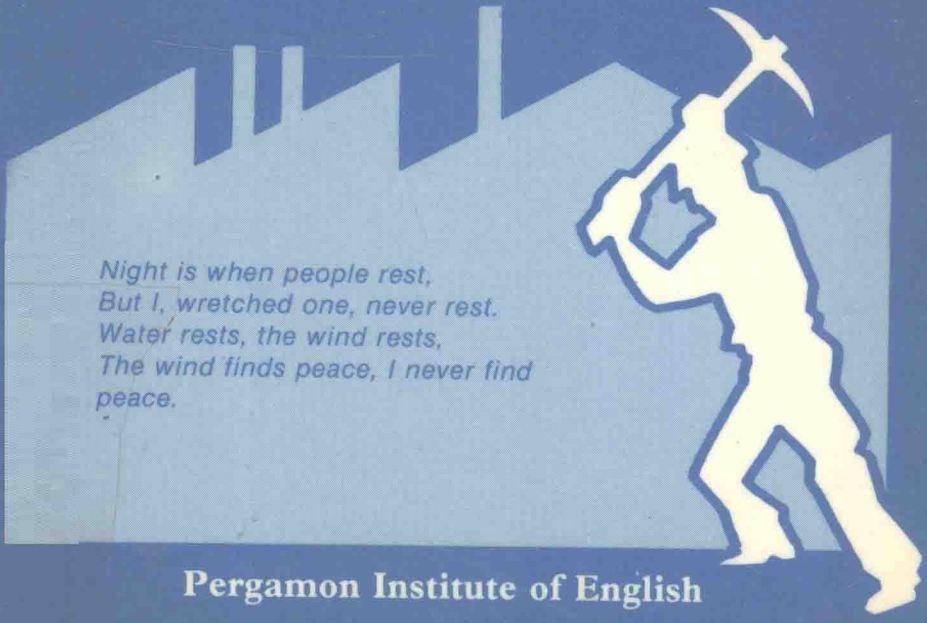
Immigration and Bilingual Education

ARTURO TOSI

La notte è lu repuose de la gente,
E i' mescheniello nu' repose maie:
Reposa l'acqua e reposa lu viento,
Lu viento abente, e i' n'abento maie.

Night is when people rest,
But I, wretched one, never rest.
Water rests, the wind rests,
The wind finds peace, I never find peace.



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IMMIGRATION AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

A case study of movement of population, language change and education within the EEC

ARTURO TOSI
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. . . this peasant limped through the streets of Melfi bearing before the eyes of his fellow-citizens the absurd sign of a civilization which had marked him forever, but of which he knew nothing. What could Russia or the Emperor of France mean to a peasant from Melfi? . . . The Spanish troops of Pietro Navarro laid siege to Melfi, took it, and killed all the citizens they could lay their hands on, folk who knew little of France and Spain, or Francis I and Charles V. They razed most of the houses and gave what was left of the town to Philibert of Orange and later, as a reward for his maritime victories, to Andrea Doria of Genoa, with whom the citizens were even less acquainted. . . .

. . . After thousands of years of this same experience it was only natural that the peasants had little enthusiasm for war, that they looked with misgivings on all flags, and listened in silence while Don Luigi sang from the balcony of the grandeur of Rome. Governments, Theocracies and Armies are, of course, stronger than scattered peasants. So the peasants have to resign themselves to being dominated, but they cannot feel as their own the glories and undertakings of a civilization that is radically their enemy. The only wars that touch their hearts are those in which they have fought to defend themselves against that civilization, against History and Government, Theocracy and the Army. These wars they fought under their own black pennants, without military leadership or training and without hope, ill-fated wars that they were bound to lose, fierce and desperate wars incomprehensible to historians.

Preface

It has been estimated (Widgeren 1975) that in the year 2000 one-third of the young population—those under thirty-five—in urban Europe will have an immigrant background. There can be no doubt that the future Europe largely depends upon how these groups—which today we call *minorities*—are treated socially and educationally by the indigenous population.

Language, one of the primary tools for discovering the process involved in socialization, has long attracted the attention of scholars concerned with the cultural adjustment of these 'minorities' and the educational needs of their children. In Europe, as in America, interest has recently concentrated on the question of their language loyalty and maintenance, while, at the same time, much concern has arisen regarding the reforms necessary to provide new generations with an improved introduction to the *majority* culture, its language and its environment.

