Necessary Ideological Shifts in Teaching Language:
CREATING SPACES FOR TEACHING, LEARNING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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RESUMEN

En este artículo, la autora argumenta que los educadores que enseñan idiomas necesitan más que la adquisición de conocimientos para guiar a los estudiantes a comunicarse efectivamente entre un idioma y otro. La discusión explora los cambios ideológicos que son necesarios para lograr una educación transformadora en esta era. Los ejemplos ilustrativos que se ofrecen invitan al lector a abrazar formas visionarias para enseñar, para promover el aprendizaje en los estudiantes, y para autodirigir el crecimiento profesional continuo en el campo de la enseñanza de idiomas. La discusión comienza con una sinopsis de dos tendencias clave que han impactado la educación en las últimas dos décadas. Se identifican algunos de los cambios de paradigma que los educadores de idiomas deben adoptar para ser relevantes y eficaces en las aulas contemporáneas. Por último, se invita a los educadores a crear espacios donde la enseñanza, el aprendizaje y el desarrollo profesional están diseñados para responder a las exigencias de un mundo globalizado, tecnológico, multilingüe y multialfabetizado.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje, cultura, diversidad lingüística, enseñanza de idiomas, globalización, inglés como segundo idioma, multialfabetización, multilingüismo

ABSTRACT

In this article, the author argues that language educators need more than just the acquisition of knowledge to guide students in communicating

effectively across languages. The discussion explores *ideological shifts* that are necessary to achieve transformative education in this era. The illustrations provided invite the reader to embrace visionary ways to teach, to promote the learning of students, and to self-direct ongoing professional growth in the field of language education. The discussion opens with an overview of two key trends that have impacted education in the last two decades. Some of the paradigm shifts that language teachers must embrace to be relevant and effective in contemporary classrooms are identified. Finally, it invites educators to create spaces where teaching, learning, and professional development are designed to respond to the exigencies of a globalized, technological, multilingual, and multiliterate world.

Keywords: culture, English as a second language, globalization, language diversity, language education, learning, multilingualism, multiliteracy, second language learner

Introduction

Learners that add another language to their first language are considered second language learners. This simple explanation is useful to introduce the concept of English as a second language, yet it does not elucidate the complex nature of this construct and the multifaceted interrelationships among language, culture, and learning that exist across educational and communicative settings. For this reason, language education in the 21st century needs to evolve from approaches that are founded on linear and mono dimensional schemes to innovative models that consider language learning and teaching as multidimensional and dynamic processes. In this article, I argue that language educators need more than just the acquisition of knowledge (either practical or theoretical) to guide their students in communicating effectively across languages. The discussion explores *ideological shifts* that are necessary to achieve transformative education in this vibrant era. The illustrations provided invite the reader to embrace visionary ways to teach, to promote the learning of students, and to self-direct ongoing professional growth in the field of language education.

My thoughts are guided by two main queries: How should knowledge about effective communication critically challenge the pedagogical philosophy and ideology of teachers in multilingual classrooms of schools in Puerto Rico? How should such critical introspection renovate instructional practices to create

transformative and productive learning environments in the 21st century? The discussion opens with an overview of two key trends that have impacted education in the last two decades. Some of the paradigm shifts that language teachers must embrace to be relevant and effective in contemporary classrooms are identified. Finally, I invite educators to create spaces where teaching, learning, and professional development are designed to respond to the exigencies of a globalized, technological, multilingual, and multiliterate world.

Two Key Movements Influencing Contemporary Education

Globalization

Research across a variety of disciplines have uncover two main movements, globalization and technological innovations, that have significantly influenced education in the early part of the 21st century (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007). *Globalization* is a process that involves the widening, deepening, speeding up of worldwide interconnections in all aspects of contemporary social life (Dewey, as cited in de Jong, 2011; also see, García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzmán, 2006; Canagarajah, 2012). These interconnections have brought different regions of the world closer together. Garcia (2009) points to different observable trends, such as migration, transnationalism (moving back and forth across geographic borders), advances in telecommunication, and world trade as influencing an increase in the exchange of ideas, knowledge, culture, and products worldwide. These trends, in turn, feed the international integration of economic, social, and cultural realities being experienced in current times.

