Bilingual Youth

Spanish
in English-speaking societies

EDITED BY

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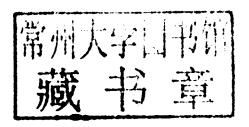
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Introduction

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Kim Potowski and Jason Rothman

Growing up bilingual or multilingual is the norm rather than the exception in many parts of the world, and our planet's multilingual individuals, estimated at 65%, in fact outnumber the monolinguals (e.g. de Bot and Kroll 2002). Approximately half of the citizens of Europe are at least bilingual, ranging from 30% in Britain to 99% in Luxembourg (Associated Press 2005), and according to Wolfe (2000) over half the population of Africa is multilingual given the reality of state official languages living in coexistence with many regional and tribal languages. Parts of Asia, too, exemplify multilingualism. For example, although Hindi is the official language of India, there are areas in which Hindi is not the main societal language, yet most Indian citizens are fluent speakers of and educated primarily in Hindi (and often English as well).

However, in many societies where English is the dominant language – including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K., and the U.S. – we notice a different dominant pattern: one of monolingualism in English. It is perhaps intuitive to link this phenomenon to the current status of English as a world language; being fluent in English is a valuable international commodity. While English is the only language of widely accepted social prestige and official function in the United States, England, New Zealand and Australia, Canada represents an exception, where an important subset of the population principally located in the province of Québec is French-speaking. Canada is officially a bilingual country (even though most individuals are in fact monolingual), which enables access to education in both languages, the proliferation of media in both languages, and the official bilingualism of its government and social services throughout the whole of Canada.

There has been a fair amount of research examining bilingualism, mostly in nations where it is common and/or official but also in nations where monolingualism is the norm. Some has combined cognitive and social aspects of bilingualism (including DeHouwer 2009) while others have either been cognitively oriented or

socially oriented. In this latter category of bilingualism as a social phenomenon, there has been work exploring the ways in which identity, culture, and heritage are indivisible from language (including Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004; Niño-Murcia & Rothman 2008; Piller 2002). Of particular interest is work focusing on bilingual children (including De Houwer 2009; McCardle & Hoff 2006; Oller & Eilers 2002) because both the language acquisition and the identity formation of children are in early stages of development.

This present volume combines a focus on English-speaking societies with a focus on children and adolescents. The third focus shared by all chapters is that Spanish is the home language spoken by the families of these children and adolescents. Spanish is the third most common language in the world, spoken by over 330 million people on all continents. In the U.S., 37 million Spanish speakers make it the second most spoken language after English, and although much has been written about Spanish in the U.S. (including Lipski 2008; Silva-Corvalán 1994; Lacorte & Leeman 2009; Ortiz-López & Lacorte 2005; Potowski & Cameron 2007), work focusing on children and adolescent Spanish-speakers in the U.S. is relatively limited (including Fuller 2009; Potowski 2007; Silva-Corvalán 2003; Zentella 1997). As for Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the U.K., research on Spanish is in its infancy (including Block 2008; Guardado 2006; Martin 1999) and, prior to the present volume, has not focused on children or adolescents.

As many of the chapters in this volume demonstrate, children raised speaking Spanish are becoming increasingly common in more parts of the world due to increased international immigration. Language contact can result in a number of linguistic and social outcomes (including full acculturation and linguistic loss, the emergence of new dialects, societal bilingualism, or resistance to cross-linguistic influence) and, perhaps even more fascinating, these outcomes may look quite different for individuals living in what appear to be the same linguistic circumstances. Factors such as motivation, familial attitudes towards the languages, and individual linguistic needs and perceptions play a large role in language outcomes. These individual factors are then delimited and/or promoted by factors negotiated at the level of the family unit, cultural communities, entire local societies and the nation.

Given that intergenerational transmission is key for the survival of a minority language (Fishman 1990), it is critical to examine language use practices among youth, who ultimately will be responsible for the survival of the language. The present volume represents a variety of portraits of what happens when families attempt to raise children in Spanish while living in English-speaking societies. Aided by the foregrounding chapter by Suzanne Romaine about language and identity and the afterword by Carol Klee that ties together many issues brought up throughout the collection, the reader gains a more complete understanding of

the variables that contribute to Spanish bilingualism in English-speaking societies, and by extension a more complete understanding of the dynamic nature of bilingualism in general. It is our pleasure to bring together this impressive array of scholarship in the first volume of its kind, uniting a gamut of sociolinguistic environments while keeping the two languages constant. We hope that it marks the beginning of comparative analyses of bilingualism, acquisition outcomes and identity construction across environments that share the same languages in common, but where important disparities exist in the sociolinguistic landscapes.

