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¡Muchísimas gracias!

Forms of bilingualism and play across linguistic boundaries in dual language classrooms

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Summary

This ethnographic study has followed a cohort of students from K through 3rd grade to examine the practices and attitudes of bilingual and “emergent” bilingual learners in a Michigan dual-language immersion elementary school. In our society, American-accented English predominates and has greater prestige over Spanish or Spanish-English bilingualism—a situation that sociolinguists describe as “diglossia.” The school’s mission is to develop balanced bilingualism (idealized as dual monolingualism) and to instill pride in Spanish language and Hispanic culture. And yet, bilingual speakers in the school often share a “code-switching” or “interlanguaging” norm rather than two monolingual norms. It is these differences and the tensions between beliefs (language ideologies) and speaking and listening practices that my study explores.

Here, the school’s mission statement is compared to student (and parent) interview results about reasons to be bilingual. In the full paper, I argue that these show that linguistic inequality is salient, even to young students. As Joshua Fishman (2006: p.72) puts it, diglossia “can [itself] be an object of organized social consciousness.” What interests me is what happens when it does. For example, teachers emphasize Spanish use as resistant to English monolingualism, which underscores the already-salient role distinction between adults and kids and de-emphasizes kids’ playful “interlanguaging” practices (for which see examples).

Study Site: “La Paz Elementary”



Photo: Third-graders with recorder in class reading corner. “La Paz Elementary” (a pseudonym) is an urban K-5 public school with a 50/50 dual immersion model. The school serves a socioeconomically, racially, and linguistically diverse student population including the local Hispanic community of primarily Mexican and Central American immigrants.

Study description and methodology

The data presented come from preliminary analysis of an ongoing, longitudinal study started 2013-14, when I began ethnographic observations with an entering Kindergarten cohort and that year’s 3rd grade. I continued to follow the Kindergarten cohort through their 1st and 3rd grade years (and await district approval for their 5th grade year). My study involves ethnographic participant-observation as a volunteer/observer in classroom, lunch, and recess, as well as interviews and less formal conversations with students and staff. I apply discourse analysis to recordings and written documents together with my fieldnotes.

School Mission, Vision, and Beliefs Statement

Vision statement:

La Paz Elementary will equip students with **bilingual skills** and **multicultural** understanding that will enable them to benefit from existing and future **opportunities** in a **global** society.

Mission statement:

La Paz students will attain high levels of **proficiency** in their native language, in a second language, and **meet or exceed targets** for **achievement** in all academic areas. All students will demonstrate **positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors**.

Beliefs Statement

1. All students can learn and succeed academically
2. **Diversity** is an asset that can drive **growth** and **understanding**
3. **Bilingual citizens** will have increased opportunities in a **global** society
4. Parents are an integral part of the school learning community
5. La Paz Elementary School is part of a larger community and utilizes **local, regional, national, and international** resources.

Diglossia Theory

Diglossia describes a situation of two “separate and unequal” codes (where “code” refers to languages, dialects, sociolects, registers, or styles) (Eckert 1980). There is a “functional compartmentalization” between a vernacular or L(ow) code learned as an L1 and a nonnative or secondarily acquired prestige or H(igh) code normatively used in formal or official contexts (Ferguson 1959, Fishman 1967, 2006).

L(ow) “Code” vs. H(igh) “Code”	
*L1, vernacular	*L1+L2, prestige
<i>“separate and unequal”</i>	
<i>functional compartmentalization:</i>	
Informal contexts	Formal contexts
Indexes “home,”	Indexes official,
sociality	
	institutional power

*full paper & bibliography available upon request via email

Reasons for being bilingual #1: “communicate with more people” (accommodate monolinguals)

"would be gooder to speak Spanish with some of your friends that can speak Spanish"
"if your friends say something in Spanish"
"if you don't know any Spanish...and your friends don't know any uhm English and they won't understand you"
"if you're in trouble and they only know how to speak Spanish..."

I can communicate with more people and it's just really fun to know what other people are saying
So we can communicate with more people, and have more friends, and be able **to get better jobs***

Reasons for being bilingual #2: "get a good job" (opportunities through skills)

*Because you get better jobs and you be able to communicate more with the world...
So we can communicate with more people, and have more friends, and be able to get better jobs.
Because in English, you know Spanish you have to know English to have a job too.
(Why are you learning in Spanish?)
So that we can learn a different language and there'll be more opportunities for jobs if you learn two languages

Reasons for being bilingual #3: Speak to people/family in other countries

Cause we could connect with other countries that speak Engliss--English and Spanish... if I speak only English and when I go to my where I was born, In Oaxaca, that would have been kind of hard
Para cuando voy a México (¿por qué?) Cuando hablo mis tíos y mi abuelo puedo hablar español más
because then you can communicate with other people from different from like Spanish is spoken a lot in different countries so now you can go to the countries and understand it
Po:rque, porque yo te gusta español porque puedes hacer, puedes vivir, no vir, ve a Mexico o Spain y puedes espeakar con otras personas

Reasons for being bilingual #4: Know “home language”

(Why are you learning in English?)
So that we don't . So that we can still get some of our home language. And we don't always have to speak in Spanish
Porque mi mamá sabe, nació en [ciudad], que está en España
K-G2 just wants to know what her mom is saying to her sister in Spanish
PARENT 1: Porque no queremos que él pierda el español. ...Nosotros viajamos a México cada año, cada dos años- yo quiero que él mantenga esa, su-
PARENT 2: Idioma
PARENT 1: Su idioma, su herencia

Code-switching between adult and K student speaking turns:

G1: Look at this ugly marker
KW: *Si: Ahora está un poco feo*
B1: Eww:
G1: It has spit on it
G2: I just had that one yesterday
KW: *O: sí?*
G2: And look at this cute marker
KW: *Hmm, pero cuidado por que si, cuando se va adentro, no se puede {{utilizar*
G1(?): {{This is the last marker we can use?
KW: *Sí*
B1: Why not?
This is a typical example of the adult (KW, the author) adhering to using Spanish in class, but students choosing English, with the result that our role difference is marked.

Adult versus kid voices: A 3rd-grade metapragmatic moment

Teacher: Y [sic] *gradué* bachelors of arts
G1: What's a bachelor of arts?
B1: I thought she said bachelor of farts
This brief excerpt illustrates two typical metapragmatic responses by kids to teacher talk. Kid lifeworlds and practices are not completely congruent with adults’.

English for negotiation among bilingual 3rd grade boys

B1: *No quiero* (B1 and B2 laugh) No. He still answering
B3: So you ask me 'em
B4: No no. Give it to him give it to B1
B3: No please don't please don't
B1: He still hasn't answered that's why

A group of 3rd-grade Hispanic boys from Spanish-speaking families code-switch frequently, using Spanish as in-group language, But switching to English for social negotiation. This, too, is a common pattern during “academic” Spanish time (although this excerpt was during lunch).



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