

Intercultural bilingual education among indigenous peoples in Latin America

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Introduction

Of the estimated 300 million indigenous persons that survive to date in the world, between 40 and 50 million live in Latin America. There are indigenous people in every country, perhaps with the only exception of Uruguay. In Bolivia and Guatemala they are numerical majorities: 62% of the total population and nearly 50%, respectively (Sichra and López, 2002).

Over 700 different indigenous languages are spoken in the region (Grinevald, 2006), some with a small number of speakers and others with millions, such as Quechua and Aymara. Brazil is the country with the greatest linguistic diversity (approximately 180 indigenous languages) and Nicaragua the country with the least (3 indigenous languages and Creole English).

Since the 1970s increasingly powerful indigenous organizations and leaders and the resurgence of ethnicity -- recognized as "the return of the Indian" (Albó, 1991) -- have pushed governments into reconsidering their positions with respect to indigenous populations. During the 1980s and 1990s most countries underwent constitutional reforms acknowledging the multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual nature of their societies as well as the right of indigenous peoples to education in their mother tongue or L1 (Moya, 1998), and in certain situations with this right implemented under community management and control (e.g. Colombia) (Bolaños et al, 2004).

Responding to social and economic exclusion, Latin American indigenous national and international movements are highly political. It is difficult to separate education and literacy from the struggle for rights and self-determination. The political mobilization of indigenous organizations leads to educational reforms and intercultural bilingual approaches (e.g. Bolivia, Ecuador). And, in turn, bilingual education has contributed to increased political awareness and organizational processes among indigenous people.

Across Latin America the terms intercultural bilingual education, bilingual intercultural education and ethno-education are used interchangeably.

Early developments

Contemporary Latin American indigenous bilingual education (IBE) has a long history (López, 2006b) that dates back to the beginning of the 20th century with experiments by teachers working in indigenous communities in Mexico (Brice-Heath, 1972), Peru and Ecuador (Sichra and López, 2002). Starting in the late 1930s in Mexico, the United States based Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) soon became a privileged actor in the region, when various governments signed contracts with this institution whose main mission was and continues to be the translation of the Bible. Additionally, in the Amazonian basin, SIL committed itself to help governments incorporate indigenous communities that were then either isolated or had limited contact with mainstream society. For over 50 years, SIL developed IBE projects emphasizing language development and evangelization, from a perspective of planned cultural change (Larson et al, 1979). SIL's work has drawn severe criticism (Hvalkof and Abby, 1981), but it must also be acknowledged that the importance

given to the development of literacy in the indigenous language contributed to speakers' self-esteem (Landaburu, 1998) and the valuing of their languages.

Initially IBE was conceived as an instrument of assimilation; hence, most governments implemented early-transition strategies (López, 2006b). Nonetheless, large-scale projects carried out in the countries with the highest indigenous presence --Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia and Ecuador--had an impact on indigenous communities and schools, providing important evidence regarding the advantage of initially resorting to the pupils' L1 (López, 1998). Mexico and Peru did more intensive work in the field and produced classical publications on IBE (Arguedas, 1966; Aguirre Beltrán, 1973; Modiano, 1974; Escobar et al, 1975). The prominence of IBE in these countries is closely linked to the national policies of state *indigenism* that also had an academic impact. This period witnessed a major impact of linguistics in IBE, both descriptive and applied.

As indigenous demands grew stronger in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a discursive shift took place in most countries away from transitionally oriented programs to adopting the maintenance and development model (Sichra and López, 2002). A factor influencing this move was the new orientation, which resulted from the meeting held in Barbados in 1977 between Latin American anthropologists, linguists and indigenous leaders and intellectuals, marking a turn from top-down state indigenism to a more grass-roots and critical approach. In some countries, this approach led to the active participation of indigenous organizations in program decision-making.

From its beginnings, IBE drew attention from academic circles; between 1963 and 1992, 380 books and articles about IBE were published in 13 different Latin American countries (Amadío and López, 1993). A recent review on the state of interculturalism and education in Latin America, although with a heavy Mexican emphasis, includes 415 references specifically related to IBE in the decade 1990-2000 (Bertely and Gonzales, 2004).