Although this phenomenon is not novel, today its ongoing occurrence and visibility have heightened its importance. At the same time different debates emerge about its impact and multidirectional effects. While Canagarajah (2012) identifies concerns about how globalization may influence colonization and imperialistic actions and reactionary discourses that emphasize homogeneity and separatism, Panayotou (2000) and others discuss environmental threats including global change, energy consumption, and water supply (also see, Najam, Runnalls, & Halle, 2007; United Nations Environment Programme, 2007).

Interestingly, language, more specifically language diversity has been both a tool to promote globalization as well as a byproduct. To communicate and gain access to global advantages, individuals and groups who migrate or are involved in cultural, social, economic exchanges must diversify their linguistic repertoire by integrating new languages as well as creating new ways to communicate (Maurais & Morris, 2003). Increased global contact promotes the contact of languages. In turn, this gives new visibility to the more than 6,000 distinct languages around the world (Baker, 2011), reaffirms the need of some lingua francas, and promotes the emergence of new linguistic codes like Spanglish (Spanish-English), Hinglish (Hindi-English) or Jopará (Guaraní-Spanish).

In particular, de Jong (2011) explains glocalization as a globalization strategy that "multinational companies with a global reach use to adapt their business practices to specific localities" (p. 84). These companies adjust their products and marketing strategies to attract local customers and improve their financial gains. For example, in Puerto Rico I have eaten at Kentucky Fried Chicken (a chain of restaurants, which originated in the southern part of the United States) that serves "arroz con habichuelas". In the United States I have watched T.V. commercials where the characters interject words in Spanish like, "this is 'muy bueno'".

Technological Innovations

Technological Innovations refer to the new ways to learn, acquire, and process knowledge that are being facilitated through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Cummins, Brown, and Sayers (2007) explain that these advances offer new resources for teaching and learning, and more opportunities for individuals to self-guide their education.

Digital technologies design new ways to communicate through oral and literate means (Mills, 2011). For instance, *virtual transnationalism* (Shklovski, 2011) is a technological avenue that supports individuals and groups to remain connected with social networks and developments in their home countries and abroad. Interactions between language groups in different regions of the world are facilitated through the use of the electronic means. Consider the recent preponderance of blogs in the World

Wide Web, texting through smart phones, electronic mail (e-mail) through computer networks, and Voice over Internet Protocols (VoIP) services such as SKYPE and Google Talk. In addition, new resources are available for meshing languages with other symbol systems (i.e., icons, emoticons, and graphics) and modalities (i.e., images, video, and audio) on the same "page" (Canagarajah, 2012).

Increasingly we see the influence of these two key movements in education. Scholarly publications assert their impact in the way schooling is done and the way we interpret teaching and learning. Gradually, traditional instructional routines are being changed to integrate technology to the format and presentation of instruction, as well as to share pedagogical ideas with audiences of practitioners across the world. Take for example the traditional lesson illustrated in Figure 1.

Read the phrases below. Fill-in-the-blanks in the sentences provided by changing the verbs to the Present Continuous.

1. touch his head   lay on the ground   play basketball

2. fly over head   talk to Jack   ride the motorcycle

3. sit at a desk   fall through a hole   scream at Jack

1. Jack _____ and he _____. Then, he _____.

2. Right now, a plane _____, the woman _____. Jack _____.

3. Now, the red-haired woman _____, but Jack _____ and she _____.

Figure 1. Traditional Language Lesson

The lesson is presented through a paper and pencil format mode. It asks English Language Learners (ELLs) to read some phrases presented in isolation of any context. The ELs are expected to fill in the blank using these phrases with verbs in the present continuous form.

However, consider this same type of lesson presented with an accompanying video clip that provides a meaningful context to the different actions captured in the phrases. This is precisely

what Claudio Azevedo, an ESL teacher in Brazil, suggests educators should do. In his blog, *Movie Segments to Assess Grammar Goals*, (http://moviesegmentstoassessgrammargoals.blogspot.com/), he includes a series of movie segments and activities to practice grammar. His purpose is to expose teachers to make the teaching of grammar entertaining for the students through the use of technology. In addition to lesson plans, the site offers printable worksheets with answer keys and tips that teachers may use to develop their own ideas using technology to teach English. To see the lesson plan illustrated in Figure 1 taught using a movie segment, search his blog for "Oblivion: Present Continuous" (April 19, 2013).

In schools, the acquisition of knowledge through technological advances and the ability to communicate this knowledge beyond the limits of the classroom require access to technology and skill in using it for these purposes. Towards this end, I contend, language educators must also modify perspectives and philosophies about the nature of communication and language, and the pedagogical schemes used to teach them. Rich scholarly discussions in the last twenty years identify two paradigm shifts, related to language and pedagogy that frame contemporary understandings of language education.