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Identity and multilingualism

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> We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word itself has acquired a huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world.   (Gilroy 1997: 301)

The study of the relationships between identity and multilingualism is more timely than ever in view of the fact that most of the world's population is multilingual and that globalization of economies and intensification of migration have facilitated a mixture of languages, cultures and identities to an unprecedented degree. This chapter shows how at both the macro- and micro- sociolinguistic level language has probably always played and will continue to play a critical role not simply in articulating identities, but also in actively constructing them as speakers make choices in their social interactions in favor of some varieties over others (and likewise, within those varieties, of some variant forms over others). Macro-level processes such as language maintenance and shift are the long-term, collective consequences of consistent patterns of language choices (both conscious and unconscious) made by speakers at the micro-level. Thus, the everyday forces that shape people's linguistic repertoires are the same ones that drive language change and the evolution of language more generally. The chapter concludes with some reflections on why identities matter and identifies some of the challenges ahead.

1.   Introduction

The study of identity is a topic straddling numerous disciplines, including for instance, psychology, sociology, politics, gender studies, anthropology, and linguistics, to name only a few making contributions to a substantial literature spanning decades. Within these research traditions scholars dealing with various aspects of identity have examined the ways in which people relate to their environment and how they perceive their own position within it, both as individuals or as members of a group. Thus, identities based on age, social class, gender, occupation, etc.

may be deemed social, those based on membership in cultural groups may be deemed cultural, etc. So-called national identity is concerned with membership in national groups, ethnic identity with membership in ethnic groups, etc. For sociolinguists, a key issue is the role language plays in constructing the identities of individuals and groups (Joseph 2004).

The study of the relationships between identity and multilingualism is more timely than ever in view of the fact that most of the world's population is multilingual and that globalization of economies and intensification of migration have facilitated a mixture of languages, cultures and identities to an unprecedented degree (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). Despite Friedman's (1999:211) contention that "the great issues of identity politics and self-determination are becoming fewer and fewer these days", Gilroy's (1997) remarks cited at the opening of this chapter are more in line with contemporary realities. The breakup of established identities, re-emergence and reconstitution of old identities and continuing creation of new ones over the last half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st provide ample evidence that identity matters more than ever in today's globalizing world. Language is a critical nexus in this on-going dynamic, as noted by Kroskrity (2000:1), who by contrast to Friedman, believes that "never before have the relations of language, politics and identity seemed so relevant to so many." The recent upsurge in migration and transnational diasporic populations has brought about increasing linguistic and cultural diversity to much of the globe, along with new challenges to traditional linkages between languages and identities.

Friedman is certainly not the first (nor will he likely be the last) to suggest that identity politics will be a casualty of globalization and its supposedly relentless forces of homogenization. His assertion is reminiscent of prognostications of earlier sociologists who confidently predicted the demise of ethnicity in tandem with the rise in modernity. The resurgence of ethnic identities supposedly doomed to disappear took some by surprise in the 1970s when the United States was forced to awaken from the fallacy of the melting pot. In similar fashion, Marx and his followers, who believed that the whole basis for ethnicity and separate nationhood would be eliminated under socialism, would have found unimaginable the wave of resurgent nationalisms in the post-Soviet era of the 1990s. Indeed, a dramatic restructuring of societies on the basis of ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities over class-based ones is still unfolding. Thus, Friedman's "great issues of identity politics and self-determination" loom larger and larger in the post-communist and postcolonial era.

This chapter will show how at both the macro- and micro- sociolinguistic level language has probably always played and will continue to play a critical role not simply in articulating identities, but also in actively constructing them as speakers make choices in their social interactions in favor of some varieties over others (and likewise, within those varieties, of some variant forms over others).

