Language Issues in Comparative Education

Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Non-Dominant Languages and Cultures

Carol Benson
Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

and

Kimmo Kosonen (Eds.)
Payap University & SIL International, Chiang Mai, Thailand

This volume compiles a unique yet complementary collection of chapters that take a strategic comparative perspective on education systems, regions of the world, and/or ethnolinguistic communities with a focus on non-dominant languages and cultures in education. Comparison and contrast within each article and across articles illustrates the potential for using home languages – which in many cases are in non-dominant positions relative to other languages in society – in inclusive multilingual and multicultural forms of education. The 22 authors demonstrate how bringing non-dominant languages and cultures into schooling has liberatory, transformative potential for learners from ethnolinguistic communities that have previously been excluded from access to quality basic education.

The authors deal not only with educational development in specific low-income and emerging countries in Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam), Latin America (Guatemala and Mexico) and Africa (Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania), but also with efforts to reach marginalized ethnolinguistic communities in high-income North American countries (Canada and the USA). In the introductory chapter the editors highlight common and cross-cutting themes and propose appropriate, sometimes new terminology for the discussion of linguistic and cultural issues in education, particularly in low-income multilingual countries. Likewise, using examples from additional countries and contexts, the three final chapters address cross-cutting issues related to language and culture in educational research and development.

The authors and editors of this volume share a common commitment to comparativism in their methods and analysis, and aim to contribute to more inclusive and relevant education for all.

“A richly textured collection which offers a powerful vision of the possible, now and in the future.”
Alamin Mazrui, Rutgers State University of New Jersey, USA

“This book takes the local perspective of non-dominant language communities in arguing for a multilingual habitus in educational development. Benson and Kosonen masterfully extend theories and clarify terminology that is inclusive of the non-dominant contexts described here.”
Ofelia García, City University of New York, USA
LANGUAGE ISSUES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION
COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: A DIVERSITY OF VOICES
Volume 24

Series Editors
Allan Pitman
University of Western Ontario, Canada
Miguel A. Pereyra
University of Granada

Editorial Board
Mark Bray, International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, France
Ali Abdi, University of Alberta, Canada
Christine Fox, University of Wollongong, Australia
Steven Klees, University of Maryland, USA
Nagwa Megahed, Ain Shams University, Egypt
Crain Soudien, University of Cape Town, South Africa
David Turner, University of Glamorgan, England
Medardo Tapia Uribe, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico

Scope

Comparative and International Education: A Diversity of Voices aims to provide a comprehensive range of titles, making available to readers work from across the comparative and international education research community. Authors will represent as broad a range of voices as possible, from geographic, cultural and ideological standpoints. The editors are making a conscious effort to disseminate the work of newer scholars as well as that of well-established writers. The series includes authored books and edited works focusing upon current issues and controversies in a field that is undergoing changes as profound as the geopolitical and economic forces that are reshaping our worlds. The series aims to provide books which present new work, in which the range of methodologies associated with comparative education and international education are both exemplified and opened up for debate. As the series develops, it is intended that new writers from settings and locations not frequently part of the English language discourse will find a place in the list.
Language Issues in Comparative Education
Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Non-Dominant Languages and Cultures

Edited by

Carol Benson
Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

and

Kimmo Kosonen
Payap University & SIL International, Chiang Mai, Thailand

SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM / BOSTON / TAIPEI
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated with love and respect to the memory of

Dr. Neville Alexander
22 October 1936–27 August 2012

proponent of a multilingual, multicultural South Africa
and world
“Serious, solid, convincing, interesting, lots of new data. All educational decision makers need this book – so do teachers and politicians. If research can change people’s monolingual mindset and give non-dominant language speakers (and, with them, all of us) a chance, this is the book.”
– Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Emerita, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

“This book moves education toward liberation of students and educators, while liberating readers from unquestioned assumptions in the language and education field. Drawing on cases from minoritized communities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, the book takes the local perspective of non-dominant language communities in arguing for a multilingual habitus in educational development. Beyond the volume’s comprehensiveness and comparative focus, Benson and Kosonen masterfully extend theories and clarify terminology that is inclusive of the non-dominant contexts that are here included.”
– Ofelia García, City University of New York, USA

“Language Issues in Comparative Education is an important contribution to our understanding of the complex interplay between language policies and practices in education and the broader socio-political and economic forces that shape society as a whole. A richly textured collection, it offers a powerful vision of the possible, now and in the future.”
– Alamin Mazrui, Rutgers State University of New Jersey, USA

“Careful attention to the language part of multilingual education, and the intimate connection of language and culture, makes this book essential reading for researchers and practitioners alike. Different contexts, different issues, different foci distinguish the chapters, but the imperative to incorporate learners’ languages in their educational experience unites them.”
– Carolyn Temple Adger, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington DC, USA
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

*Sheldon Shaeffer*

Introduction: Inclusive teaching and learning through the use of non-dominant languages and cultures

*Kimmo Kosonen & Carol Benson*

## Part I: Language-in-education policy issues

1. Canada’s big chill: Indigenous languages in education

*Jessica Ball & Onowa McIvor*

2. The use of non-dominant languages in education in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam: Two steps forward, one step back

*Kimmo Kosonen*

3. Language in Afghanistan’s education reform: Does it play a role in peace and reconciliation?

*Stephen A. Bahry*

4. Language and liberation. Language of instruction for mathematics and science: A comparison and contrast of practices focusing on Tanzania

*Birgit Brock-Utne*

## Part II: Community and parent voices

5. Indigenous Mexican languages and the politics of language shift in the United States

*Laura Menchaca Bishop & Prema Kelley*

6. “We lost our culture with civilization”: Community perceptions of Indigenous knowledge and education in Senegal

*Karla Giuliano Sarr*

## Part III: Classroom practices and teacher voices

7. First language-based preschools in Adivasi communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

*Govri Vijayakumar, Elizabeth Pearce & Meherun Nahar*
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

8. Teachers as agents of change within Indigenous education programs in Guatemala and Mexico: Examining some outcomes of cross-border professional development  
   *Janelle M. Johnson*  
   153

9. Effective activities to support teachers’ transition into the MTBMLE classroom in the Philippines  
   *Rebecca Stone*  
   171

10. English medium instruction and examining in Zanzibar: Ambition, pipe dreams and realities  
    *Pauline Rea-Dickins & Guoxing Yu*  
    189

11. Implementation of local curriculum in Mozambican primary schools: Realities and challenges  
    *Nuzzly Ruiz de Forsberg & Alicia Borges Månsson*  
    207

12. Culture as a vehicle, not a bridge: Community-based education in autonomous regions of Nicaragua and in the Navajo Nation, USA  
    *Kerry White*  
    225

## Part IV: Researcher voices

13. Teaching and assessing independent reading skills in multilingual African countries: Not as simple as ABC  
    *Leila Schroeder*  
    245

14. Exploring the development of reading in multilingual education Programs  
    *Stephen L. Walter*  
    265

15. Towards adopting a multilingual habitus in educational development  
    *Carol Benson*  
    283

## Contributors

303
I’m a glass half-empty kind of person, inclined to a pessimistic view of the present and even more of the future. From this point of view, the world’s “now” is becoming ever less inclusive and its “then” ever less likely to be sustainable.

Many countries of the world have achieved or are in the process of achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) targets set for the world in 2000 and due to be achieved by 2015. This is the good, glass half-full picture. But many of these achievements have been the result of increases in nationally aggregated averages (e.g. in school enrolment, child survival etc.) which have masked what are often sharply increased disparities within nations (glass half-empty!) by gender, ability, location (urban-rural-remote), socio-economic status (upper versus lower quintile) and ethnic/linguistic status (majority/dominant versus minority/non-dominant). Thus, the world is becoming both less inclusive, with the marginalized and disempowered becoming more so, and less sustainable, as many demographic, social, economic, and environmental trends appear to be going in the wrong direction. It is therefore essential to address the reasons for these trends and examine what can be done to fill the glass.

This volume, “Language Issues in Comparative Education: Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Non-dominant Languages and Cultures,” addresses these trends in two critical ways. First, the authors explore the role of languages and cultures in education systems in transforming and liberating the potential of learners from ethnolinguistic communities usually excluded from access to quality basic education. The logic is persuasive: (1) hundreds of millions of children around the world are forced to study in a language they barely understand; and (2) children become most easily literate in their mother tongue, their language of daily use, and the skills they gain in this process can be applied subsequently to gain literacy in national and international languages. Bringing their languages and cultures into the classroom is thus an important way to make education more inclusive and equitable.

Some of the authors explore opposition to this logic in terms of practical obstacles (too many languages, no orthographies, no teachers, no texts, no funds) – obstacles usually able to be resolved by well-planned mother tongue-based programs – and, more profoundly, a deeply embedded ideology of national unity (one people, one language, one nation) and a consequent fear of doing anything to empower groups likely to threaten this ideology. They also explore how ethnolinguistic minorities or even majorities are kept out of the mainstream of their nation’s social, economic, and political life and institutions, and how these excluded people are let into that mainstream life – if at all – only once they leave behind their ethnic and linguistic identity and take on the language and culture of
The dominant society, a society usually larger in numbers, richer, and more politically powerful.

The contributions of this volume should also be seen in light of the broader issue – beyond education but able to be prevented by education – of the absolute loss of languages and the cultures that carry them in the context of a globalizing and modernizing world. Languages are living things; they need to develop, thrive, and be used effectively, including in education – and many need to be revitalized and even saved from an early death – in order for all people of the world, especially those most excluded and disadvantaged, to benefit from development. A dynamic, living language, in other words, is essential to the well-being and sustainability of any human society. But linguistic diversity, as with cultural diversity and biological diversity, is under serious threat around the world, with a large percentage of the several thousand languages currently spoken likely to die by the end of the century; ironically, education is one of the most significant perpetrators of this trend.

In the current and post-2015 development agenda, the discourse revolves around economic, social and, above all, environmental sustainability (especially, most visibly, climate change) – with culture and language, it seems, relegated to a place of much less importance. This volume brings these important themes back into the spotlight, offering comparative views of what linguistically and culturally relevant education means for learners and their communities. Though most of the authors discuss the challenges faced by non-dominant communities, many also describe successes in countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines and Thailand in Asia as well as Cameroon, Eritrea, and Kenya in Africa. Others use ethnography to give voice to members of non-dominant community members as diverse as Indigenous Mexican mothers and Navajo elders in the United States and Pulaar school directors in Senegal.

If readers take these messages to heart, this volume may make a significant difference to the discourse around language and culture in education: firstly at the school level, by helping to empower ethnolinguistic minorities to speak, read, and further develop their own language and culture and to learn better in the process; and secondly, in the global debate around any future development agenda(s), in order to ensure a role for linguistic and cultural diversity in filling the glass, guaranteeing for all of us a sustainable future.

Sheldon Shaeffer
Consultant and Former Director
UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education
Bangkok
INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Teaching and Learning through the Use of Non-Dominant Languages and Cultures

LANGUAGE ISSUES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

This book explores current issues of language(s), culture(s) and power in education. Each chapter expands on a paper presented at the 55th Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) held in Montreal, Quebec in May 2011 with the theme L’éducation c’est ce qui libère/Education is that which liberates. It is fitting that we came together in officially bilingual, actually multilingual and multicultural Montreal. We as authors and editors were inspired both by the theme of liberation and by the relevance of comparative research and analysis to the exploration of linguistic and cultural issues in education. Taken as a whole, our chapters draw linkages between the experiences of Indigenous people of the Americas, multilingual Africans and ethnolinguistic minority people in Asia in discussing efforts to bring learners’ own non-dominant languages and cultures into the educational systems that purport to serve them.

For an education system to be truly liberatory, it must deal with issues of domination, and must attempt to right some wrongs (Ghosh, 2011). We the editors both have as a central research focus the mismatch between the languages people speak and the languages that are privileged by the school and other institutions of power. Some time ago we began using the term non-dominant languages (abbreviated as NDLs) to refer to the languages or language varieties spoken in a given state that are not considered the most prominent in terms of number, prestige or official use by the government and/or the education system (Kosonen, 2010). In contrast, the term dominant language (DL) refers to the/a language that has official status and high prestige and is spoken by dominant group members (Benson & Kosonen, 2012). These language-related terms have been extended to cultures and social groups in this volume, as they have been adopted by many of our contributors to highlight the power differentials involved in the quest for more equitable educational approaches.

It has been estimated that there are nearly 7000 languages spoken in the world today (Lewis, 2009), yet only a few hundred of them are used as languages of education, and most of these are dominant languages (see table in Walter and...
Benson, 2012: 283). Despite the fact that most countries and indeed their societies are multilingual, their educational systems tend to function in only one or two languages, due in part to the long-standing fallacy that national unity is built around a single language. Against this fallacy we would argue that using one language and excluding many others actually creates divisions, inequalities and inequities, because it means that hundreds of millions of people worldwide are forced to learn – or teach – through a language in which they are not proficient.

Lack of proficiency in the language of instruction, when viewed from a dominant and monolingual perspective, is generally seen as a deficiency, and learners from non-dominant groups are thus perceived as deficient even before they begin their school careers. It is common to hear that there is a “language barrier.” Learners are not seen for what they already know and can do, which would be consistent with constructivist theory and learner-centered approaches (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978); instead they are identified by what they are missing. Ruiz (1984) would call this a “language as problem” orientation. Gogolin (2002; see also Bourdieu, 1991) gets to the root of this orientation by showing how a monolingual habitus, or set of unquestioned assumptions concerning the desirability of a single dominant language, governs a great deal of decision-making in education worldwide. As a result, bi- or multilingualism is often rendered either invisible or undesirable.

We can thus ask this question: Is the school designed for the learner, or is it trying to impose on that learner a single dominant language, culture and way of life? Further, if we adopt the complementary views that the process of education can be liberated and liberating (e.g. Freire, 1970) and that a habitus can change as the result of new experiences (e.g. Bourdieu, 1991), we must ask a follow-up question: How can people’s eyes be opened to the alternatives?

