is envisioned” (1966, p. 8). In fact, what these pseudoscientists consider research, that is, work based on quantitative evaluation results, can never escape the social construction that generated these models of analysis from which the theoretical concepts are always shaped by the pragmatics of the society that devised these evaluation models in the first place (Fowler et al., 1979). That is, if the results are presented as facts that were originally determined by a particular ideology, these facts cannot in themselves illuminate issues that lie outside of the ideological construction of these facts to begin with (Myers, 1986). I would warn educators that these evaluation models can provide answers that are correct and nevertheless without truth. A study that concludes that African American students perform well below white mainstream students in reading is correct, but such a conclusion tells us very little about the material conditions with which African American students work in the struggle against racism, educational tracking, and the systematic negation and devaluation of their histories. I would propose that the correct conclusion rests in a full understanding of the ideological elements that generate and sustain the cruel reality of racism and economic oppression. Thus an empirical study will produce conclusions without truth if it is disarticulated from the socio-cultural reality within which the subjects of the study are situated. For example, an empirical study designed to assess reading achievement of children who live in squalid conditions must factor in the reality faced by these children, as accurately described by Jonathan Kozol:

Crack-cocaine addiction and the intravenous use of heroin, which children I have met here call “the needle drug,” are woven into the texture of existence in Mott Haven. Nearly 4,000 heroin injectors, many of whom are HIV-infected, live here. Virtually every child at St. Ann’s knows someone, a relative or neighbor, who has died of AIDS, and most children here know many others who are dying now of the disease. One quarter of the women of Mott Haven

who are tested in obstetric wards are positive for HIV. Rates of pediatric AIDS, therefore, are high.

Depression is common among children in Mott Haven. Many cry a great deal but cannot explain exactly why.

Fear and anxiety are common. Many cannot sleep.

Asthma is the most common illness among children here. Many have to struggle to take in a good deep breath. Some mothers keep oxygen tanks, which children describe as “breathing machines,” next to their children’s beds.

The houses in which these children live, two thirds of which are owned by the City of New York, are often as squalid as the houses of the poorest children I have visited in rural Mississippi, but there is none of the greenness and the healing sweetness of the Mississippi countryside outside their windows, which are often barred and bolted as protection against thieves. (1996, p. 4)

An empirical study that neglects to incorporate in its design the cruel reality just described (and this is often the case in our supposedly classless society) will never be able to fully explain the reasons behind the poor performance of these children. While pseudoscientists will go to great lengths to prevent their research methodologies from being contaminated by the social ugliness described by Kozol so that they can safeguard their “objectivity” in, say, their study of underachievement of children who live in ghettos, the residents of these ghettos have little difficulty understanding the root causes of their misery, as described by a resident of the community named Maria:

If you weave enough bad things into the fibers of a person’s life—sickness and filth, old mattresses and other junk thrown in the streets and ugly ruined things, and ruined people, a prison here, sewage there, drug dealers here, the homeless people over there, then give us the very worst schools anyone could think of, hospitals that keep you waiting for ten hours, police that don’t show up when someone’s dying ... you can guess that life will not be very nice and children will not have much sense of being glad of who they are. Sometimes it feels like we have been buried six feet under their perceptions. This is what I feel they have accomplished. (1996, p. 39)

What this woman Maria would probably say to researchers is that we do not need another doctoral dissertation to state what is so obvious to the people sentenced to live in this form of human misery. In other

words, by locking children in material conditions that are oppressive and dehumanizing we are invariably guaranteeing that they will be academic underachievers. Once the underachievement is guaranteed by these oppressive conditions, it is then very easy for research studies as described in *The Bell Curve* by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray that, in the name of objectivity, are disarticulated from the political and social reality that shaped and maintain these oppressive conditions, to conclude that blacks are genetically wired to be intellectually inferior to whites. Along the same lines, an empirical study that concludes that children who engage in dinner conversation with their parents and siblings achieve higher rates of success in reading is not only academically dishonest but also misleading to the degree that it ignores the class and economic assumptions that all children are guaranteed daily dinners in the company of their parents and other siblings. What generalizations can such a study make about the 12 million children who go hungry every day in the US? What can a study of this type say to thousands upon thousands of children who are homeless, who do not have a table and who sometimes do not have food to put on the table that they do not have? A study that makes such sweeping and distorted generalizations about the role of dinner conversations in reading achievement says little about children whose houses are without heat in the winter, houses that reach such dangerously cold conditions that a father of four children was led to remark: "You just cover up ... and hope you wake up the next morning" (Kozol, 1996, p. 3). If the father really believes the study results, he will suggest to his children, after they've all made it through another freezing night alive, that they should have a conversation during dinner the next night since it will be helpful in their reading development should they be lucky enough to make it through still another night alive. What dinner conversation would the Haitian immigrant, Abner Louima, have with his children after being brutally sodomized with a toilet plunger by two white policemen in a New York police precinct? (McAlary, 1997). Would his children's reading teacher include as part of his or her literacy development the savage acts committed by the white New York police against their father?