Macro-level processes such as language maintenance and shift are the long-term, collective consequences of consistent patterns of language choices (both conscious and unconscious) made by speakers at the micro-level. Thus, the everyday forces that shape people's linguistic repertoires drive language change and the evolution of language more generally. These repertoires can be regarded as sets of communicative practices embedded in networks of relationships linked into larger networks. Changes in global networks of communication have recently transformed the world's linguistic landscape in unprecedented ways as high-tech, cheap forms of computer-mediated communication offer a variety of unanticipated possibilities for articulating and transforming identities and languages. After examining some of the ways in which identities linked to language are constructed at both the macro and micro level, the chapter concludes with some reflections on why identities matter and identifies some of the challenges ahead.

2.   The construction of identities linked to language

Although the word *identity* comes historically from Latin *idem* 'same', identity is primarily about constructing differences between ourselves and others. Indeed, it can be seen as the driving force of evolution over the course of human history. Although language is only one of many features (e.g. dress, behavior patterns, race, religion, nationality, occupation, etc.) that may mark identity, either individually or collectively, many regard languages as a benchmark for cultural diversity because virtually every major aspect of human culture ranging from kinship classification to religion is dependent on language for its transmission (Haarmann 2004). People hold strong beliefs and deeply felt emotions concerning their language, culture, and identity, about who we are similar to as well as whom we are different from. Not being able to speak a particular language restricts our ability to communicate and identify with speakers of that language. For this reason, language has played a key role in constructing and maintaining distinctive human identities by serving an important boundary-marking function between groups. Someone who does not speak our language is different. The ancient Greeks called those who could not speak Greek properly 'barbarians'; even before them, the Aztecs of ancient Mexico called those who could not speak their language 'savages' or 'mutes'.

The more distinct a language or variety is from some other, the more effectively it can serve as an identity marker. Even communities sharing what is ostensibly the 'same' language will tend to develop distinctive varieties of it as a way of distinguishing themselves from their neighbors. Thus, the English spoken in England will be different from that spoken in the United States, Australia and South Africa, just as within each country there will be locally distinct varieties tied to

specific regions and subcultures. The English of New York City will be different from the English of Pittsburgh, just as the English of African Americans is distinct from that spoken by white Americans.

Languages stand in part-whole symbolic relationships with particular ethnic, cultural, social and/or national groups that speak them. In this sense they resemble flags, which are emblematic of national identities. Although many features can mark identity, language is the only one carrying extensive cultural content. Because a large part of any language is culture-specific, people feel that an important part of their traditional culture and identity is also lost when that language disappears. Moreover, once lost, a language is far less easily recoverable than other identity markers that might stand in its stead. Because identities are dynamic and relational, rather than static and fixed, the relevance and centrality of language to cultural and ethnic identity may vary from group to group and be more or less pronounced at different times (Smolicz 1981). Some groups see their existence as distinct cultural entities dependent on the maintenance of their language. Others regard religion, ethnic or racial affiliation as more important.

René Lévesque (1968: 14), former leader of the Parti Québécois and Quebec Prime Minister, stressed the centrality of French to Québécois identity when he said:

> Being ourselves is essentially a matter of keeping and developing a personality that has survived for three and a half centuries. At the core of this personality is the fact that we speak French... To be unable to live as ourselves, as we should live, in our own language and according to our own ways, would be like living without a heart.

Sir James Henare expressed similar feelings about Maori when he said "Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori." 'The language is the essence of Maori identity.' (Waitangi Tribunal 1989:34). Although distinct cultural and ethnic identities can survive language shift, a Québécois or Maori identity expressed through English is not the same as one expressed through French or Maori. To say they are different does not imply that one is necessarily better than the other. It does mean, however, that to argue for the preservation of French in Quebec or Maori in New Zealand is to argue for a people's right to choose the language in which they want to express their cultural identity.

Identifying with a culture normally implies positive attitudes toward the language used in its associated community, but for various reasons this may not always be the case. Although the Irish language stands for being Irish, for some its symbolic values are positive, while for others they may be negative; Irish is symbolic of what some regard as an old-fashioned, impoverished way of life based on agriculture that many abandoned long ago. Stereotypes about groups

are projected onto their language and cultures, so that where an ethnic or cultural identity is stigmatized, the use of the associated language may be abandoned as a way of distancing oneself from the negative identity. Many stop speaking their languages as an act of survival or self-defense in situations where they feel threatened. Many older generation Quechua speakers, for instance, recall being made fun of for speaking the language. To avoid embarrassment and harassment, they avoided speaking the language during their regular trips to town. Indeed, only 40 years ago Quechua, Aymara and other native people from the eastern part of the Bolivia were not allowed to enter the Government Palace, or allowed to walk on the sidewalks in certain important cities. Although the pressure not to speak Quechua originally came from outside the community, eventually it came from within it as well. Many older people also recall being laughed at by friends or family for speaking Quechua in their own communities (King 2001:73).