The analysis of IBE has been approached from different and complementary perspectives: as a privileged domain of language policy and planning (Brice-Heath, 1972; Escobar et al, 1975; Cultura de Guatemala, 1995), as the setting in which the predominantly oral indigenous societies gradually become literate (Larson et al, 1979; King and Hornberger, 2004; Sichra, 2006), as a vehicle for combating the long standing history of discrimination and racism (CARE, 2004), as a means to introduce interculturalism in multiethnic societies (Mosonyi and Gonzales, 1974), and more recently others have examined IBE within the framework of indigenous peoples' human rights (Cultura de Guatemala, 1995; Hamel, 1997).

Books and articles on IBE in Latin America also depict different implementation aspects: curriculum design (Dietschy-Scheiterle, 1987), materials preparation (Chetry-Komarek, 1987), language use and alternation in class (Hornberger, 1988), and pre- and in-service teacher training (Calvo and Donnadieu, 1992). Two additional areas that deserved special attention are the learning and teaching of Spanish as a L2 (Pozzi-Escot, 1990), and the development of a unified writing system in the indigenous languages, an issue that is particularly influential in South-America (Cerrón-Palomino et al, 1987).

Indigenous organizations have always considered IBE counter-hegemonic, even when governments implemented it. Nonetheless, these projects and programs have been constantly under scrutiny with ongoing tests of validity, efficiency and efficacy. One of the earliest research projects took place in Chiapas, where indigenous children in a bilingual

program obtained better scores than their peers in L2 tests in the second grade (Modiano, 1974). Comparable results were attained in different countries at various levels of primary schooling. In Puno, Peru, at fourth grade level, in relation to proficiency in the L1 and in Spanish as a L2 as well as achievement in other subjects, bilingually educated children obtained comparable or better results than indigenous students in monolingual Spanish schools. In that same region, Hornberger (1988) found that even only after the first two years of schooling, bilingually educated Quechua children developed a more complex use of their L1 than their peers in Spanish-only schools. In Mexican indigenous rural schools, Francis and Hamel (1992) determined that the skills and competencies bilingual children developed in their L1 transferred to Spanish, facilitating reading comprehension and writing skills in their L2. Similarly, in Peru López and Jung (2003) found that Aymara speaking children in IBE fourth and fifth grades produced written texts in Spanish –their L2-- of higher grammatical and rhetorical complexity than those they could produce orally in this same language.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the geography of IBE has expanded significantly as countries' educational reforms tried to respond to the needs and expectations of indigenous populations. When in the 1960s and 1970s the implementation of IBE projects was generally restricted to the five countries with more indigenous presence—Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia— by 2006 IBE projects and programs were being implemented in 17 countries. In some cases, like in Bolivia, an analysis of the evolution of IBE and its up-scaling made specialists conclude that governments had changed their perspective towards indigenous pupils' education, moving away from discrete and focalized projects to the inscription of IBE in national policies (Muñoz, 1997; Albó and Anaya, 2003). However, IBE remains generally restricted to the formal primary education of children (López, 2006a and b; Hornberger and López, 1998).

Major contributions

The studies reviewed and our own involvement in research as well as in the practical implementation of IBE show that the adoption of language maintenance and development ideologies coincided with an emerging understanding of the role of culture in IBE, which led to the relocation of linguistics as the major discipline influencing the field. Anthropologists analyzed the problems indigenous learners faced in schools where their languages were used but within Western-oriented curricula and concluded that much more than bilingual education was needed. Under the *Barbados spirit*, the notions of interculturalism and of intercultural bilingual education were elaborated, when indigenous educational experiments were implemented in Venezuela (Mosonyi and Gonzales, 1974). Gradually these notions influenced IBE, initially in South America and later in Mexico, where the concept of bicultural bilingual education predominated (Calvo and Donnadieu, 1992). Although much work remains, for over a decade IBE has been gradually paying more attention to indigenous knowledge and practices, and hence the denomination of *intercultural* bilingual education (EIB in its acronym in Spanish) has become more common in relation to the education of indigenous populations. It must also be acknowledged that most of the educational reforms of the 1990s included the notion of intercultural education for all--influenced by the demands of education for all and establishing links between education and the strengthening of democracy. This has been precisely one of the most pressing demands from indigenous leaders who claim that society at large should become intercultural since throughout history indigenous people have always had to learn from the non-indigenous but the opposite has never been the case. Most recent indigenous

proposals also point in the direction of two-way IBE (CONAMAQ et al, 2004; CNEM, 2004).