Most of the chapters in this book are concerned with appropriate and participatory design of educational services for members of non-dominant groups. Reflecting an important area of research and practice in comparative and international education, many authors examine the roles played by national ministries of education and international development agencies. Underlying our discussions is an underlying critique of long-standing “best practices” where planners replicate dominant models of schooling nationally and internationally, often reproducing inequities and limiting people’s opportunities for further learning and employment. The promotion of dominant languages in education maintains and even widens the gap between dominant and non-dominant groups. This has long been true in low-income “Southern” countries, where languages imposed by colonial and/or local elites have been privileged as national and/or official languages. The North is no exception; more serious consideration of educational language issues is clearly needed when it comes to serving regional and minority groups as well as new multilingual and multicultural communities created by internal and international migration.1

Since the 1990s, the concept of Education for All and subsequent establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (e.g. UNESCO, 2012; United Nations, 2012) have driven rapid expansion of educational systems around the world. In
recent years increasing attention has been paid to the quality of mass education and the degree to which it is inclusive of all learners. Due to improved availability of educational statistics disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and language (e.g. EFA GMR, 2011), disparities in educational achievement which were previously hidden have come to light, and issues of language and culture are being re-examined. These issues are not new; over sixty years ago UNESCO made a clear statement of the necessity of the learner’s home language (“mother tongue”) in basic education (UNESCO, 1953). What is new is that there is greater and wider recognition by education ministries, development agencies and even stakeholders regarding the cross-cutting nature of language(s) and culture(s) in education. This means more programs and policies where learners’ own languages are used for some part of instruction, and where learners’ cultures are better represented in curricula and materials (see Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012 for some recent examples). High-level discussions between researchers, development agencies and politicians are taking place, such as a landmark international conference organized in Bangkok in November of 2010 by a group of development partners that explicitly linked achievement of the MDGs to using learners’ own languages for instruction (UNESCO, 2010, 2012). Highlighted speakers who described the importance of first languages in education at the conference included the Prime Minister of Thailand and the former First Lady of East Timor (Royal Thai Embassy, 2010; SEAMEO, 2010). Recent years have also seen the expansion of international and regional networks by donors, cooperation agencies and NGOs, practitioners, academics and others involved in language, education and development issues.

This new or renewed attention being paid to language of instruction issues has brought in new partners, and new challenges. One challenge appears to be getting specialists in different fields to speak with and listen to each other. A current example is the USA-led push for early grade reading assessment (EGRA) and the much-needed attention to early literacy it has brought about in low-income multilingual countries. As shown by some contributions to this volume, many aspects of the EGRA assessment and resulting promotion of certain teaching and learning approaches are based on research and practice in the North, specifically in monolingual English-speaking contexts, and need to be better informed by research on multilingual, multicultural education. Fortunately, CIES has provided an important forum for exchanges between specialists, with contributions from some of the networks already mentioned, and with this collection of chapters we aim to carry the discussions forward.

This volume thus brings together some of the latest thinking and research on language in comparative education, with a timely focus on how non-dominant languages and cultures can contribute to the liberation of learners as well as education systems through inclusive educational approaches. Though the issues are quite universal, they are manifested in different ways in different contexts, and we have been able to capture some of that diversity by including both low- and high-income country cases and by exploring a wide range of approaches from pre-primary to higher education, including adult basic education and teacher professionalization. Throughout the book we link development efforts with
longstanding research on and principles of multilingual, multicultural education. It is our aim to promote more organized, collaborative progress toward incorporating learners’ languages and cultures into education for quality, equity and liberation.

DISCUSSING LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION: KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Like the field of comparative and international education and CIES as an organization, the chapters of this volume approach the theme from a variety of academic disciplines and perspectives. Some of the authors are teachers or teacher trainers; some are anthropologists or linguists; some are development practitioners and some language policy specialists; and all are educational researchers. We represent the diversity of backgrounds one finds working in educational development, where terms, concepts and contexts can be quite distinct.

For this volume to provide a useful and coherent comparative analysis of individual contexts and world regions, we as editors asked the contributors to make use of key terms and concepts in the same ways we understood them, or to make any unconventional uses or diverging views explicit. Diversity in terminology is understandable given the different realities experienced by stakeholders in different countries and regions, as well as the constant need to find ways to contest standard terms, particularly in calling attention to oppressive power relations. We have thus shared definitions across chapters and developed our thinking throughout the process. This book now represents our collective efforts to consolidate some of the latest – and in our opinion the most relevant – terminology being used in the study of language issues in comparative education. We hope it will be useful to fellow researchers as well as to those with whom we work, including local practitioners and specialists, policymakers and international colleagues who are as yet unfamiliar with concepts in multilingual, multicultural education.

Terms Related to Non-Dominant Communities

We use the term ethnolinguistic community or group to refer to a group of people who share a culture, ethnicity and/or language that distinguishes them from other communities (Kosonen, 2005, 2010). All people are members of one or more ethnolinguistic communities, whether they are non-dominant or dominant in the society or country in which they live. We use ethnolinguistic minority in reference to an ethnolinguistic community which is either fewer in terms of number or less prestigious in terms of power and economic status than the predominant group(s) in the given state (ibid.).

In different parts of the world, terms such as “ethnic minorities,” “tribals,” “hill tribes,” “natives” or “indigenous peoples” are used to discuss ethnolinguistic minority communities. Though these terms are used even by official sources, they are contested, may be derogatory, and are understood differently in different contexts. Because they make cross-national comparison difficult, they are rarely used in this volume, and exceptions are duly noted.
“Indigenous Peoples,” which is a problematic term in some parts of the world, is widely used in the Americas and in contexts where the legal rights of original peoples are being supported, e.g. for the Saami of northern Europe or certain groups in Southeast Asian countries. The United Nations, for example, has developed international legal instruments to recognize and promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010), though the definitions provided are very broad in an attempt to cover many different situations. Other examples would be Aboriginal Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, cases not covered in this volume but well represented elsewhere. Ball and McIvor (Chapter 1 in this volume) provide some guidance, defining Indigenous Peoples as “the first peoples of a colonized land.” In the Canadian context they are specifically referring to three types of Indigenous groups: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

With this guidance, we use the term Indigenous with a capital I to privilege the peoples or life ways that originate from the geographical place in question as opposed to coming from outside. In this book, Indigenous is applied most often to Original Peoples of the Americas, where they can also be considered ethnolinguistic minorities with distinct cultures. Many speak non-dominant languages – but not all, due to past and present-day oppression, as is the case of Navajo in the USA and minority groups of Coastal Nicaragua (White, Chapter 12) along with Indigenous Mexicans living in the USA (Menchaca Bishop & Kelly, Chapter 5). Interestingly, we rarely use the term Indigenous in African or Asian countries, where nearly everyone is indigenous to the continent.

The term ethnolinguistic minority is applied most often in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Kosonen, Chapter 2; Stone, Chapter 9). It should be noted that not all ethnolinguistic minorities are Indigenous Peoples, nor are they always numerical minorities:

[T]he term ‘minority’ is often ambiguous and may be interpreted differently in distinct contexts because it may have both numerical and social or political dimensions. In some cases it may be simply used as a euphemism for non-elite or subordinate groups, whether they constitute a numerical majority or minority in relation to some other group that is politically and socially dominant. (UNESCO, 2003: 13)

In many Asian countries there are non-dominant ethnolinguistic communities that are in the majority, or at least are more numerous than dominant groups (Lewis, 2009), e.g. speakers of Western Punjabi in Pakistan and Javanese in Indonesia, both of which are the largest ethnolinguistic communities in their countries. Neither is discussed in this volume, but their cases are comparable to those of large Indigenous groups like Quechua/Quichua speakers in Bolivia and Peru, or to ethnolinguistic groups in multilingual African countries, where relative dominance or non-dominance is due to historical, political or other power-related factors but not directly to population size.
Terms Related to Languages in Education

We have adopted the term non-dominant languages (NDLs) in part to avoid the more ambiguous terms “minority language” or “indigenous language,” and in part to highlight the oppressed status of these languages relative to dominant languages (DLs) of power, which is useful when discussing education policy and school use of learners’ home languages. However, as already mentioned, the NDL-DL distinction may not always be clear; for example, some so-called mother tongue-based multilingual education programs are not using each learner’s home language but rather a “dominant NDL” of the region, or a dominant (standard) variety of the local NDL. Neither case is necessarily bad; a more widely spoken NDL is likely to be “closer” linguistically and/or culturally to learners’ actual first languages than the DL would be, and use of a “dominant NDL” may possibly be more feasible economically (see e.g. Benson’s 2003 example from Guinea-Bissau, and Brock-Utne’s arguments regarding Kiswahili in Tanzania, Chapter 4 in this volume). However, for pedagogical purposes it is important to differentiate between types of NDLs, and that necessitates additional terms.

In this book we consider a local language (also called vernacular or Indigenous language by some) to be one spoken in a relatively restricted geographical area, and one not commonly learned as a second language by people outside the community (Kosonen, 2005). Local languages are almost exclusively autochthonous, i.e. they originate from the place where they are spoken, and nearly always NDLs. They tend to: (a) lack written form; (b) be in the early stages of linguistic development (i.e. not yet standardized); and/or (c) be considered unsuitable for use in education due to low status relative to the DL and/or small number of speakers (ibid.). While it can be argued that local languages should be used in education, it is rarely possible through official means.

The term first language or L1 refers to a language a person speaks as a mother tongue, vernacular, native language, or home language. It should be noted that bi- or multilingual people may consider several languages their home or first languages. For L1 we use the range of definitions of mother tongue by Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) as a language that one (a) has learnt first; (b) identifies with; (c) knows best; and/or (d) uses most (see also UNESCO, 2003). We propose making the term plural (an option that Skutnabb-Kangas herself supports) and adding (e) speaks and understands competently enough to learn academic content at the appropriate age level (Benson & Kosonen, 2012). Benson (chapter 15, this volume) notes that for educational purposes it is important to assess which languages individual learners speak proficiently, particularly when they enter school. According to language learning theory and principles of bilingual education (e.g. Cummins, 2009; Thomas and Collier, 2002), having two or more strong NDLs in one’s repertoire should be an asset to the learning of additional languages (both NDLs and DLs) as well as academic content.

With regard to standard or non-standard varieties (also known as “dialects”) of NDLs, or DLs for that matter, the field lacks well-defined terminology. As already mentioned, we avoid the term “dialect” because of its inaccurate use, particularly
INTRODUCTION

in post-colonial countries, to imply that NDLs are not fully developed “languages.” “Dialect” has also been used with slightly more accuracy to refer to pidgins and creoles that developed as a result of historic contact between DLs and NDLs, but the pejorative connotation remains, despite the fact that they are fully developed languages that tend to serve as lingua francae (see below) and have been successfully used in education (see e.g. the work of Siegel, 1997, 2008).

The somewhat fuzzy distinction between language and variety (or dialect in the linguistic sense) involves mutual intelligibility; i.e. when speakers of different varieties understand each other sufficiently and can communicate without great difficulty they can be said to speak varieties or dialects of the same language (Kosonen, 2005). Mutual intelligibility can be defined in lexical terms, e.g. two varieties share a high percentage of the same vocabulary, or in attitudinal terms, but not all linguists agree on the criteria to differentiate between a language and a dialect (see Lewis, 2009, for widely accepted criteria). There are at least two problems with the variety issue from our point of view. The first problem is that they may represent a monolingual habitus; multilingual speakers of Bantu languages, for example, are metalinguistically aware enough to be able to adapt their own languages to understand their neighbors but not necessarily those living further away, leading specialists to refer to the Bantu languages as a continuum (e.g. Prah, 2008). In terms of educational language use, this would suggest that “dominant NDLs” could be used for education in certain regions, rather than attempting to use each local language. However, the second problem with the variety issue is that mutual intelligibility is judged by adult speakers, not by school-aged children. It cannot be expected that young children who are just beginning their school careers have had exposure to a standard variety of their local NDL or other languages spoken in the area.

A language of wider communication (LWC) – also called a lingua franca, regional language or trade language – is a language that speakers of different local languages use to communicate with each other (Kosonen, 2005), and which is spoken more widely than a local or home language; examples are creoles (as mentioned above) or widely spoken regional languages like Wolof in Senegal (see Sarr, chapter 6 in this volume), used by various ethnolinguistic communities to communicate with each other. As dominant NDLs, they may be useful in education, but as mentioned above they may not be so widely spoken among young children.

A second language (L2) is seen broadly as a language that is not the learner’s first language, but one that she or he is required to study or use. It may be an LWC, i.e. spoken in the immediate environment of the learner, or it may be a foreign language, i.e. not heard in the learner’s environment (Kosonen, 2005). For speakers of NDLs, the L2 is often a DL, usually a national or official language, used in formal domains like schools, clinics and government. The main problem with the concept of L2 in education is that the pedagogical strategies should be different depending on whether the L2 is an LWC or a foreign language. Benson (Chapter 15 in this volume) proposes an elaboration of the L2 concept to distinguish between the two, using L2_env, for a language to which the learner is exposed in
her/his environment and $L_{2_{\text{alt}}}$ for a language to which the learner is exposed only at school.

According to Crystal (1999: 227), a national language is “a language that is considered to be the chief language of a nation state,” whereas an official language is a language that is “used in such public domains as the law courts, government, and broadcasting. In many countries, there is no difference between the national and official language” (Crystal, ibid.). It should be noted, however, that in some post-colonial contexts, particularly African ones, national languages refer to non-dominant languages spoken within the “nation”; further, some countries like Nigeria and Guinea use the term national languages to endow certain larger or more widely used NDLs with a special status that is below official but above other NDLs.

A final term that is used in this volume is international language, referring most often to European ex-colonial (or exogenous) languages. In post-colonial countries these may also be official languages, particularly in Latin America and many parts of Africa, though less so in Asia.