These questions make it clear how distorted empirical study results can be when they are disconnected from the sociocultural reality that informs the study to begin with. In addition, such distortion feeds into the development of stereotypes that, on the one hand, blame the victims for their own social misery and, on the other hand, rationalize the genetic-inferiority hypotheses that are advanced by such pseudo-scholars as Charles Murray and the former Harvard professor Richard J. Herrnstein (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). What empirical studies

often neglect to point out is how easily statistics can be manipulated to take away the human faces of the subjects of study through a process that not only dehumanizes but also distorts and falsifies the reality.

What needs to be fully understood is that educators cannot isolate phoneme-grapheme awareness from social class and cultural identity factors that ultimately shape such awareness.

### **Fracturing Cultural Identities**

Most conservative educators and many liberals conveniently embrace a form of “naïve” empiricism in which scientism and methodological refinement are celebrated, while issues of equity, class, cultural identity, among other sociocultural knowledges, “are subordinated to the imperatives of efficiency and technical mastery, and [sociocultural factors] are reduced to a minor footnote in the priorities of ‘empirical’ scientific inquiry” (Giroux, 2001, p. 87). While the fields of bilingual education and English as a second language have produced a barrage of studies aimed primarily at demonstrating the effectiveness of English acquisition, these research studies conspicuously fail to raise other fundamental questions: Does cultural subordination affect academic achievement? What is the correlation of social segregation and school success? What role does cultural identity among subordinated students play in linguistic resistance? Does the devaluation of students’ culture and language affect reading achievement? Is class a factor in bilingual education? Do material conditions that foster human misery adversely affect academic development?

These questions are rarely incorporated in “naïve” empirical studies that parade under the mantra of scientific “objectivity” as a process to deny the role of ideology in their work so as to ideologically prevent the development of counterdiscourses that interrogate these studies’ major assumptions. As Paulo Freire would point out, when these educators claim a scientific posture, for instance, “[They often] try to ‘hide’ in what [they] regard as the neutrality of scientific pursuits, indifferent to how [their] findings are used, even uninterested in considering for whom or for what interests [they] are working” (1998, p. xxi). Because most educators, particularly in schools of education, do not conduct research in “hard sciences,” they uncritically attempt to adopt the “neutrality” posture in their work in the social sciences, leaving out the necessary built-in criticism, skepticism, and rigor of hard sciences. In fact, science cannot evolve without a healthy dose of self-criticism, skepticism, and contestation. However, for instance, a discourse of critique and contestation is often viewed as contaminating “objectivity” in social sciences and education. As Freire would argue, these educators “might treat [the] society under study as though [they] are not

participants in it. In [their] celebrated impartiality, [they] might approach this real world as if [they] wear 'gloves and masks' in order not to contaminate or be contaminated by it" (1998, p. xxi).

The metaphorical "gloves and masks" represent an ideological fog that enables educators to comfortably fragment bodies of knowledge so they can conduct their research, for example, among children who live in Mott Haven to determine their phoneme-grapheme awareness, disarticulated from the material conditions of Mott Haven as described by Jonathan Kozol in which children are locked in a chain of oppressive and dehumanizing circumstances that invariably guarantee that they will be academic underachievers.

By reducing reading principles or the acquisition of English, for instance, to pure technicism (i.e., phoneme-grapheme awareness), these educators can easily disarticulate a particular form of knowledge from other bodies of knowledge, thus preventing the interrelation of information necessary to gain a more critical reading of the reality. These metaphorical "gloves and masks" enable educators to engage in a social construction of not seeing, which allows them to willfully not understand that behind the empirical data there are always human faces with fractured identities, dreams, and aspirations. The fracturing of cultural identity usually leaves an indelible psychological scar experienced even by those subordinated people who seemingly have "made it" in spite of all forms of oppression. This psychological scar is painfully relived by Gloria Anzaldúa: "*El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua*" [The Anglo with the innocent face has yanked our tongue] (1987, p. 203), thus sentencing colonized cultural beings to a silenced culture: "*Ahogados, escupimos el oscuro. Peleando con nuestra propia sombra el silencio nos sepulta*" [Drowned, we spit darkness. Fighting with our very shadow we are buried by silence] (1987, p. 203).