Another major outcome of IBE is related to the increasing attention paid to indigenous languages and their present condition (England, 1998; Landaburu, 1998). Taking these languages into schools in most cases meant previously developing writing systems and even elaborating the languages' lexicon, tasks which became even more demanding when IBE moved into the upper levels of basic education. In this context IBE adopted the notion of *normalization* taken from the Catalanian and Basque sociolinguistics and bilingual education traditions (López, 2006a). In various countries, from Guatemala to the south, linguists and teachers, whilst producing educational materials, became involved in language elaboration processes and in the creation of unified writing systems in line with linguistic standardization (Cerrón-Palomino et al, 1987). Producing written texts for school use in otherwise oral languages also implied training indigenous teachers and educators who spoke these languages but had not written them. In this process, the question of authorship arose and was considered as an instrument of indigenous self-recognition and empowerment (Lindenberg-Monte, 1996).

In line with the emphasis given to language development, initially the preparation of teachers favored training in some aspects of descriptive linguistics, usually to the detriment of a sound understanding of the roles culture and pedagogy played in IBE. This orientation is being revised since attention is now given to a more comprehensive understanding of IBE. The re-conceptualization that is currently in progress is also a by-product of the involvement of indigenous experts and organizations in the field, and particularly in pre- and in-service teacher training (Carranza et al, 2004; López, 2006b).

It is now generally accepted that in-service teacher training is insufficient and that greater attention ought to be paid to pre-service education. Thus, there is increasing agreement that ongoing professional development is required. Hence, as of the 1990s, more IBE teacher education programs have been organized, gradually resulting in curriculum re-definition with more consideration paid to indigenous knowledge systems, as in Mato Grosso, Brazil (CEISI, 2005) and Iquitos, Peru (Carranza et al, 2004). In the Peruvian Amazon, an indigenous bilingual teachers' program –FORMABIAP— prepares professionals to respond to the needs and aspirations of indigenous peoples and simultaneously stimulates a dialogue amongst indigenous knowledge and value systems vis-à-vis mainstream traditions, in order to structure an intercultural perspective that could contribute to the sustainable development of the Amazonian sub-region. In turn, in Bolivia, indigenous organizations and leaders took it upon themselves to intervene in student and even lecturer selection processes so as to ensure they spoke the indigenous language in question and were sympathetic to the indigenous cause (López, 2006a).

The benefits of L1 development referred to above do not seem to be restricted to greater L2 proficiency. López (1998) summarizes findings from different countries that provide empirical evidence related to indigenous bilingual children's overall academic achievement, active participation in learning and development of positive self-image, self-esteem and respect. A Bolivian longitudinal study carried out between 1992 and 1995 revealed that in IBE programs girls and boys developed significantly higher levels of self-esteem, a greater capacity for adaptation and a more tolerant attitude in cases of frustration (in López, 1998). Research corroborated these findings ten years later in Guatemala (Rubio, 2006). It is promising to discover that bilingual children take advantage of and apply the linguistic knowledge and experiences previously acquired, in spite of the

short span of time devoted to systematic L1 development (3 to 4 years). With greater investment in L1 development, one could expect even better results.

Two other areas in which the contribution of the inclusion and use of children's L1 in education are in evidence are increased and better quality participation from parent, community, and indigenous organizations (López, 2006a; Garcés, 2006), as well as significant improvement in terms of internal efficiency indicators such as enrollment, attendance, retention, and less grade repetition (López, 2006a).

Work in progress

The increasing role indigenous organizations and leaders have assumed has brought about new analysis and research issues. Three of them relate to the recuperation of indigenous views and voices, aspects linked to a shift from top-down language and educational planning to bottom-up approaches, as well as to newer and greater demands on teacher education and on the preparation of qualified human resources in general.