Many parents stopped speaking their native languages at home in order to prepare their children for school in the dominant language so that they would not face the same difficulties they once encountered as monolinguals in a language that was stigmatized and forbidden at school. Writing of Scottish Gaelic speakers who emigrated to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Mertz (1989:12) remarked that young people's denials of any knowledge of Gaelic represented attempts to deny an image of themselves as poor or lower-class. As knowledge of English was required for assimilation to and social mobility within mainstream English-speaking Canadian society, the symbolic linkage between Gaelic, rural 'backwardness' and economic hardship propelled language shift.

When the link between language and culture is intact, boundaries and identities may be taken for granted. However, because identities emerge in response to economic, cultural and political forces, perceptions realign themselves to changing situations. In some groups there may be debate about which particular aspect of their culture is of prime significance, or whether someone can be a 'real' member of the cultural group without speaking the associated language. When asked whether a knowledge of Scottish Gaelic was necessary to being a 'true Highlander', those who spoke the language said it was, but people of Highland birth and ancestry who did not speak Gaelic said it wasn't (Dorian 1998:20–1). In the Canadian eastern Arctic Inuktitut is linked to local economic, cultural, and kinship practices persisting over centuries, but for some young Inuk in Iqaluit, Igloolik and Kimmirut identity is predominantly defined by genealogy and way of life; one can be Inuk without speaking the language (Dorais 2005).

In countries where Quechua is spoken, on-going shift to Spanish has led to changing perceptions of the role of Quechua in defining traditional indigenous identities. Among the Saraguros, for example, who number roughly 22,000 and reside primarily in approximately 60 rural communities scattered around the

largely white town of Saraguro in the southern Andean highlands of Ecuador, deciding who or what is indigenous is no longer an easy task. With over two million speakers, the Quechua are the largest of Ecuador's ten indigenous groups. Although they were once marked locally and nationally by speaking Quechua, by their distinct hair and clothing styles, as well as lifestyles based on agriculture, many now find themselves in the awkward position of regarding Quechua to be an essential component of their ethnic identity, but not speaking the language themselves. As people have given up traditional lifestyles and become more similar to the white townspeople, the cultural features marking the boundaries between them and others have changed. This has led to a desire for revitalization in order to reinvest language with a boundary marking function that it has lost. In other communities, however, where clothing and traditional agricultural work still mark people as indigenous, there is little need for language to function as an identity marker and the maintenance of Quechua is not seen as essential to group identity. Thus, communities differ in the extent to which Quechua is regarded as a core value of culture. Communities still speaking Quechua but about to lose it are not concerned, but others further along the road to shift are worried about its loss. While the referential and communicative functions of Quechua may have weakened, its value as an indexical sign of ethnic membership has strengthened (King 2001).

In some places where traditional languages have disappeared, people may vest their identity in a new language, in some cases in a distinctive variety of the dominant language, or in other cases, a creole language. In large parts of Australia many Aboriginal people speak Aboriginal English, Torres Strait Creole, or Kriol (an English lexicon creole), as their first language. In other parts of the world too many people speak English or another language as a second or additional language without a loss of cultural identity. Because acquisition of the dominant language proceeds in tandem with the loss of the minority language, distinctive features of a receding language may also be transferred to and survive in an equally distinctive form of the dominant language replacing it. The Highland variety of English to which terminal Scottish Gaelic speakers shifted incorporates a large number of the most distinctive phonetic traits of their Gaelic. Similarly, some aspects of Aboriginal identity and ways of speaking live on in the local and highly distinctive (though stigmatized) varieties of English spoken among many young people now in parts of Australia. In the absence of indigenous languages in most parts of the Caribbean due to the extermination of indigenous populations by colonization, creoles are able to unify diverse groups and serve as a badge of authenticity validating a new local identity. In parts of the French Caribbean, for instance, debates about the role and status of creole languages assumed a prominent place in the cultural identity and political status of the islands vis-à-vis France, just as