Necessary Paradigm Shifts in Language Education

Linguistic Paradigm Shift

An increasing number of investigations about language, in terms of its structure, use, and function, have uncovered novel explanations that challenge entrenched beliefs about efficient ways to teach and learn it. Specifically, García (2009) argues for a *linguistic paradigm shift* that actualizes new interpretations of *communication* using one or multiple linguistic repertoires. Canagarajah (2013) expands on this issue by explaining that communication transcends individual languages and words. It is a process of combining language with other "symbol systems (i.e., icons, images), diverse modalities of communication (i.e., aural oral, visual, and tactile), and environmental resources (i.e., social and material contexts)" to create meaning (p. 1). At present transferring ideas is done utilizing different and inventive devices and mechanisms

that alter inert notions of when, where, and how communication and learning can happen.

The fluid use of different linguistic repertoires is not foreign to this recent interpretation of communication. Various codes, dialects, and discourses are part of *languaging* practices implemented by learners to make sense of what they experience (García, 2009). Thus, rather than favor the separation of languages as the accepted practice in language teaching, scholars propose that languages in authentic settings are mixed (code mixing), switched (code switching), shifted (code shifting) and meshed (code meshing) by teachers and learners so that they may use all the available linguistic capital they have to create and convey meaning (Canagarajah, 2013; de Jong, 2011; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Maurais & Morris, 2003). Today more than ever, educators are being encouraged to embrace the authentic, intricate, flexible, and valuable languaging practices ELLs use, and to mirror these practices in the classroom. One possible consequence of this type of transformation is that schools scaffold learners to expand their linguistic repertoires when communicating with others by integrating social and academic languaging practices.

The terms we use to identify language learners must also be critically scrutinized to uncover buried messages which contradict the agenda of educational change put forward here. Up to this point in the discussion, I have used English language learners (ELLs) to refer to students who are adding English to their existing linguistic system. As a construct, the term restricts attention to just the new language being learned. By hiding the existence of a first language, it presupposes a hierarchy of importance in instruction, as well as in society, and a threat to maintaining the first language (Baker, 2011; Wong Fillmore, 1991). A recent term coined by García (2009), *emergent bilinguals* (EBs), reinterprets this notion by recognizing that effective teaching of English makes students bilinguals, not merely monolingual in that language. That is why, for the rest of the paper, I will use the term emergent bilinguals when referring to learners of an additional language. This change in terminology acknowledges the fact that words have power, and that power must validate the richness and worth in using more than one language to communicate thought.

The globalized reality of the 21st century demands that teachers of language acknowledge the importance of all the languages learners speak and device instruction to support their use and growth so that these learners are equipped to function and succeed in contemporary diverse and technologically savvy societies. Contexts like Puerto Rico, that as a result of a history of colonization are increasingly less homogenous and monolingual, must change educational views which stress the importance of one language over another. Educators in our and other similar societies must abandon assimilationist's views and be cognizant of pluralists discourses (de Jong, 2011) that are more relevant to the educational, sociopolitical, and technological expectations of today.

Bilingualism and *multilingualism* are concepts that lead us to reflect on the multiple ways we speak and communicate on a daily basis and their significance for our cultural and linguistic identities (de Jong, 2011). Having proficiency in more than one language (bilingualism and multilingualism) uncovers language learning as a complex and dynamic process. Viewing them as a continuum reminds us that "language learning is a continuous developmental process that occurs throughout a lifetime and is recursive and circular" (García, 2009, p. 59). In other words, language practices among bilinguals and multilinguals are multifaceted and interrelated and are not always simply linear.

If we agree that the education for all students should be grounded on their strengths —what they know and are able to do— (de Jong, 2011), then it follows that instruction should encompass forms of *hybrid language use* that serve to create meaning in organized ways. Consequently, some argue in favor of schooling approaching bilingualism and multilingualism not purely as linguistic events, but as observable communicative practices across languages that speakers employ. *Translanguaging* (García, 2009) and *translingualism* (Canagarajah, 2012), constructs centered on this understanding, should be adopted as guiding principles of enacted language policies in classrooms and schools. Both terms validate different ways to integrate more than one language to communicate meaningfully within multilingual settings. In addition, this understanding is applied as an instructional strategy to develop and reinforce learners' first and second (third, fourth,

or fifth) languages while learning content. Creese and Blackledge (2010) signify that it is not uncommon to observe classrooms in Europe where learning is processed in multiple languages simply by teachers discussing the subject matter in one language and EBs writing it in another. Celic (2012) suggests using other strategies to teach translingually, such as, implementing multilingual read alouds, multilingual word walls, multilingual writing references, multilingual graphic organizers, multilingual books, Google Translate, and reading thematically in multiple languages.