The fact is that the teacher remains a key factor for the construction and implementation of IBE. Opposed to traditional mainstream education that denies the existence of another language and culture in the classroom, IBE is now recognized as part of the indigenous patrimony, rescuing their values, relocating their languages and cultures, assigning them at least the same status in schools that hegemonic languages and cultures enjoy. This paradigm shift places vast demands on teachers professionally trained under the ideals of monolingualism and monoculturalism and the illusion of an unquestionably homogeneous Nation-state. Thus, teacher education and development is trying to move far beyond just the technicalities of learning and teaching in order to professionally prepare individuals who will assume a personal and collective commitment to struggle against racism and discrimination. This new focus of teacher education is aligned with the indigenous political project of transforming Latin American countries into multinational entities.

In this context, the work regarding indigenous views is being undertaken both within academic spheres as well as by some indigenous organizations themselves. In at least Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala and Mexico, grass-roots organizations are involved in the design and implementation of alternative educational programs in which local knowledge and histories deserve specific attention. In Bolivia and Guatemala this is an outcome of the direct participation of indigenous educational councils (CONAMAQ et al, 2004; CNEM, 2004). In Ecuador, Colombia and Chiapas, Mexico, the concern for the development of alternative curricula is a side-effect of a profound change in the management and administration of education. In Ecuador, in 1988 the nation-wide administration of IBE came under indigenous control, due to an agreement between the government and the most important national indigenous organization (Garcés, 2006). In Colombia, as a result of the constitutional reform of 1991, indigenous peoples have been granted the right to design their own educational models (Bolaños et al, 2004). In Chiapas, a new regime of self-determined autonomous local governments allows indigenous municipalities to organize their own education (Bertely, 2004). In the Peruvian Amazon, since 1988 a regional indigenous organization negotiated with the government a system of shared management of the newly created FORMABIAP. All of these experiences receive support from researchers and committed academicians.

Recuperating indigenous voices and views also receives increasing attention from universities and research centers. Such is the case of PROEIB Andes—the Program of

Professional Development in Intercultural Bilingual Education for the Andean Countries--through its MA program in IBE that receives students from six countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru). Research projects are being carried out in order to contribute to alternative curriculum design and implementation in indigenous territories, attending equally to broader social dimensions of the indigenous culture (cf. www.proeibandes.org). Some cases are: a ceramics and textile project for the Awajuns of Peru (Taish, 2001); an art project for the Mapuches of Chile (Cartes, 2001); a project focusing on the social tensions that have arisen amongst the Guambianos of Colombia as a result of the introduction of writing (Almendra, 2005); also a project focused on the incorporation into the curriculum of hunting-related knowledge of the Yuracares of Bolivia (Sánchez, 2005).

The indigenous demand for more curricular-inclusion of their knowledge and value systems has generated an on-going process of enquiry about the validity of the previously unquestioned official school knowledge (Stobart & Howard, 2002; Bolaños et al, 2004; Carranza et al 2004; CIESI, 2005). Indigenous leaders and organizations are now struggling to exercise control over curriculum design, taking advantage of the fissures opened by the ministries of education themselves when they modified their policies and opened up legal provisions for curriculum diversification in order to respond to local needs (CONAMAQ et al 2004; Aikmann 2003). The fact is that these new curricula leave little room for diversification and inclusion of local knowledge, due to the content load and the centralized nature of the curriculum determined by governments.

A specific mention needs to be made to the Paraguayan case. Paraguay is a bilingual country par excellence: the majority of the population (87%) speaks Spanish and Guarani and these two languages have been used extensively in education since the early 1990s when a profound educational reform began. In Paraguay a minority (1.6%) is of indigenous ancestry and identifies itself as such. Indigenous Paraguayans speak different Amerindian languages of which only six are genetically related to Paraguayan Guarani (Meliá 1997). The national reform scheme practically excluded indigenous pupils since it opted for the curricular use of Paraguayan Guarani, a modern urban variety of this Amerindian language widely spoken by the majority of the population of the country that is in fact non-indigenous. It was only at the beginning of the present decade that due to indigenous demands and international pressure, the Ministry of Education of Paraguay started a series of specific indigenous bilingual education projects, thus extending their bilingual reform to the indigenous minorities.