Two fields of enquiry have emerged, known as 'societal bilingualism' and 'bilingual education'. The former refers to language attitudes and use on the part of the immigrants and the changes undergone in the new environment. The latter concentrates on the educational measures required to overcome monolingual schooling in the *majority* language and to create better learning opportunities for *minority* children. The aim of the present book is not to make any further contribution to either of these fields, but, rather, to investigate the relationship between them. It attempts, in particular, to achieve this objective by surveying recent research literature relevant to the two fields of enquiry (Chapter 1), by presenting a case study involving movement of population between two countries (Chapter 2), by analysing patterns of language change in the new environment (Chapter 3), by investigating the development of the mother tongue

by the new generation at home and at school (Chapter 4) and, finally, by weighing up the political implications of societal bilingualism and bilingual education as perceived by different groups of people—with diverse interests, motives and objectives—involved in the debate. The context of immigration is the European Economic Community, which currently promotes social and educational opportunities to facilitate movement of population between the member states. The people involved are Italians who moved from rural areas of Southern Italy to industrial urban localities in England, where they have lived for some twenty to thirty years.

Readers will find that two controversial terms (among others) are used throughout the book: *immigrants* and *linguistic minorities*. Both terms will be defined and then further explained in different contexts, comparing established terminologies from previous research with those present in official documents. However, one potential misunderstanding regarding the term *immigrants* is that both sources tend to use it in opposition to *migrants*. Readers may agree that in certain circumstances families have eventually settled abroad—although they may originally have intended to return home—simply because they have been deprived of the social and linguistic abilities to reintegrate in their native countries. *Linguistic minorities* usually refers to communities whose languages are either spoken by minorities in their own country or are official languages of countries from which some people departed to move into the 'host' society. But immigrants may also have been linguistically different and discriminated against in their own country before they became so in the 'host' society.

In 1970 a group of school-children from a village in the mountains outside Florence conducted an analysis of class, language diversity and school achievement in the Italian society. Their study—which was awarded the prize of the Italian Physics Society for the statistical work involved—concluded: '. . . we should settle what "correct language" is. Languages are created by the poor, who then go on renewing them forever. The rich crystallize them in order to put on the spot anybody who speaks in a different way.' (Scuola di Barbiana 1967.)

The author of this book was strongly impressed by the work of these children. Therefore he cannot concern himself with the challenges of

existing terminologies. Rather he feels much more preoccupied with the need to throw some light on the issues which they cover.

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Chapter 1

Bilingualism and Education in a Multi-ethnic Society

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Introduction

During the past fifteen years a considerable number of studies in the field of applied linguistics have been concerned with language teaching in multilingual settings. Unlike studies concerned with the teaching of traditional foreign languages in the curriculum, the research literature in this area was faced with a complex of societal questions and educational problems of a highly interdisciplinary nature. One common objective of these disciplines was the improvement of the academic performance of children of immigrant and minority populations, whose massive school failure had brought to general attention a number of social, cultural and economic problems—in particular, the fact that their education was provided in a medium different from their first language and, often, from that of the community life. The contributions, discussions and recommendations of applied linguists on this problem were to reflect progressively an awareness that the assessment of language competence, as well as the choice of bilingualism, closely depend on the standards demanded by the community and on decisions and policies made by its social institutions. In consequence their attention focused on the goals and processes inherent, respectively, in monolingual compensatory schooling, in partial/transitional bilingual education, and on the social and linguistic outcome of these measures. In this context definitions and descriptions of individual and societal bilingualism had to undergo considerable revision in the light of the different language policies which in turn promoted, tolerated or disdained language diversity and pluralism within the cultural ambitions and economic aspirations of the overall society. The formulation of the challenging and contro-

versial hypothesis of 'semilingualism' is a typical example of such developments.

The purpose of this chapter is to survey recent studies, reports and reforms in language education for linguistically diverse children in America and Europe and to outline the significance of their different philosophies, objectives and implications in the various contexts and forms of immigration. This survey is, however, subject to the following restrictions:

(1) it does not include material on bilingualism not directly relevant to the linguistic conditions of im/migrant children, and does not claim to be comprehensive on this subject;
(2) it deals mainly with articles in English and materials obtainable in Britain, although it includes some works published in other European countries (Sweden, Italy, Germany and France);
(3) it concentrates on discussions developed after the completion of a survey article on mother tongue teaching (Tosi 1979b) and, while giving particular attention to recent contributions, also attempts to examine earlier discussions which are of particular relevance to the present debate.

Terminology

There is a considerable literature on bilingualism covering a wide range of aspects of language competence at the level of individual abilities, and descriptions of societal situations at the level of community interaction. At individual level, as Swain and Cummins (1979) have shown, definitions concentrate on different aspects of bilingualism (i.e. level of competence, types of skills, age of second language learning, context of learning or domain of use). If on the one hand there seem to be disagreements among researchers as to the exact meaning of the term, much of their work is spent defining bilingualism, whilst practitioners and education officials are relatively little concerned with it. On the other hand, many recent works (see, among others, Rosen and Burgess 1980 and Paulston 1978) show that there is a growing tendency to accept the working definition that bilingualism is not an all-or-none property but an individual characteristic that may exist to degrees varying from minimal competence to

complete mastery of more than one language (Hornby 1977). At group level, a landmark distinction was made by Gaarder—as reported in Paulston (1975)—who distinguishes between 'élitist' and 'folk' bilingualism: the first being the privilege of middle-class, well-educated members of most societies, the second describing the conditions of ethnic groups within a single state who have to 'become bilingual involuntarily, in order to survive'. The distinction is a crucial one, as it shows that while the first group uses the education system which they control to seek bilingualism, the second group has bilingualism foisted upon it by an education system which is controlled by others. Research findings are also consistent in showing that 'élitist' bilingual education has never been a problem and privileged children from the dominant group do well academically whether they are educated in their mother tongue or in a second language. The issue of bilingual education has developed in those situations where 'folk' bilingualism results from ethnic group contact and competition (Paulston 1975).