Terms in Bi- and Multilingual Education

“Bilingualism or multilingualism is the use of more than one language in daily life” (UNESCO, 2003: 12), but it is also the purposeful use of two or more languages in educational policy and practice. Terms in this domain often refer to issues in language policy and/or to certain models or methodologies that are put in place to make education more equitable and inclusive. They are in opposition to terms like submersion education, which refers to the instructional use of a language that learners do not understand or speak well. Submersion, which connotes drowning, occurs when children who speak NDLs are put into DL-medium classrooms without any provision for accommodating or alleviating the disadvantages created by lack of understanding (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000: 582-587).

Language policy in this volume means legislation on and de facto practices pertaining to the use of languages in a society, whereas language-in-education policy means legislation on and practices pertaining to languages or media of instruction and languages of literacy used in basic education (Kosonen & Young, 2009). A language of instruction is a language through which the contents of the curriculum in a given educational system or a part of it are taught and learned, whereas a language of literacy is a language through which reading and writing are initially learned, for example, both through printed written materials and oral language development (Kosonen, 2005; Kosonen & Young, 2009).

There are two common terms related to individual language proficiencies and/or to the goals of a bi- or multilingual program: multilingual/multilingualism and plurilingual/plurilingualism. These terms, which tend to be used interchangeably in English-based international discourse, can refer to societies as well as to individuals. However, in Europe (and in Bahry’s Chapter 3 in this volume), a distinction is made, where multilingual refers to societies and plurilingual to
individuals (e.g. Council of Europe, 2006). We find this an interesting distinction which remains to be explored.

Bilingual/multilingual education (MLE) means the systematic use of more than one language for instruction and literacy learning, and biliteracy refers to the use of more than one language for reading and writing. Mother tongue-based, L1-based or first language first MLE (which is increasingly being abbreviated MTBMLE in the literature) refers to a system of multilingual education which begins with or is based on learners’ first language or mother tongue (see Benson, Chapter 15 in this volume). This term is used to distinguish MLE based on learners’ own languages from programs that employ several languages but exclude learners’ own. It also excludes programs that use the L1 orally as an auxiliary language to facilitate understanding of the curricular content and textbooks written in DLs (Kosonen & Young, 2009). Oral use of a language can be officially endorsed, but it is more often informal based on the decisions at the school level or even in individual classrooms. We don’t consider oral use of a language – even if it is addition to the official language of instruction – making an education system bi-/multilingual.

As the term mother tongue is problematic when taken literally – which happens when second-language speakers use the term in any language, e.g. the United Nations’ ‘Mother Language Day’ – we prefer to use first language-based or L1-based MLE. We are aware that this term also requires further development, which we hope will be sparked by this volume.

A final aspect of MLE that is central to the discussions in this volume is the intercultural aspect of bi- and multilingual programs. Bilingual intercultural education (EIB/BIE), from the Spanish educación intercultural bilingüe as practiced in countries like Bolivia and Guatemala, refers to the very important cultural components of inclusive education for Indigenous learners. In its Latin American conceptualization, EIB/BIE is meant to integrate local cultural values and lifeways into L1 instruction and to teach about the dominant culture while teaching the dominant language as an L2 or foreign language. In other parts of the world, local culture has been brought into the classroom in the name of curricular relevance, i.e. to help learners understand curricular content, whether or not the L1 is used as a medium of instruction. A relatively recent incarnation of this approach has been to add a separate local curriculum component to primary curricula. As Ruiz de Forsberg and Borges Månsson describe in the case of Mozambique (Chapter 11, this volume), operationalizing the local curriculum component involves the support of community members, who are called on to share local skills (also called Indigenous knowledges; see e.g. Sarr in Chapter 6, this volume) using the NDL that they share with learners. Recent work in Latin America (López, 2009 in Benson, Chapter 15, this volume) uses the concept of interculturalism to empower learners to address the power differentials between dominant cultures and their own.
Terms Related to Development of NDLs for Educational Use

Language development in the context of language planning is commonly seen as consisting of three parts: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning (Cooper, 1989). Status planning refers to decisions about which languages are used for official and educational purposes, i.e. language policy. Acquisition planning has to do with the methods by which people should be taught and learn particular languages. Finally, corpus planning encompasses linguistic activities related to development of languages themselves, including the creation and improvement of writing systems and standardization of language use in written form. Non-dominant languages are frequently in need of development in written form for domains like education in which they have traditionally been underutilized. In this volume, discussions of language or linguistic development of NDLs refer mainly to corpus planning to enable acquisition planning, i.e. use of these NDLs in education.

Some contributors to this volume discuss the need to create or improve the orthography of an NDL, which is a standard system for writing that includes spelling and punctuation rules (Crystal, 1999). A closely related term is script, which is “the graphic form of the units of a writing system (e.g. the Roman vs. the Cyrillic alphabet)” (Crystal, 1999: 299). Some languages use an alphabet, or set of symbols (letters) that represent the sounds of the language; others (e.g. Mandarin) use pictographs or other visual representations of meaningful units of speech.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This volume comprises 15 chapters in addition to this Introduction that take a strategic comparative perspective on education systems, regions of the world, and ethnolinguistic groups. Among the authors are researchers who are well established in the field as well as new scholars whose research is recent and relevant. Individually and together, we examine the liberatory potential of using non-dominant languages and cultures in education. The chapters are divided into four broad themes: 1) language-in-education policy issues, 2) community and parent voices, 3) classroom practices and teacher voices, and 4) researcher voices. In this section we provide a brief summary of each theme and chapter.

Before our detailed description of the contents, we would like to call attention to the form in which they are presented, which we feel is consistent with the intent of this volume. Each chapter begins with an abstract written in a non-dominant or lesser-known language, which serves to expose readers to these languages, to demonstrate that they can be used to express academic concepts, and to exhibit the wealth of linguistic resources that are available to us all. Each language is identified by a three-letter code which, according to an international linguistic standard, indicates the exact variety used (see Lewis, 2009, for more information on this system).

Part I begins with overarching issues of language policy in education. There are four chapters with examples from three continents: Africa, Asia and North
INTRODUCTION

America. In Chapter 1, Jessica Ball and Onowa McIvor start off the discussion with a highly critical review of the situation of Indigenous languages and cultures in education in Canada, setting the stage for other contributors to address issues of power and domination. They explore community-driven heritage language teaching as a small but positive step toward respecting Indigenous learners, and outline a revitalization program that would go well beyond formal education to involve non-dominant group members in their own liberatory processes.

With Chapter 2, Kimmo Kosonen moves the discussion to Southeast Asia and a comparison and contrast of recent language-in-education policy developments in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. His critical analysis demonstrates how written policies in Cambodia and Thailand appear to be working in parallel with regional trends to provide more latitude for NDLs in education, while Vietnam appears to be going against the trend by weakening official written policy support for NDLs. Interestingly, in Vietnam the expansion of some provincial level initiatives is underway, which may actually facilitate implementation of NDL-based MLE.

Stephen Bahry’s Chapter 3 makes a highly significant contribution to the literature on Afghanistan with his discussion of the potential role of language in educational reform and societal reconstruction. Pulling together the scant available information about the country’s linguistic and societal diversity and about current language-in-education policies and practices, he demonstrates that for education reform to succeed, policy makers – along with the international organizations supporting them – must take learners’ own languages into account.

In Chapter 4, Birgit Brock-Utne wraps up the first part of this volume by extending her impressive body of work on language and education issues in Eastern Africa to the examples of Sri Lanka and Malaysia to call attention to the importance of teaching technical subjects in learners’ first languages. Using these and other examples, she critiques the 2006 decision by Zanzibar to reintroduce DL English as the language of instruction for mathematics and the sciences beginning at grade five, which is both disempowering and unnecessary given that NDL Kiswahili is the first language of all learners in Zanzibar.

Part II of the volume moves us from the big picture to more local perspectives with two studies that give voice to NDL community members regarding how their languages and cultures should or should not be a part of their children’s educations. The first study comes in Chapter 5, by Laura Menchaca Bishop and Prema Kelley, who explore the informal language policies and practices implemented at home by Indigenous Mexican families living in New York. Their interviews demonstrate that parents are acutely aware that their NDLs are doubly dominated, both by Mexican Spanish and by American English. Lacking support from educators or from society, parents may sacrifice their languages and cultures in an effort to spare their children the discrimination they have experienced themselves.

The second study, by Karla Giuliano Sarr in Chapter 6, turns our attention to Indigenous knowledge and education in southeastern Senegal. Using an innovative classroom game along with interview data, she explores the views of children, teachers, and community members regarding Indigenous and Western forms of knowledge. Due to tension between these forms of knowledge, people develop a
sense of inadequacy and a negative view of their own culture that is only exacerbated by use of DL French as a language of instruction. The study demonstrates that the non-dominant language and culture must be respected by the school for education to be liberatory.

Part III directs our attention to classroom practices and the perspectives of teachers, representing another range of contexts from Africa, Asia and the Americas. Beginning with Chapter 7, Gowri Vijayakumar, Elizabeth Pearce and Meherun Nahar collaborate to evaluate a bilingual, bicultural preschool program for Adivasi children in Bangladesh. Their data show that children from this program outperform their peers in language development and cultural awareness, as well as being more engaged in learning. Meanwhile, however, issues of dominance mean that community members and teachers are conflicted about local language use in education beyond the informal preschool level.

In Chapter 8, Janelle Johnson explores teacher attitudes toward their potential role as agents of change in programs for Indigenous learners in Guatemala and Mexico. Having participated in a transnational professional development program, these teachers find themselves struggling to decolonize their own minds as well as the minds of others, and to support learners who are marginalized in economic as well as linguistic and cultural ways. Teachers’ own words are used to highlight the challenges they face in implementing bilingual intercultural pedagogy in the classroom, with implications for field support of bilingual teachers.

Teachers are also the focus of Rebecca Stone’s Chapter 9, this time in the context of an L1-based MLE program in rural Philippines. She examines the effects of specific training activities on Indigenous first grade teachers’ attitudes towards implementing L1-based pedagogy. Her findings – that they need time to learn about their own languages, create their own L1 materials and reflect on their own experiences as learners – have implications for other programs where teachers are being “converted” from L2-based to L1-based teaching.

In Chapter 10, Pauline Rea-Dickins and Guoxing Yu expand on Brock-Utne’s earlier observations about the medium of instruction in Zanzibar, this time using empirical studies to explore student performance in mathematics and the sciences according to different modes of assessment – English only, Kiswahili only, or both languages. Their findings identify specific challenges that learners face when trying to demonstrate their knowledge through an unfamiliar language, yet paradoxically show how learners aspire to use the dominant language at school despite lack of exposure to that language in their daily lives.

Chapter 11 by Nuzzly Ruiz de Forsberg and Alicia Borges Måansson moves the focus to operationalizing the local curriculum component of the educational reform in Mozambican primary schools to include local cultural inputs by community members. Their study raises the question of how communities can be empowered to participate in formal educational processes if decision-making is still done in a top-down manner, but they remain hopeful that the local curriculum will bring community values and languages into the classroom.

Kerry White takes us back to the Americas in Chapter 12 with her comparison of community-based education in two Indigenous contexts: the autonomous
regions of Nicaragua and the Navajo Nation in the USA. While the two communities have different aims – the former working to accommodate diverse languages and cultures, and the latter working to revitalize their heritage language and culture – both have found that success comes from being connected with their histories, respecting deep-seated cultural values, and going beyond the school to make the community the center of activity. This chapter, like the others in this section, offers specific implications for policy and practice.

Part IV concludes this volume with a collection of researcher perspectives, all drawing on the authors’ diverse yet complementary experiences in multilingual and intercultural education to highlight current research and practice – and important future directions. To begin with, Leila Schroeder demonstrates in Chapter 13 that the assessment of early grade reading skills in multilingual African countries is not a matter of simply transposing Western, monolingual English-based assumptions about literacy onto multilingual, multicultural learners. She challenges the applicability of particular theories to reading pedagogy in most African linguistic systems, arguing that literacy and development professionals should exercise much more care in developing appropriate methods and materials.

In Chapter 14, Stephen Walter expands on the theme of reading assessment in multilingual contexts, using data from a range of low-income countries to call into question the use of Western standards for reading rate, reading accuracy, and comprehension to track reading progress in basic education. He finds evidence that language of instruction is the most significant factor in the widely observed “deficit” in reading skill development in low-income countries relative to high-income, which suggests that much more attention should be paid to NDLs in early and developing literacy and learning.

Carol Benson concludes the section and the volume with her Chapter 15 calling for the adoption of a multilingual rather than a monolingual habitus in educational development. Providing evidence of Northern, English-language biases in theoretical perspectives, she argues that existing research and practice require adaptation to the multilingual, multicultural realities of many low-income contexts – from which the North could learn a great deal. She concludes by pointing out that no learner’s needs are met by education in a single dominant language; rather, learners should be helped to develop the bi-/multilingual skills needed to have healthy, productive lives with meaningful interaction at the home and family, community, regional, national and global levels. A multilingual habitus in education would thus be liberatory for all.

NOTES

i See Benson (forthcoming) for a cross-regional analysis of lessons learned in Northern and Southern contexts.

ii We recognize that use of the dominant/non-dominant labels could create false dichotomies, and that among non-dominant groups some dominate relative to others; similarly, groups that are dominant in one context (e.g. Khmer speakers in Cambodia) may be non-dominant in another (e.g. Khmer speakers in Vietnam). It is the relative nature of the terms that gives them their value in discussing how more equitable education can be designed.
In Cambodia, for example, certain groups considered Indigenous have been given the right to bilingual education, while other non-dominant groups are denied this right, leading to controversy over longevity in the region instead of focusing on language rights in education (Benson & Kosonen, 2012; Kosonen, Chapter 2 in this volume).

In these cases, a term that is often applied is heritage language, signaling that even if people no longer speak the language, they identify with the culture and language associated with their grandparents or earlier ancestors.

One exception is the term indigenous language, which is used to distinguish between e.g. African and European colonial languages; however, even this distinction can be complicated due to indigenized varieties of colonial languages, e.g. Mozambican Portuguese or Nigerian English. Another is indigenous knowledge, as discussed by Sarr (Chapter 6) in the case of Senegal.

By actual definition the term “vernacular” is not problematic; however, like the term “dialect,” it is often used in post-colonial contexts, particularly in French or Portuguese, to imply that NDLs do not merit recognition as “languages.”