The fragmentation of bodies of knowledge also prevents us from making the necessary linkages so as to understand that the yanking of linguistic-minority students' tongues is not only undemocratic but it is reminiscent of colonial policies as recounted by the African author Ladislaus Semali:

Then, I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. I first went to Iwa Primary school. Our language of education was not Kiswahili. My struggle began at a very early age constantly trying to find parallels in my culture with what was being taught in the classroom. In school we followed the British colonial syllabus. The books we read in class had been written by

Mrs. Bryce, mostly adapted and translated into Kiswahili from British curricula. We read stories and sung songs about having tea in an English garden, taking a ride on the train, sailing in the open seas, and walking the streets of town. These were unfortunately stories far removed from our life experiences. As expected, we memorized them even though they were meaningless.

By the time I was in fifth grade Swahili was no longer the medium of instruction. English had taken over and Kiswahili was only a subject taught once a week. Kichagga was not to be spoken at any time and if caught speaking we were severely punished. Thus, one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Kichagga while still in the school grounds. The culprit was given corporal punishment—three to five strokes of the cane on the buttocks. (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 9)

The expression “And then I went to school” is a common experience throughout the world, including first-world democracies such as the US, where bilingualism and multiculturalism are under constant assault by Western cultural commissars. We conveniently fall into historical amnesia by forgetting the English reeducation camps designed primarily to yank Native Americans’ tongues. Native American children were taken from their parents and sent to boarding schools with the primary purpose of cutting them off from their “primitive” languages and “savage” cultures. While we ominously forget the dehumanization of American Indian children in the so-called boarding schools, we nevertheless proudly denounced the reeducation schools created by communist governments as examples of human-rights violations. “And then I went to school” is, however, not forgotten by the American Indian writer Joseph H. Suina:

School was a painful experience during those early years. The English language and the new set of values caused me much anxiety and embarrassment. I could not comprehend everything that was happening but yet I could understand very well when I messed up or was not doing well. The negative aspect was communicated too effectively and I became unsure of myself more and more. How I wished I could understand other things as well in school. (1998, p. 297)

Whether we feel the pain of Gloria Anzaldúa’s tongue being yanked in our own democracy, whether we connect with the painful experience and embarrassment in American schools as recounted by the Native American author Joseph H. Suina, or whether we listen to

the African author Ngugi's lament for the loss of the Gikuyu language in Africa, these experiences undeniably share one common feature: colonization.

We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty on its own. The home and the field were then our pre-primary school but what is important for this discussion, is that the language of the evening teach-ins, and the language of our work in the field were one.

And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. (Ngugi, 1986, p. 11)

If we analyze closely the ideology that informs the present debate over bilingual education and the present polemic over the primacy of Western heritage versus multiculturalism, we can begin to see and understand that the ideological principles that sustain those debates are consonant with the structures and mechanisms of a colonial ideology designed to devalue the cultural capital and values of the colonized.

It is only through a full understanding of our colonial legacy that we can begin to comprehend the complexity of our bilingualism in the US. For most linguistic-minority speakers in the US, their bilingualism is not characterized by the ability to speak two languages. There is a radical difference between a dominant speaker learning a second language and a minority speaker acquiring the dominant language. While the former involves the addition of a second language to one's linguistic repertoire, the latter usually provides the minority speaker with the experience of subordination in speaking both his or her language, which is devalued by the dominant values and the dominant language that he or she has learned, often under coercive conditions. Both the colonized context and the asymmetrical power relations with respect to language use in the US create, on the one hand, a form of forced bilingualism and on the other, what Albert Memmi appropriately calls a linguistic drama:

In the colonial context, bilingualism is necessary. It is a condition



for all culture, all communication and all progress. But while the colonial bilingualist is saved from being walled in, he suffers a cultural catastrophe which is never completely overcome.

The difference between native language and cultural language is not peculiar to the colonized, but colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to just any linguistic dualism. Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two tools, but actually means participation in two physical and cultural realms. Here, the two worlds symbolized and conveyed by the two tongues are in conflict; they are those of the colonizer and the colonized.

Furthermore, the colonized's mother tongue, that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions, and dreams, that in which his tenderness and wonder are expressed, thus that which holds the greatest emotional impact, is precisely the one which is the least valued. It has no stature in the country or in the concept of peoples. If he wants to obtain a job, make a place for himself, exist in the community and the world, he must first bow to the language of his masters. In the linguistic conflict within the colonized, his mother tongue is that which is crushed. He himself sets about discarding this infirm language, hiding it from the sight of strangers. In short, colonial bilingualism is neither a purely bilingual situation, in which an indigenous tongue coexists with a purist's language (both belonging to the same world of feeling), nor a simple polyglot richness benefiting from an extra but relatively neuter alphabet; it is a linguistic drama. (1967, p. 107)

