



Understanding Bilingual Education 1: Analyzing Purposes of Bilingual Education

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Summary:

What is bilingual education and what purposes does it serve? This paper aims to introduce bilingual education and clarify why there are such diverse patterns of languages used in education. Although education in only one language is taken for granted in some regions of the world, there is still the question of what purpose it serves. In other regions bilingualism or multilingualism is more common, resulting in different types of bilingual education. Language education reflects largely unstated government policies, mainstream cultural values, and minority group aspirations. Their diverse aims result in monolingualism or various types of bilingual education in school systems around the world.

This paper briefly introduces bilingual education and various purposes behind it. Then a second paper will show how various school systems in Japan and the world can be analyzed into types of bilingual education. Weak or strong forms of bilingual education will be distinguished in terms of bilingual outcomes among students. Finally, a third paper will take a pedagogical approach, offering lesson plans to guide non-native speakers of English in doing the analysis themselves. Ten realistic cases of school systems in Japan and the world will be presented for analysis. A worksheet for students to construct a paragraph will add further criteria to decide the type of bilingual education. Utilizing the list of ten varying aims of bilingual education in this paper, and the chart of ten types of bilingual education detailed in the second paper, by completing the convenient worksheet with ten items in the third paper, the ten cases or any other school system in the world involving different languages can be analyzed according to established criteria in the discipline of bilingualism.

Key words:

bilingual, multilingual, monolingual, assimilation, minorities, education

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Understanding Bilingual Education

1. Analyzing Purposes of Bilingual Education (This paper)
2. Analyzing Types of Bilingual Education
3. Analyzing Cases of Bilingual Education

Introduction to Bilingual Education

Bilingualism is the study of languages in contact, typically in situations where people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds share the same space. Bilingualism was analyzed into four levels in **another paper**: individual, family, societal, and school levels (McCarty, 2010b). Bilingual education is bilingualism at the school level. It is not to be confused with bilingual child-raising (Pearson, 2008; McCarty, 2010a), such as speaking two languages to an infant systematically at home, which is bilingualism at the family level.



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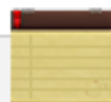
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Bilingual education should involve teaching in two or more languages in a school, that is, more than one language as the medium of instruction for students to learn regular school subjects.

However, other levels of bilingualism, including their cultural dimensions, do influence bilingual education. All people have a cultural identity and a linguistic repertoire, the languages they can use to some extent. Grosjean (1982) explains that "language is not just an instrument of communication. It is also a symbol of social or group identity, an emblem of group membership and solidarity" (p. 117). As a result, the attitudes people have toward different languages tend to reflect the way they perceive members of the other language groups.

Furthermore, languages have a relative status or value as perceived by the majority of a society. Languages are regarded as useless or attractive according to the economic power or cultural prestige attributed to them by the mainstream of a society, which tends to privilege national or international languages. Native languages of children of immigrants may seem to be of no use, and tend to be disregarded, while languages that are valued by the mainstream society tend to be used in education. However, Sweden has offered educational support in 100 languages (Yukawa, 2000, p. 47), while Japan's limited support has been nearly all in the Japanese language. This shows that it is not a matter of wealth but of the dominant way of thinking in the nation. The contrast in treating minority students can be as stark as a choice between assimilation and multicultural policies (Grosjean, 1982, p. 207).

Various Purposes of Bilingual Education

There are "varying aims of bilingual education" because it "does not necessarily concern the balanced use of two languages in the classroom. Behind bilingual education are varying and conflicting philosophies and politics of what education is for" (Baker, 2001, p. 193). These different purposes then lead to various actual school systems of monolingual or bilingual education. Ten typical aims of bilingual education were cited by Baker:

Varying Aims of Bilingual Education
1. To assimilate individuals or groups into the mainstream of society. 2. To unify a multilingual society. 3. To enable people to communicate with the outside world. 4. To provide language skills which are marketable, aiding employment and status. 5. To preserve ethnic and religious identity. 6. To reconcile and mediate between different linguistic and political communities. 7. To spread the use of a colonial language. 8. To strengthen elite groups and preserve their position in society. 9. To give equal status in law to languages of unequal status in daily life. 10. To deepen understanding of language and culture. (adapted from Baker, 2001, p. 193)

As can be seen from the above list, there are many and diverse purposes for conducting school programs that are called bilingual education, according to the way of thinking of decision makers in different cultures. Grosjean summarizes how implicit government policies affect the languages used in education: "Depending on the political aims of the authorities (national or regional), some minority groups are able to have their children taught in their own language, while others are not" (1982, p. 207). "If the government's aim is to unify the country, assimilate minorities, or spread the national language, more often than not minority languages will not find their place in education" (p. 207). Whereas, "if a society wants to preserve ethnic identities, give equal status to all languages and cultures in the country, revive a language, teach a foreign language more efficiently, or make its citizens bilingual and bicultural, it will often develop educational programs that employ two languages and are based on two cultures" (p. 215).

Conclusion to the First Paper on Bilingual Education

As Grosjean identifies the key issues above, the concerns of bilingualism researchers and practitioners shine through. A society may be judged by how it treats its minorities or protects the human rights of its vulnerable members. Some purposes for selecting languages to use in education may be better than others from both ethical and pedagogical perspectives. In any case, analyzing the diverse purposes behind the languages that appear in schools can deepen the understanding of resulting educational systems in the world, and possibly suggest improvements in terms of bilingual education.



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Profile

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Steve McCarty is a Professor at Osaka Jogakuin College and University in Japan. He is also President of the World Association for Online Education (WAOE). He was born in Boston and studied Asia at the University of Hawaii, specializing in Japan in graduate school. He teaches content-based EFL courses such as topic discussion, research paper writing, intercultural communication, language acquisition, and bilingualism. He regularly lectures to foreign officials on "Japanese People and Society" for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). He also advises Worldwide Kids English for Benesse Corporation in Tokyo. He and his Japanese wife have raised two happy sons.

See his homepage of online publications in English/Japanese
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