While this practice is certainly better than nothing, and is even called “bilingual education” in some contexts, specialists do NOT consider it first language-based MLE.

REFERENCES


Benson, Carol (forthcoming). Adopting a multilingual habitus: What North and South can learn from each other regarding the essential role of non-dominant languages in education. In Victoria Zenotz, Jasone Cenoz, & Durk Gorter (Eds.), Minority languages and multilingual education. London: Springer.


Council of Europe (Feb. 2006). Plurilingual education in Europe. 50 years of international cooperation. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, Language Policy Division. (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/PlurilingualEducation_En.pdf)


Kimmo Kosonen  
*SIL International & Payap University, Thailand*

Carol Benson  
*International Consultant in Educational Language Issues*
PART I:

LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES
1. CANADA’S BIG CHILL

Indigenous Languages in Education

ABSTRACT

Canada’s Indigenous languages are at risk of extinction because of government policies that have actively opposed or neglected them. A few positive steps by government include investments in Aboriginal Head Start, a culturally based early childhood program, as well as a federal Aboriginal Languages Initiative. Overall, however, government and public schools have yet to demonstrate serious support for Indigenous language revitalization. Language-in-education policies must address the historically and legislatively created needs of Indigenous Peoples to increase the number of Indigenous language speakers and honor the right of Indigenous children to be educated in their language and according to their heritage, with culturally meaningful curricula, cultural safety, and dignity. This chapter describes how Canada arrived at a state of Indigenous language devastation, then explores some promising developments in community-driven heritage language teaching, and finally presents an ecologically comprehensive strategy for Indigenous language revitalization that draws on and goes beyond the roles of formal schooling.
It’s been a cold 130 years for Canada’s first languages, and the thaw is still awaited. (Fettes & Norton, 2000: 29)

INTRODUCTION
A basic Canadian value is that regardless of where children live, programs for promoting their optimal development should be accessible, available, and linguistically and culturally appropriate to them (Canadian Centre for Justice, 2001). Yet despite being party to innumerable universal declarations and policy documents enshrining the rights of Indigenous Peoples to practice and perpetuate their cultures and languages, including children’s right to both learn and be educated in their mother tongue (United Nations, 2008), government efforts to implement these commitments have moved at glacial speed. Less than one-fifth of Aboriginal children in Canada are learning their ancestral languages, and this number is dwindling (Statistics Canada, 2006). The forecast for preserving and revitalizing Canada’s Indigenous languages is gloomy (Norris, 2007): All are at risk of extinction within this century because of government policies that have actively opposed or neglected them.

This chapter describes how Canada has arrived at the current state of Indigenous language devastation and how schooling has been used to pursue a national policy that recognizes only two colonial languages – English and French – to the detriment of Indigenous language maintenance and of Indigenous children’s school success. Language-in-education policies and a host of other threats undermine Indigenous languages. Immediate threats include the (unofficial) promotion of monolingualism through a lack of state support for a multilingual society and the global expansion of English. Another set of risk factors is the plethora of other competing and urgent concerns facing Indigenous communities due to past and present effects of colonization. These include: poverty, addictions, mental and physical health issues, protracted treaty negotiations, (re)building self-governance, and conflicts between Indigenous communities and various levels of government over rights to natural resources and protection of traditional Indigenous lands.

We begin with an overview of the current status of Indigenous language-in-education developments in Canada, describing both challenges and early indicators of promise. Next we outline the multiple levels of intervention needed to support the survival of Indigenous languages and examine the roles that non-formal and formal education could play to promote Indigenous learners’ language retention and school success. We encourage a view of language as not only a medium of instruction, but as “the life blood of a people,” with the capacity to carry “the spirit of the past to the children of the present” (Aboriginal Head Start Association of British Columbia, 2011: 1). Language is widely understood by Indigenous Peoples as the vehicle for the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, culture, spirituality and identity.
OVERVIEW OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CANADA

Current Conditions

Among the approximately 7,000 languages presently spoken in the world, up to 90% are predicted to disappear within the next century (Lewis, 2009). This pattern holds in Canada, which has 11 Indigenous language families comprised of 50 or more Indigenous languages (Norris, 2007). Language death occurs when one group is colonized and assimilated by another and adopts its language (Crystal, 1997), either forcibly or by choice. Over the past 400 years, Indigenous Peoples in Canada have experienced a succession of colonial government incursions, including genocide, forced relocation of villages, linguistic imperialism, prohibition of Indigenous economic, social, and political systems, and enforced enrolment of children in Indian residential schools (McCarty, 2003). These processes have already obliterated ten Indigenous languages (Norris, 2007) and nearly extinguished all others; only Nîhîyaw (Cree), Anishnaabe (Ojibway), and Inuttitut (Inuit), due to their large population bases, are expected to survive the current century (ibid.).

Tremendous diversity exists among Indigenous Peoples in Canada on dimensions that affect the survival of their languages, including population size, oral and written language use, number of dialects, level of language documentation, cultures, histories, political organization, social and health conditions, and geographic location. Further, Indigenous language communities vary with regard to their engagement in policy creation and motivation towards sustaining their languages in or outside formal schooling (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005; Fettes & Norton, 2000). Although each group has had different experiences, some commonalities exist, and these are outlined below. The authors have been involved in Indigenous language revitalization in various ways for the past 10 years ranging from language nest (early childhood immersion) to adult Indigenous language learning, with focus on the speech and language development of Indigenous children and on the impacts of language in education policies in Canada.

Declining Intergenerational Transmission of Indigenous Languages

The number of children who are learning a certain language is arguably the best indicator of its health and longevity (Barrena et al., 2007). The most recent Canadian census data indicate that only 12.4% of Indigenous children aged 0-4 are learning an Indigenous language at home; another 5% are acquiring one as an additional language (Norris, 2006). About two-thirds of these children are Inuit living in Canada’s northernmost regions; one-third are First Nation children living on reserves. Over 60% of Indigenous children are growing up in urban and peri-urban settings off reserves. Few of these children are learning an Indigenous language, mainly as a result of language loss among parents and grandparents who were forced to attend English-only residential schools, but also due to ongoing monolingual education policies. Children whose home or preschool supports
in learning an Indigenous language almost invariably are required to start primary school (i.e., Kindergarten and Grade 1) in English or French. This lack of language support is of grave concern, as expressed by the Assembly of First Nations (2000), First Nation scholars (e.g. Battiste, 2000), linguists (e.g. Phillipson, 1992) and others. Some researchers warn that mainstreaming young speakers of Indigenous languages into English- or French-medium schooling is a form of linguistic genocide (Day, 1985); they predict that English and French will continue to replace Indigenous languages until no native speakers remain.

Mismatched Languages and Learning Goals at School Entry

With most Indigenous children in Canada now speaking English or French as their first language, one might assume they would not experience difficulties attributable to language mismatches at school. However, language and culture-based challenges figure prominently among factors that may account for high rates of learning difficulties and early attrition. First, there are still communities where a majority of children speak their Indigenous language but are forced to start school in English or French, with no support for transferring skills from the more familiar language to the newly introduced language. In Labrador, 35% of Innu children never attend school, a trend that is partly due to an unfamiliar language environment (English) and school culture that is seen by Innu children and their parents as “foreign, devoid of culturally relevant curriculum, and having little or no relevance to their lives” (Philpott, 2006: 373). Second, many children, especially in rural and remote communities, speak a non-standard variety of English that creates communication difficulties for children and their teachers. Several Canadian investigators have reported unique difficulties confronting children who start kindergarten speaking an Indigenous language or a non-standard variety of English or French that is different from the language of instruction (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008; Crago, 1990; Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000). Third, the pragmatics of communication in some Indigenous families and communities may be at odds with the discourse expectations of non-Indigenous professionals in institutions of the dominant culture, including public schools. For example, Indigenous children may have been socialized not to answer questions to which they know an older person already knows the answer (e.g., rhetorical questions such as “What colour is the sky today?”) (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). The forms of oral narratives that are recognized in their home communities as constituting a ‘good story’ may be seen by non-Indigenous teachers as lacking in the necessary elements of story-telling (e.g., context setting, linear time line) (Peltier, 2011). They may have a propensity to want to learn by watching and doing rather than by listening and following explicit instructions. Failure by teachers or non-Indigenous peers to recognize, value or encourage these forms of learning readiness can cause low self-esteem, cultural identity confusion and conflict, difficulties for parents wanting to accompany their children in their journeys through formal education, and overall lack of engagement in formal education. Altogether, the situation nationwide raises serious doubts about whether Canadian public schools are willing or able to
support the social inclusion, linguistic rights and educational success of Indigenous children.

Many Indigenous parents, Elders,’ and leaders argue that linguistically and culturally inappropriate teaching methods, curricula, and learning assessment procedures frequently result in serious negative consequences for their children (Canadian Centre for Justice, 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). For example, many Indigenous children have social and environmental literacies that are valued and adaptive within the context of their everyday lives, but that are not valued or even recognized by mainstream teachers focused almost exclusively on text-based literacy. They may speak a variety of English that is the norm in their home communities but that is not readily accepted or understood by non-Indigenous teachers (Ball & Bernhardt, 2008). Consequences may include undermining Indigenous parents’ goals for children; creating cultural alienation among young people; inhibiting development of school readiness skills; perceiving Indigenous children as socially reticent or resistant to instruction; and over-identifying developmental delays and disorders, especially in the speech-language domain (Hibel, Faircloth, & Farkas, 2008). While the nature and scope of misguided practice no doubt varies across schools and regions, overall Canada is failing to support the educational success of Indigenous children (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). It is worth noting that while the number of Indigenous, professionally-accredited teachers is growing, there are few teaching in off-reserve schools and even fewer who are speakers of their Indigenous languages.

Cultural Learning through Language

Indigenous language speakers are concerned that, as fewer children learn their ancestral language, not only their languages but also their cultures will be lost (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). Indigenous languages convey culturally based ways of interpreting the world and experiences within it (Battiste, 2000), and it is impossible to translate the deep meanings of words and concepts into the languages of other cultures. When children learn their Indigenous languages from infancy, they are able to consolidate a culturally cohesive identity with links to the land, to traditional knowledge, to Elders, and to their communities (Battiste, 2000; Crystal, 1997). According to a national task force, “the ability to speak one’s own language helps people to understand who they are in relation to themselves, their families, and their communities, and to Creation itself” (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005: iv). One of the few Indigenous speech and language pathologists in Canada, Sharla Peltier, explains:

We’re taught that our language comes from the Creator and that speaking it acknowledges our connection. We’re taught that our voice is a sacred gift and that there is a lot of power in our words. When we speak, our words go around the world forever. (Ball, 2006: 1)
Given the importance of Indigenous languages for preserving Indigenous cultural identity, knowledge, social belonging, spiritual life, and existence on the political landscape, the potential for education to promote or hinder Indigenous children’s opportunities to learn their mother tongues is of critical concern.

HISTORICAL EXPLOITATION OF SCHOOLING FOR LINGUISTIC ASSIMILATION

Links between language, education, and sovereignty were not lost on the early colonizers of the land called Canada, where using schools to strip Indigenous children of their culture and language is a long-standing tradition. Because the historical treatment of Indigenous Peoples has created enormous challenges for intergenerational transmission of Indigenous languages (and, arguably, Indigenous children’s educational engagement), a brief history is provided here.

History of Indigenous Language Policy in Canada

The new country of Canada froze out Indigenous languages from the outset (Derwing & Munro, 2007). At confederation in 1867, policies supported by legislation and funding established the nation as bilingual in English and French (Gourd, 2007). A century later, heightened political tensions about the comparative status of the two languages led in 1963 to a Royal Commission mandated to study the country’s “two founding races” and “other ethnic groups” (Innis, 1973, Foreword), but the latter were defined as those who had immigrated to Canada (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1967). Indigenous Peoples, despite their efforts to be included and to have their language rights considered, were rendered invisible in policy and practice (Laurendeau & Dunton, 2006). From this foundation of cultural and linguistic imperialism, the Commission recommended an Official Languages Act, enacted in 1969, securing English and French as the official state languages (Burnaby, 1996). The Commission did assert Canada’s responsibility to do “everything that is possible … to help the native populations preserve their cultural heritage, which is an essential part of the patrimony of all Canadians” (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1967, Vol 1: xxv). However, responsibility for language maintenance was left entirely in the hands of Indigenous people who had no resources to ensure creation of opportunities for young people to learn through and develop in their Indigenous languages. This failure to recognize Indigenous languages as official created, in effect, a policy of exclusion.

Variable Control of Language and Education

Over the past two decades, the Assembly of First Nations (1990, 1991, 1992, 2000) produced four reports calling for official recognition of Indigenous languages. Parliament recently passed the Aboriginal Languages of Canada Act (Senate of Canada, 2009), but this Act falls short of calling for legislative action to guarantee support for language preservation and revitalization efforts, including public
schooling offered in Indigenous languages. Instead it recommends creating local bylaws to declare languages as “official” within a particular Indigenous community. This provision mirrors an earlier national policy allowing for local control of education of First Nation children who attend schools on reserves, and means that children may access education in an Indigenous language if they live on a reserve, if the reserve operates a school, and if that school has the community mandate and resources to offer education in the Indigenous language. Although rare, there are a few schools able to provide this kind of education (e.g. in Secwepemc territory in British Columbia and Mohawk territory in Quebec), but few or no resources are provided by the federal government.