An example par excellence concerning how our society treats different forms of bilingualism is reflected in our tolerance toward certain types of bilingualism and lack of tolerance toward other bilingualism expressions. Most of us have tolerated various degrees of bilingualism on the part of foreign language teachers and professors that range from heavy English accent to serious deficiency in the mastery of the foreign language they teach. Nevertheless, these teachers, with rare exceptions, have been granted tenure, have been promoted within the institutions they teach, and, in some cases, have become "experts" and "spokespersons" for various cultural and linguistic groups in our communities. On the other hand, if bilingual teachers are speakers of a subordinated language who speak English as a second language with an accent, the same level of tolerance is not accorded to them. Take the case of Westfield, Massachusetts, where "about 400 people there signed a petition asking state and local officials to ban the hiring of any elementary teacher who speaks English with an accent" (Lupo, 1992, p. 19), because according to them, "accents are catching" (*The*

*Boston Globe*, 1992, p. 16). The petition was in response to the hiring of a Puerto Rican teacher assigned to teach in the system. As one can readily see, empirical studies that neglect to fully investigate this linguistic drama, and treat bilingualism as mere communication in two languages, invariably end up reproducing those ideological elements characteristic of the communication between colonizer and colonized. These “naive” empirical studies cannot but recycle old assumptions and values regarding the meaning and usefulness of the students’ native language in education. The notion that education of linguistic-minority students is a matter of learning the Standard English language still informs the vast majority of bilingual programs and manifests its logic in the renewed emphasis on technical reading and writing skills. For the notion of education of linguistic-minority students to become meaningful, it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform, and reproduce meaning. Bilingual education, in this sense, must be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived culture. Hence, it is an eminently political phenomenon, and it must be analyzed within the context of a theory of power relations and an understanding of social and political production and reproduction.

While the various debates in the past two decades may differ in their basic assumptions about the education of linguistic-minority students, they all share one common feature: They all ignore the role of languages as a major force in the construction of human subjectivities. That is, they ignore the way language may either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use it.

The pedagogical and political implications in education programs for linguistic-minority students are far-reaching and yet largely ignored. These programs, for example, often contradict a fundamental principle of reading, namely that students learn to read faster and with better comprehension when taught in their native tongue. In addition, the immediate recognition of familiar words and experiences enhances the development of a positive self-concept in children who are somewhat insecure about the status of their language and culture. For this reason, and to be consistent with the plan to construct a democratic society free from vestiges of oppression, a bilingual-education program should be based on the rationale that such a program must be rooted in the cultural capital of subordinate groups and have as its point of departure their own language.

Educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their own reality as a basis for literacy. This includes, obviously, the language they bring to the

classroom. To do otherwise is to deny linguistic-minority students the rights that lie at the core of the notion of a democratic education. The failure to base a literacy program on the minority students' language means that the oppositional forces can neutralize the efforts of educators and political leaders to achieve decolonization of schooling. It is of tantamount importance that the incorporation of the minority language as the primary language of instruction in education of linguistic-minority students be given top priority. It is through their own language that linguistic-minority students will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture.

It is important to highlight that the minority language has to be understood within the theoretical framework that generates it. Put another way, the ultimate meaning and value of the minority language is not to be found by determining how systematic and rule governed it is. We know that already. Its real meaning has to be understood through the assumptions that govern it, and it has to be understood via the social, political, and ideological relations to which it points. Generally speaking, the issue of effectiveness and validity often hides the true role of language in the maintenance of the values and interests of the dominant class. In other words, the issue of effectiveness and validity of bilingual education becomes a mask that obfuscates questions about the social, political, and ideological order within which the minority language exists.

In this sense, the students' language is the only means by which they can develop their own voices, a prerequisite to the development of a positive sense of self-worth. As Giroux elegantly states, the students' voices are "the discursive means to make themselves 'heard' and to define themselves as active authors of their worlds." (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 235). The authorship of one's own world also implies the use of one's own language, and relates to what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as "retelling the story in one's own words" (1981, p. 294). To tell a "story in one's own words" not only represents a threat to those conservative educators who are complicit with dominant ideology but also prevents them from concealing, according to Vaclav Havel, "their true position and their inglorious *modus vivendi*, both from the world and from themselves" (1989, p. 42). Simply put, proponents of the English-only movement and other educators who are willing to violate linguistic-minority students' democratic rights to be educated in their own language as well as in English work primarily to preserve a social (dis)order that, according to Jean Paul Sartre, "sanctions misery, chronic hunger, ignorance, or, in general, subhumanity" (1967, pp. xxiv-xxv). In essence, educators who refuse to transform the ugliness of human misery, social injustices, and inequalities

invariably become educators who, as Sartre so poignantly suggested, “will change nothing and will serve no one, but will succeed only in finding moral comfort in malaise” (1967, p. xxvi).

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Parts of this article have been published previously in *Educational Researcher*.

<sup>2</sup>For a comprehensive and critical discussion of scientific objectivity, see Haraway (1988).

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