Indigenous demands are in fact challenging historically top-down instituted educational policies and approaches, pushing for bottom-up ones, in view of new political processes, such as decentralization and the control of local governments that indigenous leaders have recently achieved in some countries. In this new setting, the classical leadership in IBE that Mexican and Peruvian institutions once had is being displaced by other countries where this approach is the result of popular demands and indigenous struggle (e.g. Bolivia, Ecuador) and not from government decisions or academic interests. Bottom-up approaches are also implemented by countries where IBE is a new concern, as in Argentina, where a Ministry of Education team, with technical support from PROEIB Andes, carried out a nation-wide contest to recover local initiatives and learn from school-teachers and grass-roots organizations and leaders (MECyT, 2003). These new ways of educational and language policy design also imply consultations at local and regional levels (Zúñiga et al, 2003) and active involvement of indigenous organizations and leaders.

Together with these new concerns, there is an *old* issue that has steadily attracted the attention of ministries and academic and research centers: learning and teaching Spanish as a L2 (Rockwell and Pellicer, 2003; Hamel, 2004). More work needs to be done in this area, since there is social pressure regarding the children's needs to master Spanish in order to have better chances in life, since historically schools only paid attention to Spanish under a clear assimilationist scheme. Similarly, the L2 methodological issue acquires greater importance when IBE now confronts an emerging and previously unexpected need to teach indigenous languages to speakers of either Spanish or Portuguese.

Problems and difficulties

In Latin America, research cannot be drastically separated from IBE implementation or action. Most generally, researchers are also IBE activists and hence involved in various stages of program implementation. In addition, it must also be taken into account that funds available exclusively for research are practically non-existent, perhaps with the exception of certain Mexican and Brazilian institutions.

When IBE was adopted as the most suitable approach for indigenous children and adults, indigenous monolingualism was relatively high and most of the indigenous population inhabited rural areas that were either isolated or difficult to reach. This scenario has been dramatically modified: roads, migration into cities, telecommunications and political and legal transformations and democratic openness have transformed the historical *invisibility* of indigenous peoples and the physical and mental distance that separated indigenous and non-indigenous people. Notwithstanding, IBE remains trapped in a perspective of indigenous monolingualism, while indigenous sociolinguistic settings become increasingly diverse. A radical conceptual change is thus required since IBE is needed both in rural areas and in cities, with both monolingual and bilingual students.

Linguistic communities that lost active use of the indigenous language are also demanding IBE. This ought to be understood in the context of the ongoing process of "return to the Indian". It has become common for indigenous leaders to claim that "The school should return to us the language it deprived us of" (López, 2006b). These appeals not only challenge present understandings of IBE but also existing institutional and communal capacities, since indigenous communities and leaders overemphasize the role the school can and should play in linguistic revitalization, while underestimating the importance of other domains of language use (Sichra and López, 2002; López, 2006b).

Another problem is the insufficiency of adequately trained human resources: bilingual teachers and professionals for the type of education management required. This deficit is even greater if IBE is to be under the responsibility of indigenous educators. For at least a decade, most countries have implemented institutional and pedagogical reforms in teacher-training along the lines of IBE. Nonetheless, results appear to be still minimal: the new teachers do not show the professional and political strength needed to convince parents and communities of the advantages of IBE. Similarly, they do not seem to be able to break away from rote-learning, blackboard copying and dictation, which are persistent features of pedagogy in many places of Latin America and North America, particularly in connection to indigenous language teaching (King, 2001). This tendency becomes stronger when indigenous languages are taught as a L2 (Sichra, 2006). The usual priority given to "the norm" and to the written word makes the school-language gradually diverge

from the language of the home, the elders and the community (King, 2001). This type of pedagogy contradicts the liberating spirit inherent in IBE and the need to encourage and listen to the student's own voice— in the Bakhtinian sense (Hornberger 2005).

In turn, decentralized horizontal and participatory educational management of IBE requires from administrators and decision-makers more openness toward the community and to local and regional social organizations and structures. Committed human resources are needed at all levels within ministries of education and indigenous organizations. Since traditionally schools imposed upon indigenous communities their own ways and logic of management, reflecting the perspectives of the dominant group, the active participation of parents and community leaders in decision making regarding institutional and pedagogical management generates conflicts and feelings of insecurity in both parties. Underlying these problems is the clash between hegemonic and subaltern societal sectors which adhere either to mainstream *criollo* culture or to the indigenous one (Sichra, 2002).