Some bright spots in Canada’s North give hope despite the country’s gloomy language policy environment. The Official Languages Act of the Northwest Territories (1988), including the Yukon Territory, recognizes nine Indigenous languages in addition to English and French. The Nunavut Official Languages Act (Parliament of Canada, 2009) recognizes Inuktut, Inuinnaqtun, English, and French. Education in Indigenous languages is more readily available throughout these northern regions, which are the traditional territory of the Inuit, approximately 70,000 people strong (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Against Time and against the Odds

Despite progress in some regions of the country and ongoing advocacy by national Indigenous organizations, barriers to Indigenous language preservation appear almost insurmountable. A contributing factor is the lack of support of the non-Indigenous population and, in some locations, of Indigenous people themselves. In the first case, non-Indigenous Canadians have never been educated about the rich language resources that are part of the country’s heritage. Canadian mainstream media reinforce a construction of Canada as populated entirely by immigrants. Within a context of ongoing disinformation and social stigma surrounding Indigenous Peoples, their rights, and their roles in Canada’s history, widespread apathy, if not overt negativity, exists about the importance of teaching Indigenous languages. Further, “a history of Canadian government suppression and oppression of the Native language has created an attitude of apathy and fatalism about the need and utility of Native languages” (Assembly of First Nations, 1992: 2). This makes it difficult for people to mobilize successfully on behalf of their languages and cultures. For Indigenous communities struggling with challenges to their very survival, including their right to live on traditional lands, language issues may be seen as secondary at best (Romaine, 2002).

Indian Residential Schools: Multigenerational Impacts

Around the world, language-in-education policies are often motivated by an explicit or hidden curriculum of assimilation (Ball, 2011; Milloy, 1999). Canada’s overt intentions are among the worst, where successive governments historically legitimated the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families and
communities to Indian residential schools and, later, to non-Indigenous adoptive
and foster homes. In the late 1800s, the colonial government recognized that
language is the main channel for culture and lifestyle, and anticipated that if
children were prevented from speaking their mother tongue, their cultures would
likely die out (Milloy, 1999). For a century, Indigenous children in Canada were
forced through legislation to attend Indian residential schools, with a penalty of
incarceration for parents who did not comply (Milloy, 1999). While the residential
school era began winding down in Canada in the 1950s, the last school did not
close until 1996 (Milloy, 1999). Canada has since offered an apology to those
affected by the residential school era (Office of the Prime Minister, 2008),
however, measures taken toward retribution and reconciliation remain
controversial.

The degradation of children’s languages and cultures in residential schools
instilled a belief among many of today’s Indigenous parents and grandparents that
their language was inferior and their forms of social interaction and spiritual
practice were unspeakably demonic (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smoleski, 2004). In
most residential schools, children were forced to stop speaking their home
language, to stop communicating with their siblings, to repudiate their cultures and
to relinquish their Indian names (Miller, 1996). As a result, many of today’s
Indigenous parents and grandparents lost not only their capacity to speak their
languages but also their confidence in using any language effectively (Lafrance &
Collins, 2003). Even more fundamentally, many lost confidence in their capacity to
engage in the kinds of care-giving social interactions that promote attachment in
families (Chrisjohn, Young, & Maraun, 1997). As Hart and Risley (1995) have
shown, everyday family interactions are the primary contexts for developing
vocalization and speech communication. A rewarding experience of verbal
communication within the context of caring relationships is critical to optimal oral
language development during infancy and early childhood, which in turn is
foundational for subsequent literacy. Indigenous scholar Lorna Williams has
explained that when Indigenous people were told by colonial educators and Indian
agents that their language was unclean, uncivilized and not useful for learning or
for commerce, many parents developed a sense of shame about speaking the only
language they knew, and the capacity and spirit for transmitting caring and
knowledge through verbal interaction with their children was greatly attenuated
(personal communication with Lorna Williams, 2006). Parents and grandparents
who experienced poor parental modeling or abuse in residential schools or other
settings may require extra support to learn how to engage in spontaneous,
nurturing, language-mediated interchanges with their young ones (Wesley-
Esquimaux & Smoleski, 2004). Policy makers and educators need to appreciate
language development as an aspect of intergenerational family development that is
relevant to a range of policy areas, including social justice, community
development, education, literacy, and healing for Indian residential school
survivors and the children of survivors.
Indigenous Language and Education Policy

In the 1970s, Indigenous organizations became increasingly vocal about their rights to raise and educate their own children and to practice their own cultures, languages, and forms of government, which included a growing sovereignty movement. Indigenous rights activists, scholars, and parents emphasized the loss of identity, cultural knowledge, personal well-being, and social belonging caused by language-in-education policies that have denied Indigenous children the right to be educated in their mother tongue. Initially, activists saw Indigenous language policy, support for language revitalization initiatives, and language-in-education policy as interconnected. In 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood published a pivotal paper – “Indian Control of Indian Education” – that led to swift government action in the devolution of responsibility for education to First Nations themselves followed by continued strides towards the goal of self-determined Indigenous education in Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2003).

As noted by the Assembly for First Nations (1992: 2), “any strategy to increase the number of speakers of any language must necessarily involve the education system.” However, over the past two decades, international movements for language revitalization and self-determination in education have become increasingly separate. This uncoupling of language and education policy is a common problem around the world that results in missed opportunities for language advocates and educators for mutually beneficial, coordinated efforts and avoiding working at cross purposes. Nevertheless, just as colonial governments have been instrumental in the demise of Indigenous languages and cultures by excluding Indigenous languages in policies and exploiting the power of the school system, the potential of schooling must now be harnessed as part of a multipronged approach to revive and maintain Indigenous languages and cultures.

STRATEGIES FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EDUCATION SETTINGS

Strengthening Capacity for Language Teaching

Training programs for Indigenous language teachers have been instituted at a few postsecondary institutions in Canada. For example, in 1999, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) forged a partnership with the British Columbia College of Teachers to create an accredited Developmental Standard Teaching Certificate (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2001). The program enables First Nation communities to partner with postsecondary institutions to offer community-based teacher training focused on Indigenous language revitalization. The University of Victoria partnered with an Indigenous education centre to co-create a university-accredited Certificate in Aboriginal Language Revitalization, which now transitions into a baccalaureate teaching degree. The University of Alberta annually delivers a Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development Institute (CILLDI) focusing on teaching Indigenous language teachers.
**Indigenous Language as an Elective Subject of Study**

A growing number of schools in Canada with a high enrolment of Indigenous students now offer classes in the Indigenous language that is most prevalent in their catchment area. Typically a language speaker from the local area is hired on a part-time basis to teach students – not all of whom are Indigenous – who elect to study the language. British Columbia’s Ministry of Education has created a system whereby school districts can create curriculum in a language other than English or French and offer it as a second language from Grades 5-12. However, there is little support for these initiatives and little evidence that teaching an Indigenous language as a subject supports oral proficiency and literacy to the degree necessary for higher order cognitive skills or for linguistic transfer to acquiring other languages (Hinton, 2001). Except in the North (because of the activism mentioned earlier) and in some communities on reserve lands where it is feasible to make Indigenous language recovery a focus of community development work, youngsters typically have no opportunities to hear or interact in the language outside the classroom.

**Immersion Schooling**

Language revitalization scholars tend to agree that, in the absence of language immersion at home, immersion schooling programs stand the best chance of producing a new generation of proficient speakers (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; McCarty, 2003). Several Indigenous immersion programs exist in Canada, but as Richards and Burnaby (2008) report, there has been no comprehensive study to date. Some have been documented; for example, Fulford (2007) identified the following Indigenous immersion programs as some of the most successful in Canada: the Eskasoni school in Nova Scotia, the Waskaganish schools in Quebec, and Chief Ahtam School near Adam’s Lake, BC.

**Bilingual Schooling**

Beginning around 2001, a few completely bilingual community-controlled schools have been introduced in Canada, including a K-12 Cree-English school in Thompson, Manitoba (Fulford, 2007) and 14 K-3 Inuktitut-English schools in Nunavik (Louis & Taylor, 2001). Kahnawà:ke in Quebec has a school that started as a Mohawk-English program and has moved increasingly towards a full immersion approach, where more attention is placed on the Indigenous language, in this case Mohawk. In 1982, when the program was described as a partial immersion approach, two research teams explored outcomes for children in grades one and three. Both studies concluded that, compared to control subjects in English-only primary education, the Mohawk immersion students increased their ability to speak Mohawk, spoke Mohawk more often outside the classroom, scored equally well on tests of English acquisition, and performed equally well on academic tests (Hoover, 1992; Lambert et al., 1984). A study of Inuktitut-English bilingual
primary schools in Nunavik indicates that their main impact has been on personal and collective self-esteem, because children and their parents have regained control over education, and because culturally based curriculum content came in when the Indigenous language became the medium for sharing and creating knowledge (Wright & Taylor, 1995). Guèvremont and Kohen (2010) report, based on the Aboriginal People’s Survey results of 2006: “Children who spoke an Aboriginal language and learned it in school were more likely to be rated as doing very well in school” (ibid.: 13) and “Aboriginal language was associated with positive school outcomes for children if learned in school” (ibid.: 19). Unfortunately, while research from outside Canada shows that bilingual schools can make an important contribution to language revitalization, no controlled studies with carefully designed outcome measures have yet been done in Canada (Charron, 2010).

Language Initiatives in Early Childhood Programs

Although formal schooling would be the preferred site for supporting Indigenous language acquisition, it is not currently viable in Canada. However, there is gathering momentum in communities for promoting Indigenous language acquisition through community-driven programs at the pre-primary level. Initiatives include language nests for infants and toddlers, heritage-language-based and bilingual early childhood programs, and Aboriginal Head Start. These programs involve community members who have some degree of proficiency with the children’s heritage language(s). Cross-cultural investigators have demonstrated the potential utility of collaborative, strengths-based approaches to language-in-education practices (Crago, 1992; van Kleek, 1994). Community members are uniquely positioned to identify core features of language socialization, to understand the contexts of child development and care in the community, and to offer insights to teachers about the conditions, needs, and goals of a family or community (Rogoff, 1990). However, a well-established principle in language research is that early childhood is not the best time for children in these contexts to begin learning a second language (Asher & Garcia, 1969; Snow & Hoefnagel-Hoehle, 1978), unless it is an everyday language spoken at home or in an alternative care environment such as daycare.

An Ecologically Comprehensive Strategy

A federal task force concluded that “language revitalization can occur through formal education but maintenance or retention of the Aboriginal language necessitates the interaction of multiple social spheres where the language can be accessed, expressed and transmitted” (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005: 38). Figure 1 below portrays the interdependent ecological systems in which Indigenous young children and their families are nested. Supportive interventions could be introduced in any or all of these contexts to promote Indigenous language acquisition through education, either by using an Indigenous language as a medium of instruction, as in immersion and bilingual approaches, or
at least by teaching it as a subject. This schema situates the family as the core – or heart – of language-mediated relationships between caregivers and young children. However, responsibility cannot rest solely with Indigenous families and communities to ensure that Indigenous languages do not die. Partners and allies are needed in government, non-government organizations, academe, schools, the media, and society as a whole.

Figure 1. Systems of support for Indigenous language acquisition and maintenance in Canada
Investments in the areas identified in Figure 1 would yield new knowledge and a potentially effective system of supports driven by Indigenous community agendas and organizations. Partnerships across Indigenous organizations, postsecondary institutions, and health, education, and social development sectors could support new resources, capacity, and program strategies. Support for Indigenous language and literacy facilitation could be expected to:

- help retain endangered languages;
- promote cultural continuity and self-esteem;
- counteract prevalent misconstructions of cultural and language differences as communication and parenting deficits;
- reduce high rates of diversion of Indigenous children at school entry to special programs for learning support, with their attendant social stigma and exclusions; and
- increase social inclusion of Indigenous children within the fabric of Canadian society.

Policy reforms and interventions at only one or two of these levels – for example, Indigenous language immersion preschools without provisions for ongoing opportunities to learn in an Indigenous language, or early childhood immersion programs without support for parental pathways to language proficiency – are not likely to yield either measurable gains in Indigenous language maintenance or educational equity for Indigenous children. As already discussed, most Indigenous children and their parents in Canada learn English or French as a first language and acquire their heritage language, if at all, as a second language. A growing body of research shows that the process of second language learning is longer, harder, and more complex than previously believed (Lightbown, 2008). Children cannot develop proficiency through preschool immersion programs only, or through after-school language clubs; they require long-term instruction in their heritage language, as well as opportunities to use the language for learning and practice with increasingly complex forms of the language in functional settings (Collier, 1989). While learning more than one language has been associated with enhanced cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness once children are fully bilingual (Bialystok, 1991; King & Mackey, 2007), there can be real risks to children’s academic achievement if they are struggling to learn more than one language over an inadequate time period without adequate supports. Children need ongoing support for developing proficiency in their first language in order not to fall behind in content area learning, as well as ongoing opportunities to develop proficiency in their second language (Ball, 2011). For these reasons, piecemeal, bootstrapped approaches that depend solely upon community-initiated and sustained efforts are not likely to yield sought-after gains in Indigenous children’s educational success and Indigenous language recovery.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In a colonial country like Canada, Indigenous language exists within “a historically charged and politically loaded landscape” (Aylward, 2010: 297). Political will is
needed to support increasing numbers of Indigenous children entering schools to learn the language that is their birthright and to succeed academically. Political will must be followed by action taken by school administrators and teachers, informed by a program of research to generate knowledge about what kinds of innovations are likely to be effective and under what conditions (Ball, 2008).

Now that Canada has acknowledged responsibility for the debacle of the Indian residential schools (Office of the Prime Minister, 2008), it must take action. Payments to individual victims do nothing to bring back Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge that were beaten to the brink of extinction. One meaningful reparation the government could make is to create policies, backed by secure and sufficient resources to implement them, to support a multi-pronged, locally controlled strategy for ensuring that Indigenous children have opportunities to acquire their heritage languages. Investments are needed to design, deliver, document, and evaluate innovative language development programs that: (a) are culturally and linguistically appropriate; (b) assist Indigenous parents to play active roles in achieving their goals for their young children’s language development; (c) avoid extensive reliance on professionally accredited teachers who almost invariably do not speak an Indigenous language and are likely to be unaware of the language socialization environments and expectations for Indigenous learners; and/or (d) create fast-track alternative post-secondary training to increase the number of Indigenous teachers while concurrently supporting them to develop proficiency in their languages.