Beyond acquiring oracy in more than one language, learners who possess the knowledge and skill to read and write in more than one language are considered *biliterate* (literacy in two languages) or *multiliterate* (literacy in more than two languages). These constructs are complex in nature pointing to multidimensional interrelationships between multilingualism (de Jong, 2011) and literacy in teaching and learning. Although research in the field of literacy in one language (monoliteracy) has been very prolific, there is a dearth of explorations that focus on reading and writing in two or more languages. Today *biliteracy/multiliteracy* are considered emerging fields in multilingual education (Baker, 2011), that offer provocative alternatives to finite and restricted views of reading and writing, while at the same time, arguing for more versatile, inclusive, and comprehensive understandings. These constructs make visible the intricate manner that language, literacy, and technologies are negotiated inside and outside schools (Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007).

During the past two decades, there has been a gradual evolution in our understanding of the requirements of reading and writing in two or more languages. The term *multiliteracies* acknowledges that literacy teaching in the 21st century should be more responsive to the diversity of cultures and the variety of languages within societies (New London Group, 1996). Taking into account multiplicity of languages and languaging practices that happen in classrooms should inspire educators to consider "the increasing range of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (Mills, 2011, p. xiii). This researcher identifies some of the current and nascent social practices that rely on multiliteracy by combining language, literacy, and technology:

"reading books [in print and electronically], resisting advertisements, using machines (scanners, printers, voicemail), interpreting public transport information, writing memos, following directories and maps, conducting internet transactions... SMS messaging, word processing... internet relay chatting, internet navigation, critiquing websites, digital photography, slide-show presentations, computer programming, website design... using spreadsheets and databases," among others (p. 3).

New literacies (which do not depend solely on print) have emerged marrying different and pioneering forms of digital communication to, on the one hand, learning to read and write, and on the other, using literacy to learn (Castek, Leu, Coiro, Gort, Henry, & Lima, 2007). Dynamic and multidimensional models of the literacy process have been designed that consider key connections between language and literacy. For instance, Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2000) designed the *continua of biliteracy* framework. It explores this phenomenon in terms of power negotiation (language privileging), contexts (bilingual, monolingual, oral, literate), development (receptive; productive, first language, second language), content (contextualized, decontextualized), and media (linguistic structures, genres, convergent and divergent scripts).

Canagarajah (2012) reminds us that there is a long history of individuals and societies that have used more than one language to communicate orally and in writing. However, his perspective stresses that in today's globalized world, transnational contact, through migration and technological developments, have augmented exposure to and use of divergent languages, texts, and linguistic modes and mediums to think and communicate ideas. He contends that literacy should be re-envisioned through a "translingual lens" that magnifies literacy as a negotiation of diverse languages and "semiotic resources (i.e., icons and images) for situated construction of meaning" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 1).

Pedagogical Paradigm Shift

Mills (2011) asserts that "historically, schools have emphasized teachers as experts, learners as novices, and learning as the reproduction of disciplinary knowledge and deconstextualised skills" (p. 2).

Cummins and colleagues (2007) believe that the real quandary for schools today is not to simply teach how to use technology. Significantly, schooling must present the use of current technologies as tools for critical analysis and transformation rather than just for learning facts in isolation and transmitting knowledge.

A skills oriented ideology of pedagogy is no longer sustainable in light of world economies stipulating a new type of workforce and work environments. Jobs today, and in the future, will require expertise in team work and networking, analysis and critical interpretation of information to effectively respond and adapt to change, multiskilled professionals who construct, rather than reproduce, knowledge, and workers who are proficient in multilingualism, multiculturalism, and are multiliterate (Cummins et al., 2007; Mills, 2011).