Whether of indigenous origin or not, teachers, unless politically committed and aligned with the interests of the indigenous peoples, most generally represent the interests of the hegemonic sectors, since they are in fact government officers and are regarded as such by everybody. In their role as government officers, teachers gradually experience a loss of agency and the displacement of their sense of purpose (Lopez, forthcoming).

Future directions

Indigenous people approach life from a holistic or comprehensive perspective and tend to see different aspects of life as complementary to one another (Bolaños et al, 2004). In the same vein, multilingual communities and bilingual schools ought to approach language education from this integral perspective. Hence, an epistemological move is called for, since we ought to break away from the positivist tradition that has most generally dominated language teaching and also IBE. From an interdisciplinary and ecological approach, language learning should surpass its exclusive linguistic and pedagogical orientation, since it will be necessary to re-establish adequate links between learning and knowledge, learning and identity, and even learning and local histories, voices and expectations. As we have highlighted, recent indigenous demands call into question the ontology of Western knowledge.

In fact, many of the challenges identified here place the discussion regarding the future of IBE in a scenario that is both political and epistemological. Both dimensions seem to intertwine today. For the most part indigenous claims are more concerned with the need to achieve equality with dignity and simply to continue being indigenous and are no longer preoccupied only with issues of school access and coverage.

One of the areas which IBE will have to address is the revitalization of vulnerable languages or even of those on the verge of extinction. Unlike the way this task could have been assumed before—mainly by linguists and anthropologists—nowadays responsibilities such as this one must be approached as a cooperative effort under increasing community control. IBE is then faced with a two-fold challenge: (i) its reinvention in order to respond to situations in which the indigenous language needs to be reactivated and therefore very close links need to be established between communities and schools; and (ii) the relocation of education within a framework of indigenous sustainable development or of “development with identity”, as the indigenous peoples themselves now put it, since educational projects are to contribute to the community's life plan and aspirations. In this new context, “good practices” will have to be identified and disseminated in order to

promote attitudes of respect towards the interests of indigenous communities and to support projects with real, positive and long-lasting effects (Grinevald, 2006). Therefore, IBE can no longer be approached from a top-down perspective. More than ever, close collaboration between indigenous communities and their leaders and linguists, anthropologists, and educators is called for.

The recognition of the value of indigenous languages underlying IBE proposals reflects the historical recognition by Nation-states of some of the indigenous patrimony. By regarding indigenous populations as an integral part of the state and promoting their social and political participation, advances have been made against social exclusion thereby triggering an ideological relocation of linguistic and cultural diversity that has an impact on every citizen of a multiethnic society (Samaniego, 2004). This shift implies a tremendous challenge for the non-indigenous sectors, particularly for those in decision-making at ministries of education and other governmental agencies. In this new context it becomes urgent and mandatory to abandon once and for all the compensatory understanding of IBE and to regard it as an approach for better educational quality in general. From this perspective, IBE will have to first come out of its almost universal enclosure in primary education and in rural areas. It will have to be applied in secondary schools, higher education and in the non-formal education of youth and adults. It also ought to be extended to cities and towns and address the non-indigenous sectors of society, providing opportunities for Spanish and Portuguese speaking children to learn—to begin with-- the rudiments of the indigenous language most widely spoken in their areas of residence.

In so doing IBE will contribute to a critical revision of the historical linguistic structure of these multilingual societies, challenging the notion that bilingualism is the exclusive realm of the indigenous populations and monolingualism as a characteristic of Spanish speaking citizens. In the same vein, interculturalism needs to transcend indigenous settings and reshape education in cities and towns since they have turned into privileged domains for social interchange between indigenous and non-indigenous persons. Lastly, IBE needs to be regarded as part of a larger process of societal reconstruction in which specific attention is paid to indigenous leadership training. As reflected in current proposals in Bolivia and Ecuador, IBE could accompany the indigenous quest for new and more creative interpretations of citizenship in multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies that have begun to regard themselves as multinational.

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Key words

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