Here discussions tend to question the principles of monolingual schooling and the effectiveness of compensatory education for children of a linguistic background different from that of the majority group. The alternative provision suggested consists of a system offering simultaneous teaching of a child's L1 and L2, the two languages being referred to as those of the 'majority' and the 'minority' groups. Since the mid 1960s the American literature and debate on this subject has adopted the term 'bilingual education' whilst studies and discussions which have developed in Europe, almost one decade later, have become popular under the title of 'mother tongue teaching'. This terminological difference, as well as others (i.e. immigrants, migrants, linguistic minorities, dialects) have been reviewed elsewhere (Tosi 1979b) and will not be discussed here. However, it is important to remember that in Europe all foreign labourers in industrialized societies tend to be called 'migrants', with the exception of Britain. Here both Commonwealth citizens and South European labourers are referred to as immigrants. The Commission of the European Economic Community uses the term 'migrants' to cover all foreign populations, whether from the EEC states or overseas, and so do UNESCO and the Council of Europe (Tosi 1979b). In this survey

the term *im/migrant* is used except when referring to the situation in a specific country.

Research, debate and reforms in America

USA

In the United States, the site of one of the most massive language shifts in the world history, in 1975 more than twenty-five million people aged 4 years and over were said still to live in households where languages other than English were spoken (The National Centre for Educational Statistics, in Masemann 1978). There, in the mid 1960s discussions on bilingualism and bilingual education developed on two interdependent levels. At the sociological level, scholars tended to focus on the status of minority languages and their culture-carrying nature in a society looking for alternatives to the melting-pot hypothesis. At the educational level, others questioned the effectiveness of compensatory education operated by the majority group as (*a*) ignoring the minority children's linguistic repertoire, and (*b*) attempting to adapt them to the sociocultural model of the dominant group. A major impetus to the debate was provided by two fundamental studies by Fishman, one documenting the efforts of minority groups to maintain their languages (1966), the other analysing the asset of societal bilingualism and the processes of language changes in bilingual communities (1967). Subsequent works by Fishman himself and other scholars concentrated on the one hand on the state of minority languages in the communities and their use as media of instruction in the schools, on the other on the typology of bilingual--bicultural programmes required to meet the objectives of forward-looking policies of societal multilingualism and multiculturalism. In the first area of studies (see the review by Albin and Ronelle 1972, and other later works reported in Tosi 1979b) many researchers indicated that, at community level, language changes were due to sociolinguistic environments which did not reinforce generally accepted standards and 'correct' norms. This phenomenon of language shift was shown to have two major implications, one social, one individual. On a social level, where one generation's language provides the

limited data for the succeeding generation's grammar-building process, progressive changes in norms and meaning lead inevitably to the extinction of a minority language when it is not developed by formal education. At an individual level, inconsistent models in the family, lack of reinforcement of accepted norms and exclusion from exposure to the standard language in the community are responsible for weakening children's language development. The conclusion of these studies was that since these conditions affect, in turn, acquisition and performance in an L2, minority children's L1 should be developed and reinforced by the school. These findings, which were to be examined further in later studies and led to the formulation of the 'semilingual' hypothesis, were used as guidelines to set up the criteria for the identification, design and evaluation of different models of bilingual education. Two main aspects of bilingual–bicultural programmes were identified by researchers as most relevant in evaluating the implications for both the child and the community. One includes the role of L1 in the curriculum (how, to what extent and with what objective it is taught). The other focuses on the impact of minority language maintenance on the wider sociocultural context. Accordingly scholars have devised a typology to group the different programmes into categories. Most of them seem to accept that there can be two major orientations in such models:

(1) *Compensatory/transitional.* The L1 (minority or marked language) is used to enable the poor speaker or non-speaker of the L2 (majority or unmarked language) to master subjects until skills in L2 are developed. The outcome is transitional bilingualism for the child and assimilation for the minority group.

(2) *Language maintenance*. The marked language is emphasized and introduced as a more stable medium of instruction, while the unmarked language is introduced gradually, until they both become media of instruction for all subjects. The outcome is balanced bilingual co-ordinate competence in individuals and cultural pluralism in the community. The minority group preserves its own language and becomes diglossic for compartmentalized intragroup and intergroup purposes. ('Language maintenance' can, of course, be used of other goals and can take other forms.)