The idea that children should be ‘ready’ for school is a popular one, but Canadian public schools have yet to demonstrate that they are ready for Indigenous children. Language-in-education policies must address the historically created needs and goals of Indigenous families, as well as their specific needs for ensuring that children have opportunities to learn an Indigenous language within the context of culturally meaningful teaching and curricula, cultural safety, and dignity (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Understanding cultural variations in language varieties, language socialization, and the pragmatics of verbal and written communication heightens awareness of the potential cultural biases in education programs. For example, Heath (1983) found that children whose home culture values listening, observing, and “doing” over “talking” – as is likely to be the case for most Indigenous families – are more likely to be marginalized in a mainstream school that values verbal explanations and oral participation. Even if schooling is provided only in the dominant language, educators can support Indigenous children by understanding how children’s early language socialization is likely to influence their interests, attention, memory, story-telling, social interactions, and responses to pedagogical techniques.

The priority placed by Indigenous organizations on Indigenous-led programs suggests the need for programs that assist family members to promote children’s Indigenous language acquisition in the home from birth. As children approach the age of school entry, language promotion strategies need to reinforce positive cultural identity and promote success in school through programs that bridge the gap from home to school. Scholars specializing in Indigenous language acquisition
must be supported to work alongside community advocates, activists, speakers, and
learners to maximize limited resources and time. An immediate need exists for
methodologically sound research that examines outcomes of initiatives such as
Nunavik’s bilingual programs and immersion programs in Kahnawà:ke that have
existed for over two decades. Research that has been done to date (e.g., Brittain,
Dyck, Rose, & MacKenzie, 2006; Peter, Hirata-Edds, & Montgomery-Anderson,
2008; Zwanziger, Allen, & Genesee, 2006) represents a starting point. However,
much more must be done to document innovative ways of promoting, reviving and
continuing Indigenous languages.

The experiences of other non-dominant groups internationally suggest that the
most promising approach to creating new speakers is through immersion,
beginning with language nests (Wilson & Kamana, 2001) and followed by full-
immersion schooling (Aguliera & LeCompte, 2007). Other approaches that have
produced proficient Indigenous language speakers include the Accelerated Second
Language Acquisition method (Strengthening Indigenous languages and Cultures,
2011; Sarkar & Metallic, 2009), and the Master-Apprentice Language Learning
program (Hinton, 2001). Efforts must reach members of every generation within a
community.

Given past and present policies governing the education of Indigenous children
in Canada, there is reason to be discouraged about the survival of Indigenous
languages and the cultural knowledges and identities they embody. Still, the
Indigenous population is growing at twice the rate of the non-Indigenous
population (Statistics Canada, 2006), and increasing numbers of Indigenous
communities are becoming aware both of the urgency of saving their languages
and of their children’s rights to be supported in learning their heritage languages. If
languages are indeed “the life blood of a people” (Aboriginal Head Start
Association of British Columbia, 2011), allowing them to die can only be seen as a
form of cultural genocide.

Within Canada’s generally chilly climate for Indigenous languages and
Indigenous language-in-education initiatives, a slight warming trend includes the
federal government’s Aboriginal Head Start, which funds over 500 locally operated
eyearly childhood programs, and the Aboriginal Languages Initiative (ALI), which
provides $5 million (CAD) annually to be divided equally among provinces and
territories (Andrews Miller, 2008). Much more must be done. Providing equitable
resources and supports for Indigenous children to exercise their right to learn their
mother tongue and to maximize their potential for bilingual learning throughout
their school years is a critical component of a comprehensive strategy that could
potentially restore Indigenous languages within one or two generations.

NOTES

Aboriginal is a legal term meaning the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people of Canada.
Indigenous is a contemporary term used globally with a capital ‘I’ to refer to the first peoples of a
colonized land. It is used throughout this chapter to mean the three distinct Indigenous groups of
Canada (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit).
First Nation is a political term created by the Indigenous leaders of Canada to assert their position as the first, organized communities of self-governing peoples in the land now called Canada. Reservations, commonly known as reserves, are lands set aside by the federal government for the use and habitation of First Nation people. The word Elders is capitalized as a sign of respect for senior members of Indigenous communities who are not only elderly but also are carriers of the history and wisdom of their People. The British Columbia Ministry of Education provincial language template application site describes this initiative: http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/template_developed.php. Immersion in this context is used to mean language learning methods in which the target language, in this case Indigenous, is “the medium as well as the object of instruction” (Ellis, 2005: 217).

REFERENCES


Canada's Big Chill: Indigenous Languages in Education


Office of the Prime Minister (2008). PM offers full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian residential schools system. (http://pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=2146)


CANADA’S BIG CHILL: INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION


Strengthening Indigenous languages and cultures. (n.d.) (http://www.nslic.org/index.htm)


van Kleeck, Anne (1994). Potential cultural bias in training parents as conversational partners with their children who have delays in language development. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 3*(1), 67-78.


BALL & MCIVOR

Jessica Ball  
School of Child and Youth Care  
University of Victoria, Canada

Onowa McIvor  
Indigenous Education  
University of Victoria, Canada
2. THE USE OF NON-DOMINANT LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA, THAILAND AND VIETNAM

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

ABSTRACT

Education systems in multilingual nations have traditionally ignored non-dominant languages (NDL) in favor of the dominant languages, leading to gross inequalities. Therefore, for speakers of NDLs, multilingual education (MLE) based on their first language (L1) can be highly liberating. Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam are experimenting with the use of NDLs as languages of instruction. This chapter discusses educational language issues in the region by focusing on: 1) the changing policy environment in Southeast Asia, 2) new Cambodian and Thai policies that provide more official support for NDLs, 3) Vietnam’s “weakening” written policy support for NDLs, and 4) the functioning and strengthening of L1-based MLE programs in the region. The chapter concludes that addressing the language of instruction issue is possible when education policies support the use of NDLs, and when MLE programs provide strong literacy skills in learners’ L1s – as the foundation for all further learning.

C. Benson and K. Kosonen (eds.), Language Issues in Comparative Education, 39–58. © 2013 Sense Publishers. All rights reserved.
INTRODUCTION

Primary education shall be compulsory and free of charge. In local primary schools, citizens of ethnic minorities shall have the right to be educated in their own language. (Vietnamese Constitution 1946: Article 15, emphasis added)

The idea of offering education in non-dominant languages (NDL) is not entirely new in Southeast Asia, as this quote from the first Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam shows. However, the idea has remained theoretical for decades; only recently have some countries in the region actually begun using NDLs in educational practice in areas where dominant national languages are not widely spoken. One reason for the change is that hitherto hidden disparities in educational achievement due to gender, ethnicity, disability and language have become more apparent. This is due firstly to advocacy by international and non-governmental organizations as well as some academics and activists, and secondly to the availability of more disaggregated statistics related to educational quality (see e.g. Benson, 2004; Kosonen & Young, 2009; UNESCO, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a; 2008b, 2012a, 2012b). Southeast Asian countries are not alone; education systems in many multilingual contexts invariably favor dominant languages (DL) over non-dominant ones. Since many speakers of NDLs have insufficient knowledge of the DLs used for instruction, they experience unequal access to education and inferior quality of education provided. Various approaches have been introduced to make education systems more accommodating to members of non-dominant ethnolinguistic communities, among them and perhaps most importantly first language-based education (e.g. Benson; Stone; Walter, all in this volume).

This chapter attempts to outline trends in language-in-education policy in three Southeast Asian countries: Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The main focus is on policy documents (or parts of them) dealing with NDLs in education. Particular attention is paid to Vietnamese policy, which seems to be taking a different direction than the policies in Cambodia and Thailand, even though the practice may not be very different. Thus, policy developments in Vietnam are given an additional section after this introduction to establish the context for discussion. I also look briefly at the relationship between policy and actual practice regarding the use of NDLs in education. Finally, I attempt to determine similarities and differences in policies and practices in the three countries.

The chapter draws from research conducted over the past ten years on Southeast Asian language-in-education policies and practices (Kosonen, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Benson & Kosonen, 2012; Kosonen & Person, 2013; Kosonen, Shaeffer, & Vu, 2010; Kosonen & Young, 2009; Kosonen, Young, & Malone, 2007). The English translations of quotes from various constitutions are from the “Constitution Finder” (2012), and in the case of older Vietnamese constitutions from “The Constitutions of Vietnam” (2003). In addition to policy documents, data sources include various project reports as well as informal interviews of practitioners and policy makers in the region. Because there is little
published research on the chapter’s theme, many arguments are based on my long-term observations on language-in-education developments in the region. I have worked as a consultant and researcher in all three countries discussed here, and I am also in regular contact with a network of trusted colleagues working in the region on language and education issues.

VIETNAM: A TRADITIONAL LEADER IN NDL POLICY SUPPORT?

I began this chapter with a quote from the quite progressive Vietnamese Constitution of 1946. It is important to note that this constitution was written during a particularly unstable time in the country’s history. Ho Chi Minh had declared Vietnam independent after the Second World War, and although Japanese forces had departed, the French still considered the country a colony (Karnow, 1997; LePoer, 1989).

Consequently, two Indo-China wars broke out, and the first Vietnamese Constitution never had a real chance to be applied in practice, though it remained in effect in communist-controlled areas until 1954. Cima (1989: online source, no pages) claims that the purpose of this first constitution was “essentially to provide the communist regime with a democratic appearance.” The idea that everyone had a right to education in his or her own language was apparently influenced by the constitution of the Soviet Union at the time and the fact that the Indo-Chinese communist party had many members and soldiers from a variety of ethnolinguistic communities. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that there may never have been an intention to carry out the various guarantees of rights such as freedom of speech, assembly and the press (ibid.).

All subsequent Vietnamese constitutions have been less explicit than the Constitution of 1946 about the use of non-dominant languages in education. The second Constitution of 1959 gave all nationalities “the right to use their spoken and written languages” (Article 3). The third Constitution of 1980 elaborated on this by stating that “all nationalities have the right to use their own spoken languages and scripts” (Article 5). The current Constitution of 1992 is almost identical, though the problematic term “script” has been replaced: “Every nationality has the right to use its own spoken language and system of writing” (Article 5).

These documents would seem to indicate that Vietnam has been a leader in the region in terms of NDL use in education. Currently, the right to educational use of non-dominant languages is still mentioned, but it is not clear what is actually meant by “use” in this context. Nonetheless, many other policy documents have appeared in Vietnam that discuss the role of NDLs in education in more detail, and some educational development projects have included NDLs (Bui & Bui, 2009; Kosonen, 2004, 2009a; Vu, 2008; World Bank, 2009).

Practical implications of this trend can be seen in the three countries discussed in this chapter as well as in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and Timor-Leste (UNESCO, 2012a).

NATIONAL CONTEXTS

This section sets the stage for discussion of Southeast Asian language-in-education policies. It provides basic information on national-level linguistic situations and a general introduction to the language and education issues in each of the three countries.

Cambodia

In the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Khmer are the dominant ethnolinguistic group in terms of power and number, as they comprise approximately 90 percent of the population. Even though there are 21 other languages spoken by the remaining ten percent, Cambodia is among the least linguistically diverse nations in Asia (Kosonen, 2009b; Lewis, 2009). Most ethnolinguistic minority groups in the country are small in number, apart from the Cham, Chinese, and Vietnamese, whose populations are in the hundreds of thousands (Kosonen, 2007, 2009b, 2010; Leclerc, 2012; Lewis, 2009; Neou Sun, 2009).

The Constitution of 1993 establishes Khmer as the official language and gives the Khmer script an official status (Constitution Finder, 2012). Until the late 1990s, Khmer was exclusively the language of instruction at all levels of education, though schools in some areas had also been teaching Chinese or Vietnamese as subjects of study. L1-based bilingual education programs in formal and nonformal education have been initiated by various international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in close collaboration with provincial education authorities and local communities. Five non-dominant languages, namely Brao, Bunong, Kavet, Krung and Tampuan, have thus far been introduced as languages of instruction, and work is ongoing in three additional languages: Jarai, Kaco’ and Kui (Benson, 2011; Benson & Kosonen, 2012; CARE International Cambodia, 2004; Kosonen, 2007, 2009b, 2010; Noorlander & Ven, 2008; Neou Sun, 2009; Thomas, 2002; UNESCO, 2007b, 2008, 2012a).

Thailand

In the Kingdom of Thailand, Standard Thai (based on Central Thai as spoken in the capital, Bangkok) is the de facto official and national language. An estimated 50% of Thai citizens speak Standard or Central Thai as their first language. Standard Thai is the dominant language of the country and widely spoken throughout the country as a second language, but there are no reliable data on the extent of people’s bilingualism (Kosonen, 2007, 2008, 2010; Kosonen & Person, 2013). More than eighty languages are spoken in Thailand, and the populations of some ethnolinguistic communities, such as Lao-Isan, Kammeuang, Pak Tai, Pattani
Malay, and Northern Khmer, are in the millions. In addition, there are at least one hundred thousand speakers of Sgaw Karen, Kui, Phuthai, and some Chinese languages (Kosonen & Person, 2013; Leclerc, 2012; Lewis, 2009).

Standard Thai is the language of instruction at all levels of education, and has been so almost exclusively for about one hundred years (Kosonen & Person, 2013; Prapasapong, 2009). However, for approximately half of the population of Thailand – possibly more – this language is not their first, and many children have comprehension problems in early childhood education programs and the early grades of primary school (Kosonen, 2008; Kosonen & Person, 2013; Smalley, 1994). Consequently, the dominant use of Standard Thai as the LOI is a major obstacle to educational achievement in many parts of the country.

In line with regional trends, debates on language and education issues have increased in Thailand among educators and politicians as well as in the media. Recent policy decisions have provided more latitude for ethnolinguistic minority people to use their languages in various ways, and several NDLs are currently used in L1-based education pilot projects (Kosonen, 2007, 2008, 2010; Kosonen & Person, 2013).

**Vietnam**

In the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Vietnamese-speaking Kinh are the dominant ethnolinguistic group, accounting for about 86 percent of the population. The remaining 14 percent comprises a number of non-dominant ethnolinguistic communities, many of whom lack exposure to the Vietnamese language. Several minority groups have large populations, including the Tay, Thai, Muong, Hoa (i.e. Chinese) and Khmer with populations of more than one million each. Five more groups, the Nung, Hmong, Dao, Gia Rai, and Ede, have populations in the hundreds of thousands. Nearly thirty non-dominant languages already have writing systems, and language development is ongoing in others (Bui & Bui, 2009; Benson & Kosonen, 2012; Kosonen, 2004, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Leclerc, 2012; Lewis, 2009; Vu, 2008; World Bank, 2009).