Mastering pedagogical methods of teaching language and literacy or infusing technology into instruction, by itself, is not enough to answer the educational, communication, and work demands of the 21st century. Educators are being invited to generate meaningful paths for using language, literacy, and new technologies as *mindtools* (Jonassen, as cited in Cummins et al., 2007). In this singular outlook, educators and learners confront educational and social challenges and transform them into possibilities by recreating and generating knowledge and critical capabilities. The intellectual tools required to renovate language education in this manner entail the resourceful integration of linguistic, literate, and technological competencies.

Although few in numbers, some publications offer descriptions of school and university level programs that implement this promising approach to teaching and learning in multilingual settings. Cummins and his collaborators (2007) offer portraits of classrooms, inside and outside the United States, where teachers and students actively use technology mediated instruction to build their multilingualism and multiliteracy as they expand their frames of content knowledge and understanding. In a recent volume edited by Canagarajah (2013), scholars illustrate multilingual communities of practice where multiliterate pedagogical practices, which circumscribe to this innovative paradigm, are being developed and investigated.

The *Japan Art Mile* (JAM, http://www.artmile.jp/info-in-english/about-iime/) is an ongoing venture that combines art and technology to promote critical analysis for learning in language education classrooms around the world. As part of the Art Miles Mural Project (AMMP, http://www.artmiles.org/amiice/p_aboutartmiles_e%5B1%5D.pdf), the International Intercultural Mural Exchange (IIME) provides children and youth opportunities to learn through Global Learning Networks (GLN). Classrooms in different countries are connected through Information and Communication Technologies to learn interactively. With their partners across the world, groups of students explore issues of global significance through online forums and videoconferences. They collaboratively design and create a mural that represents what they learned and the problem-solved solutions. Half the mural is created in a classroom in Japan and the other half in the partner classroom in a different country. The mural is exhibited inside and outside Japan. This project integrates, in authentic and dynamic ways, language and literacy to technology and art. They are not seen or treated as end-products themselves, but as tools for critical and creative thinking and problem solving.

More than 52 different countries and regions and 20,000 emergent bilingual students have participated in this experience, creating over 433 murals between 2006 and 2013. This project is a partner of the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN), a non-profit organization to empower teachers and students to work together online using the internet and other communication technologies. Below I include two YouTube links that illustrate examples of the Japan Art Mile in action:

- *Japan Art Mile 2012: Mexico*
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPlPbOPC1nk
- *Art Miles 10 Years*
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EnE5NW3Esw

Transforming Language Education

The title of this article suggests that educators need to *create* spaces where teaching, learning, and professional development are designed to respond to the exigencies of a networked, technological, multilingual, and multiliterate world. Since, these spaces

are, most likely, not given, educators must create them through ongoing *introspection* on their pedagogical philosophies and identities. The introspective process can identify where linguistic and pedagogical shifts in their practice need to be made. A new awareness must be set that embraces the *construction* of higher-order thinking skills and the scrutiny of how knowledge *interconnects* with power throughout language education classrooms.

The failure or success to realize the educational potential of multilingualism, multiliteracy, technology, and art, has everything to do with the enacted pedagogy, more specifically, with the ideology that leads and shapes it. I argue that it is through inquiry-based orientations to teaching, learning, and professional development that educators can transform their pedagogical dogmas and practice, to support emergent bilinguals constructing knowledge and thinking critically in more than one language.

My research with classroom-based inquiry strongly suggests that teachers who pursue critical reflection and inquiry projects in their multilingual schools and classrooms are equipped to create new knowledge about teaching and learning. They, in turn, search to disseminate this information so that misconceptions are clarified, entrenched practices are changed, and unhelpful and misguided instructional and language policies are eradicated in their contested working environments (Nevárez-La Torre, 2010).

Educators can transform language teaching by creatively exploring practice in classrooms and schools. These investigations should be collaborative efforts with practitioners from different educational settings. Together, language educators can document and examine the process of integrating multilingualism, multiliteracy, technology, and art used to enhance communication across languages, and build critical thinking capacities of students. To lead this type of professional venture, educators ought to ask themselves: What is the ideology of one's own pedagogy? How should it change to amplify both language learning, and learning content knowledge in more than one language?

The following YouTube link presents a promising path for transforming education, with implications for innovating language teaching: *Educational Uses of Second Life* (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=qOFU9oUF2HA

&NR=1). As language educators ponder on the possibilities of classroom-based inquiry, they should consider the message of this video. The type of classroom as well as the process of teaching and learning illustrated, which educational institutions around the world are envisioning and working towards, ought to inspire the modification of their ideological pedagogical paradigms.

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