

**Key concepts in applied linguistics /
Conceptos clave de la lingüística aplicada**

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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According to Baker, “Bilingual education is a simplistic label for a complex phenomenon” (Baker, 2006, p. 213) and this complexity characterises a highly interdisciplinary field of study which has greatly expanded over the last 15-20 years, particularly in Spain and in parts of Latin America (c.f. Dobson, Perez Murillo & Johnson, 2010; Hamel, 2008).

A distinction traditionally made between ‘bilingual education’ and other types of educational provision involving two or more languages is summarised by Romaine in the following manner, “Bilingual education [...] a program where two languages are used as media of instruction” (Romaine, 1989, p. 216). This, by definition, excludes programmes where the emphasis is exclusively on language development per se (whether these are termed ‘foreign,’ ‘second’ or ‘additional’) and focuses directly on relationships between language learning and other areas of the curriculum. This dual focus is reflected in methodological approaches, such as Content-based Instruction (CBI)—associated particularly with North America—or, more recently, in a European context, Content and Langua-

ge Integrated Learning (CLIL). It must be noted that although the labels used in these two initiatives, their academic background, as well as their origins are different, both educational approaches are actually similar in practice.

Another important differentiation that is often found is between bilingual education programmes for ‘majority’ language speakers and those aimed at ‘minority’ language speakers. These are often aligned with a distinction between models which are based on an additive vision and those which espouse a subtractive view of bilingualism. These programmes have been classified by Hornberger (1991), and later by May (2008), as maintenance, heritage and enrichment, which in different ways aim at adding another language to the speaker’s repertoire—thus extending it—, and transitional models which are designed to replace one language by another, subtracting rather than adding to the user’s linguistic resources.

Two key concerns regularly discussed and researched in the field of bilingual education are (i) classroom language use in bilingual education programmes, and (ii) relationships between languages and content areas, in particular language development and academic achievement. I will briefly comment on some of the key issues which characterise both areas.

CLASSROOM LANGUAGE USE IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

A controversial area related to bilingual education is the debate about classroom language use. There has been a long tradition of monolingualism with regard to the use of language(s) in the classroom, as Cummins (2008, p. 65) notes, “It is assumed that instruction should be carried out, as far as possible, exclusively in the target language without recourse to students’ first language.” This tradition is also reflected in the early development of the Canadian immersion programmes which were based on a separation of language according to subject, teacher, or time

of day in accordance with a principle of “bilingualism through monolingualism” (Swain, 1983).

More recently the phenomenon of codeswitching, or “the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation” (Milroy & Muysken, 1995, p. 7) and the selective use of the students’ L1 has been increasingly revindicated as a resource in the foreign language classroom. Macaro (2006) sees the use of the students’ L1 as helpful in the following classroom functions: Giving complex instructions to carry out learning activities, controlling students’ behaviour, and checking learners’ understanding. He also recommends the use of the L1 for explicit grammar teaching and to build social and personal relationships with the learners. Cummins (2008) is a strong advocate for bilingual instructional strategies which recognise and promote the reality of cross-language transfer. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that there is still much ground to cover before bilingual classroom language use is seen as the norm.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

CBI, seen by many as the core of bilingual education, is an example of an approach to language teaching and learning that highlights communication and use in authentic, contextualised situations, where the attention of the learner is focused on meaning rather than on form. This means that the content matter will dictate the selection and sequence of language items to be taught and learnt in the programme. Thus, content, rather than language, is used as the point of departure (Brinton et al., 1989) for syllabi and materials design.

A concern with how to ensure optimal cognitive and linguistic development is characteristic of research in this field. As Genesee (2004) recognises, from evaluations of the progress of majority language students in bilingual programmes, there is evidence of similar levels of

achievement in academic domains compared to students in monolingual programmes. This author demonstrates that students in bilingual immersion programmes also generally achieve high levels of proficiency in the learning of the target language. However, in order to try to ensure an appropriate balance between a focus on form and a focus on meaning, Lyster (2007) has proposed the Counterbalance Hypothesis as a systematic way of integrating and complementing these different emphases by orienting the learners in the opposite direction to that to which they are used to in the classroom at different moments in the language learning process (a focus on meaning for those who have been exposed to a focus on form and vice versa).

A similar focus in a European context, CLIL, is defined as “a generic term that refers to any educational situation in which an additional language, and therefore not the most widely-used language of the environment, is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself” (Marsh & Langé, 2000, p. iii). Recently, Abello-Contesse et al. (forthcoming) have problematised the notion as to whether, in fact, the teaching and learning of specific academic content—through approaches such as CLIL or CBI—is the most appropriate way to achieve bilingualism and biliteracy in certain school contexts. They suggest that possibly in settings such as foreign-language programmes, the development of a strong content-based model, originally designed to meet the needs of students in second-language settings, might not be the most effective way to achieve bilingualism. A possible alternative might be the notion of “education for bilingualism” (de Mejía & Fonseca, 2009) which includes various pedagogical modalities which aim at the development of bilingualism in the school curriculum, yet not necessarily through the teaching and learning of different subject areas completely in another language.

In conclusion, although bilingual education is a notion that seems transparent, in reality there have been heated debates among its supporters and detractors as to what can be legitimately classed within this character-

risation, how far languages should be separated in the bilingual classroom and the relative emphasis which should be accorded to the development of both language and content area knowledge. It remains to be seen how far these tensions can be resolved in the future.

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