The Vietnamese government officially recognizes fifty-four ethnic groups, according to the official classification of “nationalities” by the state. According to unofficial estimates and linguistic surveys, approximately one hundred languages are spoken in the country (Leclerc, 2012; Lewis, 2009). Reasons for this apparent discrepancy are similar to other countries such as China, Laos and the former Soviet Union, as Soviet-influenced approaches to ethnolinguistic classification have not necessarily been based on the languages people speak but on political factors (Benson & Kosonen, 2012; Kosonen, 2009a; Stites, 1999; UN-HRC, 2011; World Bank, 2009).

This ethnolinguistic classification as imposed by the state can cause confusion regarding the educational performance of learners by nationality. Many members of larger and more urbanized ethnic groups such as the Hoa, Muong, and Tay, for example, speak Vietnamese competently, some being bilingual and some having altogether lost their heritage languages (Kosonen, 2004, 2009a). The educational
success of people from these groups in Vietnamese-medium education has been used to argue against the need for first language-based education among other, less assimilated minority populations, seriously impairing their access to quality education.

LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICIES

This section outlines the main language-in-education policy positions of the three countries based on the available policy documents, particularly on statements regarding the use of NDLs in education. Brief interpretations of the current policies are provided as well.

Cambodia

Until late 2007, no explicit written policy support existed in Cambodia for the use of NDLs in education. However, the positive results of several pilot projects in L1-based education, as mentioned above, seem to have positively influenced policy developments. The Education Law of 2007 gives authorities the right to choose the language(s) of instruction, by issuing special sub-decrees or decisions in areas where Khmer Lue or Indigenous languages are spoken (Benson, 2011; Kosonen 2007, 2009b, 2010; Neou Sun, 2009; UNESCO, 2011). This represents the first time that a Cambodian law gives explicit attention to non-dominant languages in education.

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether the law also refers to the three largest NDLs, namely Cham, Chinese, and Vietnamese, which are commonly considered non-Indigenous (and the latter two being immigrant) languages. The Lao, with a larger population than many Khmer Lue groups, also fall into this category. The Cham are considered by many Khmer people as well as by the Cambodian state as Khmer Islam, i.e. Muslim Khmers (Bredenburg, 2010), though they have a distinct culture and language unrelated to Khmer (Lewis, 2009). Overall, like children from the smaller Indigenous communities covered by the law, children from these larger “non-Indigenous” ethnolinguistic communities often lack access to the Khmer language. Thus because of their classification, “non-Indigenous” children are not as yet given access to education in their own languages.

The community schools model (Neou Sun, 2009; Noorlander & Ven, 2008; Siren, 2009) developed and piloted by CARE International has provided the basis for the “Guidelines on implementation of bilingual education programs for indigenous children in highland provinces,” which was signed by the Minister of Education, Youth and Sports in August 2010 and subsequently disseminated to the provinces involved. The Guidelines essentially concretize parts of the 2007 Education Law for the geographical areas where the majority speak NDLs. Although the Guidelines do not define what bilingual education exactly means in the Cambodian context, the document does describe how bilingual education will be implemented and expanded at the primary level by the Ministry and its partners
in five highland provinces, namely Kratie, Mondulkiri, Preah Vihear, Ratanakiri and Stung Treng.

The Guidelines document provides a chart of a transitional two-language education model which stipulates the use of L1 (the home language) and L2 (Khmer) as follows: in Grade 1, 80% of curriculum is learned in the L1, in Grade 2, 60% in L1, and in Grade 3, 30% in L1. The dominant language, Khmer, is introduced gradually in the first three grades. From Grade 4 all instruction will be in Khmer, even in non-Khmer speaking areas. The Guidelines also support the use of NDLs and the gradual introduction of the dominant language to non-Khmer-speaking children in early childhood education, but no details are provided on implementation or the balance between L1 and L2 use.

Cambodia must be congratulated for putting L1-based bilingual education into official policy and practice. Neither Thailand nor Vietnam has such detailed policy documents on the use of NDLs in education. An evaluation report states that “[w]ith adoption of the Guidelines, the MoEYS has taken a very important step, from relatively small-scale piloting … to expansion to … [several] provinces with significant minority populations” (Benson, 2011: 17). It is easy to agree with this statement, but at the same time it is important to note that the current policy is not without problems. As Benson (ibid.) noted, the Guidelines support a fairly short duration of L1 use, i.e. an early-exit model of bilingual education, and a “transitional philosophy” is clearly evident. These issues were raised and briefly discussed at a national symposium in November 2011 (UNESCO, 2011), but even though both MoEYS officials and international agency representatives acknowledge the issues, to date no changes have been made to the early transition model.

In sum, despite the positive policy developments, several challenges still remain in the Cambodian language-in-education scene:

– Firstly, who counts as Indigenous in Cambodia and/or as eligible for multilingual education? What provision, if any, is provided for Cham and other “non-Indigenous” children who are not fluent speakers of Khmer?
– Secondly, what is the future of L1-based instruction in nonformal education? The non-formal (NFE) sector is not mentioned in the Guidelines, and the November 2011 symposium (ibid.), which actually focused on NFE, did not produce any tangible outcomes.
– Finally, is the use of the non-Khmer scripts allowed for writing NDLs – for example, in writing Jarai, which is a cross-border language using the Roman script in Vietnam? In addition, the draft orthography of Kui was rejected in April 2012 by the MoEYS, so Kui cannot be used in MLE as stipulated in the Guidelines. This case raises a question about the future of orthographies for previously unwritten NDLs, as there seems to be some reluctance on the part of MoEYS to actually expand multilingual education to new languages.
The status of non-dominant languages in Thai society is still ambiguous. Different groups of people hold different views on the language issue. Various activities promoting NDLs – conducted mostly by language communities and other non-governmental actors – have preceded the actual written language policies in Thailand. Government authorities have allowed many ethnolinguistic communities and their partners, such as academics and NGOs, to work quite freely in the NFE sector. This has perhaps been due to the unthreatened dominance of Standard Thai along with a laissez-faire attitude among many civil servants.

Academics and organizations working broadly on language issues, including non-dominant languages, started discussing the need for an explicit written language policy in the early 2000s. It was eventually the Royal Institute of Thailand that coordinated the drafting of the Kingdom’s first National Language Policy (NLP). In 2006 a special NLP drafting committee was appointed. The coordination role fell quite naturally to the Institute, as it is the official authority on the Thai language, and its members represent the highest levels of academic excellence in Thailand. More than a dozen public fora and academic meetings were organized to gather information on the current language situation, raise awareness on the language issues, and help pave the way for policy development (Kosonen & Person, 2013; Person, 2010).

The policy that emerged was signed by then-Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva in 2010, and two years later by the current government head, PM Yingluck Shinawatra. While the NLP deals with a wide range of issues relating to languages, the key points relating to non-dominant languages, and their use in education, are:

– [V]arious ethnic groups … have the right to use their mother tongues in their homes, in their communities, and in public places. This includes the use of their mother tongue in the education system for their young people. (NLP, 2010, Section 4, emphasis added)

[The NLP] … support[s] the use of the ethnic languages, or the mother tongue, as the first language of children in the education system. (NLP, 2010, Section 4, emphasis added)

It is the policy of the government to promote bilingual or multilingual education for the youth of the ethnic groups whose mother tongue is different from the national language (Thai) … in order to strengthen the study of the Thai language and to support the cognitive development and education of children. (NLP, 2010, Section 5, emphasis added)

It is clear that this policy supports the use of all languages spoken in Thailand as the basis for further learning. Furthermore, the policy promotes L1-based multilingual education for all who do not speak Standard Thai at home.

The rationales given by the NLP for L1 use are particularly interesting. Usually – at least in most of Asia – the main justification given for the use of NDLs is to
teach the dominant language more effectively, which is also the first rationale of the Thai policy. However, the NLP also calls for the use of learners’ first languages as the basis for cognitive development, which in a way respects NDLs in their own right. Few other Asian countries have policies as explicit as this about the benefits of L1-based education, or use the proven theoretical grounds to justify L1-based education in non-dominant languages.

While it is not yet clear how the new policy will be operationalized, the NLP does provide official government support for the use of NDLs as languages of instruction. The Royal Institute has also initiated a project to officially recognize NDL orthographies based on the Thai script. The Pattani Malay orthography was the first to go through an approval process, which represented the first time that a Thai government agency has granted formal recognition to NDL orthography (Kosonen & Person, 2013; Person 2010).

Even with the introduction of a quite progressive written language policy, Thailand is not without challenges, including the following:
– Firstly, will the outlined actions of the NLP actually be implemented, and by whom? Some stakeholders are quite skeptical about whether these good policy statements will ever be implemented by the Thai Ministry of Education.
– Secondly, as very few members of the Thai public, government officials or decision-makers understand the importance of L1-based education, how can awareness on language issues be raised?
– Thirdly, will it be possible to advocate for L1-based education for speakers of languages related to Standard Thai, as these languages are usually seen as dialects even though some are quite distinct?
– Finally, given the unstable political situation in recent years, how can policies supporting NDLs in education be protected so they will not be caught in political battles?

Vietnam

The national and official language in Vietnam is Vietnamese, and it functions as the language of wider communication throughout the country. As mentioned earlier, the use of non-dominant languages in society and education is supported by various policy documents, such as constitutions, laws, decrees and decisions (Bui & Bui, 2009; Kosonen, 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Kosonen, Shaeffer, & Vu, 2010; Vu, 2008; World Bank, 2009).

Despite support for NDLs in numerous policy documents, in practice Vietnamese has remained the main language of instruction at all levels of education, even in non-Vietnamese-speaking areas. There is confusion over conflicting statements in different documents and their relative weight. Interestingly, around 10 NDLs have been used in programs called “bilingual education” (Kosonen, 2004, 2006, 2009a; UNESCO, 2008b; Vu, 2008, 2010), which have taught NDLs only as subjects of study for a few hours per week. These programs are top-down government directed (Kosonen, 2009a; UN-HRC, 2011),
with little if any contribution from the ethnolinguistic minority communities themselves, unlike in many other Asian countries.

There is a Department of Ethnic Minority Education at the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) which could be expected to promote NDLs and cultures. Instead, its stated priorities are the extension of Vietnamese-medium preschool programs into ethnic minority areas, investment in boarding schools for younger ethnic minority learners, the improvement and “strengthening” of Vietnamese language learning at all levels, and the creation of a sixth primary year so that Vietnamese can be “mastered” (Benson & Kosonen, 2012; EMED, 2007; Vu, 2010). Since the mid-1990s, boarding schools that use Vietnamese almost exclusively have been extended to ethnic minority areas. State officials see this program as a strategy to provide “equal educational opportunities” for non-Kinh people in highland areas, but experiences from other countries show that such boarding schools are rarely anything more than an assimilation strategy (Benson & Kosonen, 2012; Kosonen 2004, 2009a; World Bank, 2009).

In order to understand the state’s current position on the role of NDLs in education in Vietnam, the most current and important language-in-education policy documents must be analyzed. The following are citations from key articles of the 2005 Education Law, and Government Decree No 82/2010/ND-CP “on teaching and learning ethnic minority languages in general and continuing educational institutions”:

Vietnamese is the official language to be used in schools and other educational institutions … The State shall enable ethnic minority people to learn their spoken and written languages in order to preserve and develop their ethnic cultural identity, helping pupils from ethnic minorities easily absorb knowledge. (Vietnamese Education Law, 2005: Article 7, emphasis added)

Ethnic minority languages are taught as a subject in general and continuing education institutions. (Vietnamese Government Decree 82/2010/ND-CP: Article 6, emphasis added)

The Decree regulates in detail the teaching and learning of ethnic minority languages including the conditions, content, methods and forms of teaching and learning … All the previous regulations which conflict with the Decree will be abrogated. (Ibid.: Article 1 and 14, emphasis added)

The Law and the Decree are closely related, as the Decree attempts to provide practical guidelines for the implementation of the Law in terms of NDLs in basic education (formal and nonformal sectors), excluding early childhood education (ECE). It is worth noting that the Decree went through a development process of five years, and different drafts had slightly different foci, possibly reflecting the differing positions of different factions in the MoET and other state agencies. It seems as if there is an attempt with the Decree to represent the government’s last word on NDLs in education. Even though the Decree probably intends to put some
order to the confusion over conflicting statements of the past, it leaves us with many questions about the role of NDLs in education. Some remaining aspects are unclear:

- Does the Decree allow first language-based bi- or multilingual education in NDLs, e.g. the externally-funded pilot projects currently operating? Educationalists have reportedly interpreted the Decree as “a continuing restriction on the teaching of ethnic minority languages solely as separate language courses, not to be used as the medium of instruction” (UN-HRC, 2011: 14).
- If NDLs can only be used as subjects of study, what will happen to the pilots when their external funding runs out?
- What does Vietnamese as the official language of education mean in practice – must it be the sole or the main language of instruction?

NON-DOMINANT LANGUAGES IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

This section describes current use of NDLs in education in the three countries, including pilot projects and research results. These examples reflect recent developments in the region, while demonstrating the “power” of effective practice in NDL use. Available space does not allow a thorough description of NDL practice, but the works cited can be consulted as they elaborate on these points.

Pilot Projects as Demonstrations of Effective Practice

In Cambodia and Thailand, successful pilot projects using NDLs have led to the review and ultimate rewriting of existing language-in-education policies. The Cambodian experience in using NDLs, initiated by International Cooperation Cambodia, CARE International and other partners, provides an excellent example. Students in Cambodian pilot programs in both formal and non-formal systems are learning to read in their first languages as well as Khmer and are using both languages for further learning. Community school language committees consisting of NDL community members have been integrally involved in language and curriculum development, the production of learning materials, and the identification of volunteer teachers. Important factors of success in the “CARE model” pilots, which are now being implemented more widely in the formal sector, include the active participation of communities through these committees, the hiring and training of local staff who speak the NDLs used as LOIs, and the adoption of an alternative school calendar that is suited to local farming conditions (AKP, 2012; Benson, 2011; Benson & Kosonen, 2012; CARE International Cambodia, 2004; Kosonen, 2007, 2010; Neou Sun, 2009; Noorlander & Ven, 2008; Thomas, 2002; UNESCO, 2007b, 2008b).

In Thailand, an action research project using a widely spoken NDL, Pattani Malay, as a language of instruction represents the first serious attempt to address educational language issues in Southern Thailand. The project, which is based on the principle of long-term use of the L1 for literacy and learning, was initiated by
by Mahidol University and other non-governmental actors, and is supported the Thailand Research Fund and UNICEF, with technical support from SIL International (Aluyufri 2008; Prensrirat, 2008, 2009; Paramal, 2008; SEAMEO, 2009). Another promising project involving long-term L1 use is operating in the Kanchanaburi Province, using Mon and Standard Thai as languages of instruction (Tienmee, 2009). This initiative is a result of collaboration between a Thai NGO, the Foundation for Applied Linguistics (FAL) and the Ministry of Education (MOE), with technical support from Payap University and SIL International (ibid.). FAL and MOE are also involved in small-scale MLE programs in Northern Thailand, mostly in ECE and the early grades of primary, using four NDLs: Akha, Hmong, Lahu and Pwo Karen (Kosonen & Person, 2013; Tan, 2011; UNESCO, 2012a).

Finally, despite the gap between written policy and educational practice, some initiatives that use NDLs in education are operating in Vietnam. One project supported by Save the Children employs para-professional teaching assistants to promote oral classroom communication in the L1, though they stop short of using these languages for literacy (Benson & Kosonen, 2012; Kosonen, 2009a; Vu, 2010). An action research project by MoET and UNICEF takes a fully bilingual approach from preschool to the end of primary at grade 5, in clusters of schools in three provinces, representing three NDLs: Hmong, J’rai and Khmer. This program uses L1 literacy as a basis for learning additional languages and academic content, and has received technical support from many of us working in the region (Bui & Bui, 2009; Benson & Kosonen, 2012; Malone, 2010; Shaeffer, 2010; UNICEF, 2011).

NDLs have also been brought into primary education by other means. In some areas of Thailand, for example, “local curriculum” (up to 30% of learning time) is used for teaching at least six different NDLs (Prapasapong, 2009; UNESCO, 2012a). The local curriculum component is used less in Cambodia and Vietnam for teaching NDLs, but it is used in other countries (see Ruiz de Forsberg and Borges Månsson, Chapter 11 in this volume) and it could be a good platform for introducing new NDLs into the formal education system. However, it must be remembered that in the case of Vietnam, the teaching of NDLs as school subjects has not led to adoption of L1-based education.

Research on NDL Communities and Learners

Research on the conditions of NDL communities and learners has contributed to greater public awareness of language and education issues, which has in some cases led to the revision of practices and policies to better serve diverse populations. For example, as a result of recent research, the Thai MOE now acknowledges that many minority learners are prevented from performing up to their true potential if only Standard Thai is used as the LOI (Kosonen, 2008; Kosonen & Person, 2013). Prapasapong (2009) cites a MOE survey showing that in some areas there is a mismatch between teachers’ NDLs and those of their students, meaning that they do not necessarily understand each other, making
learning inefficient. Based on learning results from the Pattani Malay MLE pilot in Thailand, Walter (2011) has shown that speakers of the NDL studying in their L1 perform far better in all tested school subjects – including the DL, Standard Thai – than speakers of the NDL taught only in the DL.

In Vietnam, evidence from the pilot project on MLE mentioned earlier has been important in addressing the issue of “presumed obstacles” to NDL use in education. For years Vietnamese government officials have relied on common myths, e.g. that L1-based bilingual education is not feasible in “such a linguistically diverse context” (Bui & Bui, 2009; Kosonen, 2004, 2009a; Kosonen, Shaeffer, & Vu, 2010; Viet Nam News, 2011; World Bank, 2009). Another presumed obstacle is the lack of teachers who speak NDLs; however, recent yet-unpublished (Jim Owen, pers. comm. 2012) research regarding the linguistically diverse Lao Cai province – in which a L1-based education pilot is currently operating – shows that most schools comprise only one or two ethnolinguistic groups and that many teachers have some proficiency in local NDLs. The presumed heterogeneity is mostly in towns influenced by migration, which are not the target areas of L1-based programs. It is likely that the situation is similar or even more conducive to L1-based education in other provinces that are linguistically less diverse.

LATEST ISSUES AND TRENDS

When Cambodian, Thai and Vietnamese policies and practices with regard to NDLs are compared, some interesting commonalities and differences emerge. The biggest difference between these three countries is what I call “the philosophy of policies and practices” – the ideologies and principles guiding decision-making and action. Another key difference is the level of freedom or space in which NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) to function, and consequently be involved in L1-based education.

Vietnam has issued many supportive policy statements, but most could be considered rhetoric because few have been put to practice. In addition, as in other one-party states influenced by the Soviet Union, there has been very little latitude for local CSOs or community-based initiatives, and the work of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) has been restricted more in Vietnam than in neighboring countries. Yet Vietnam has been relatively independent in its decision-making on language-in-education issues, as outside actors seem to have had less influence on policy formation than in Cambodia or Thailand – for better or for worse.

In terms of their philosophies of policies and practices, Cambodia and Thailand have been quite different, probably due to a certain extent to their different political systems. Until recently neither country has issued explicit policy statements on NDLs or their use in education. This may have been unintentional, as most decision-makers are members of dominant ethnolinguistic communities (as they also are in Vietnam) and may not be aware of the linguistic diversity existing in their countries, or of the need to address language-in-education issues. However,
local CSOs, NGOs, academics as well as INGOs have been quite free to advocate for L1-based education and to initiate various projects at the local level. Consequently, some piloting and action research in L1-based education has been possible without official policy support. These conditions, which experienced South African language advocates might call “enabling” (Heugh, 1995), have allowed various actors in Cambodia and Thailand to work towards more inclusive educational approaches. Today it is clear that government agencies and official policy documents are aligning themselves with this trend by providing increased support for NDLs in education. These developments have not occurred in a vacuum, but reflect – and contribute to – the regional trend of increasing L1-based bi- and multilingual education.

Meanwhile, and somewhat inexplicably, Vietnam has gradually weakened its statements in official documents on the importance and use of NDLs in education. One possible explanation is that government officials no longer take for granted the policy statements that were adapted from – and sometimes even literal translations of – Soviet documents. Thus, documents may have been revised to better reflect the true intentions of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the State. Vietnam continues to be quite inward-looking, and few stakeholders are aware of international research, policy and practice in bilingual education. (This might explain why, as mentioned above, the teaching of NDLs as subjects at some grade levels could mistakenly be called “bilingual education.”) In sum, statements in the most current and relevant Vietnamese policy documents are clearer but weaker than those of their neighbors in Cambodia and Thailand.

It is ironic that at the same time Vietnam has weakened policy support for NDLs in education, at least half a dozen other countries of Asia and the Pacific region are strengthening their use of NDLs. It is also surprising that the two Vietnamese pilot projects using NDLs in education – both sponsored by international agencies – are operating without major problems, and are in fact achieving positive results. Interestingly, some NDL communities and education officials in Lao Cai province have become so excited about the potential of L1-based education that the provincial education administration is using some of its regular budget to fund expansion of MLE initiatives (UN-HRC, 2011; UNICEF, 2011; Viet Nam News, 2011). One reason for the inconsistencies may be the fact that these projects began several years before Decree 82/2010/ND-CP was approved, and no new NDL projects have started since the Decree was passed. The real reasons for this apparent mismatch between words and deeds can only be guessed, but perhaps the Decree is not intended to be taken any more literally than the positive statements of the 1948 Constitution, making the lives of non-Vietnamese stakeholders ever more complicated.

It can be concluded that the approach chosen in Vietnam has been more top-down compared to the others. Of these three countries – and perhaps throughout Southeast and East Asia and the Pacific region – Vietnam has had the biggest gap between the rhetoric and reality in terms of latitude for NDLs in education. Most discouragingly, based on the assumption that learners’ L1s are the best means for achieving high quality education, Vietnamese officials seem to be weakening the
previously supportive policy statements to match their inaction and non-implementation of earlier “strong on the surface”-type policies.

Fortunately, Cambodia and Thailand are following the international trend of recognizing the importance of NDLs in education. Written policies are being introduced or strengthened on the basis of advocacy and/or demonstration of successful outcomes of L1-based education. Previously in both Cambodia and Thailand the use of NDLs in education was stronger in practice than in written policy. In order to reduce the gap between the policy and practice, the Cambodian and Thai governments have strengthened their written policies, not weakened them.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that more supportive language-in-education policies and the increasing use of NDLs in education in Cambodia and Thailand are in line with a regional trend. In Vietnam the opposite is happening, i.e. weakening policy support for and potentially less use of NDLs in education. It can be concluded that what we are seeing in Mainland Southeast Asia is two steps forward and one step back in the policies designed to make education more appropriate and equitable for speakers of NDLs.

Despite their current advantages over Vietnam in terms of policy development, the situations in Cambodia and Thailand are far from ideal. All three countries could still greatly improve their language-in-education policies, and implementation of these policies, to establish a clear legal foundation for the development and use of all NDLs at all levels of education. Several important questions remain unanswered and require further investigation, including the following:

- Why are Vietnam’s written policies going against the regional trend of increased use of NDLs, and even against local interests and practices in some areas of the country?
- Why have Cambodia and Thailand failed to support all languages in education, particularly the largest NDLs?
- Why are most NDL-based educational projects initiated by non-governmental organizations rather than by appropriate government agencies like education ministries?
- How can the roles of civil society and NGO actors be expanded, even in top-down Vietnam where all local organizations have links with the Party and the State, so that NDL-based education can be expanded and sustained?

As all three cases show, addressing language-in-education issues for ethnolinguistic minority learners is possible when 1) policies give sufficient latitude for use of non-dominant languages and 2) when MLE programs use and develop learners’ L1s for sufficiently long periods for learners to achieve strong literacy and thinking skills. There is a great deal of evidence (e.g. Ball, 2010; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012; Ouane & Glanz, 2011; Walter & Benson, 2012) that “short-cuts” are rarely effective in providing a strong enough foundation in the
L1 for further learning, and such programs do not give learners the full benefits of L1-based MLE (see Benson; and Walter, both in this volume). The recommendation would thus be that the best support to speakers of NDLs would be educational programs that provide functional literacy in the L1, long-term use of the L1 as a LOI, and gradual introduction of dominant languages. Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam could all be encouraged to expand their policies and practices further, in line with these recommendations, so that education can be more equitable for all, including the speakers of non-dominant languages.

NOTES

1 I wish to acknowledge the very useful comments and suggestions by Carol Benson and Dennis Malone on this chapter.

2 No official English translations were available for any of these documents, thus unofficial ones have been cited. Using the official Thai version of the National Language Policy, I was able to confirm the English translation to be accurate, but as I am not proficient in Khmer or Vietnamese I must rely on the unofficial translations of Cambodian and Vietnamese documents made by NGOs or by the governments themselves. These are normally accurate enough for common usage.

3 “Nationality” in Vietnam – as well as in China and other countries influenced by the Soviet Union – is the government’s category to identify different ethnolinguistic communities. Individual nationality is mostly based on real or assumed racial lineage, and often relates to the heritage language of the community. However, the government’s ethnolinguistic classifications do not always reflect the linguistic or cultural realities of the communities themselves.

4 In Vietnam and other countries influenced by policies and ideology of the Soviet Union, the term script is often used in an unconventional manner, basically referring to orthography or writing system rather than a script per se, as discussed in the Introduction to this volume.

5 The script provision is often interpreted to mean that NDL orthographies must be based on the Khmer script, even if a particular language has used a non-Khmer script historically or does so in other countries.

6 The term “bilingual education” is used in Cambodia to refer to programs that start in the L1 and teach additional languages; these are now called multilingual education (MLE) in most Asian countries.

7 Similar situations exist in Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries, particularly among ethnic Chinese and Central Thai-related groups, but these people are likely to be considered members of the dominant ethnolinguistic community. In Vietnam, the “stamp” of the official heritage nationality stays with a person (and is printed in one’s official identification card) even if linguistic assimilation has occurred.

8 It is important to note that earlier drafts of the law gave stronger support to NDLs by stating that ethnic minorities have the right to L1 instruction in public schools, but over the years of refining the law the terms were weakened, possibly due to nationalistic political actors feeling that national unity would be endangered.

9 In Cambodia, “Khmer Lue” is often translated to English as “indigenous” or “indigenous people” (with no capital letter showing awareness of international rights issues).

10 These are NDLs related to Khmer as well as Jarai, an unrelated Austronesian language.

11 One positive exception is recent LOI policy in the Philippines (see Multilingual Philippines, 2013; Stone, in this volume), where L1-based MLE in NDLs is justified on pedagogical, linguistic and cultural grounds.

REFERENCES


Constitution Finder (2012). University of Richmond, VA, USA. (http://confinder.richmond.edu/index.html)


Neo Sun (2009). Education policies for ethnic minorities in Cambodia. In Kimmo Kosonen & Catherine Young (Eds.), Mother Tongue as Bridge Language of Instruction: Policies and Experiences in Southeast Asia (pp. 62-68). Bangkok: SEAMEO.


Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the National Institute of the Korean Language (pp. 151-172). Seoul: National Institute of the Korean Language.


Siren, Un (2009). The mother tongue as a bridge language of instruction in Cambodia. In Kimmo Kosonen & Catherine Young (Eds.), Mother tongue as bridge language of instruction: Policies and experiences in Southeast Asia (pp. 148-152). Bangkok: SEAMEO.


_Kimmo Kosonen_  
*SIL International & Payap University*  
_Chiang Mai, Thailand*