

# Cultural and Language Diversity and the Deaf Experience

Editor

ILA PARASNIS

*National Technical Institute for the Deaf,  
Rochester Institute of Technology*

Published  
1996

 **CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Perspectives from the History and Politics of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education in the United States

KENJI HAKUTA AND  
ELIZABETH FELDMAN MOSTAFAPOUR

This chapter provides an overview of the current status of bilingual education in the United States, with a special focus on trends in research and policy in this area. In the context of the present volume, it is appropriate to acknowledge that bilingual education in this country refers almost exclusively to the education of "limited-English-proficient" (LEP) students who have an oral, non-English primary language. For example, the major federal instrument to support bilingual education, the Bilingual Education Act (also known as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), makes no mention of programs for deaf students. Despite many obvious parallels and similarities, there has been little contact between researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who work with LEP children and those whose concerns lie with another subpopulation of bilingual children, namely, the Deaf. This chapter is prepared from the perspective of researchers in bilingual education, rather than Deaf education, with the

Kenji Hakuta (Ph.D., Psychology, Harvard University), Professor of Education at Stanford University, is a developmental psycholinguist who conducts and publishes research on the phenomena of bilingualism and language acquisition and on bilingual education. He is the author of many books, including the well-known *Mirror of Language: The Debate on Bilingualism* (1986, Basic Books). His address is: Stanford University School of Education, Stanford, CA 94305.

Elizabeth Feldman Mostafapour (M.A., Education, Stanford University) is a doctoral student in the Language, Literacy, and Culture Program at the School of Education, Stanford University. Her research interests include foreign language education, language policy, and the education of linguistic minorities in the United States. Her address is: Stanford University School of Education, Stanford, CA 94305.

hope that the issues we raise may help to identify the parallels and differences that exist between these areas.

## Definitions

A most pressing issue in the area of bilingual education has been to specify the definition of bilingualism. For a first-hand experience, the next time you have a captive group of people interested in bilingualism (as in a graduate seminar), try asking them to jot down spontaneously a definition of what it means to be bilingual. What you will likely find (based on a considerable number of replications of this "experiment" by the first author) is that most (roughly three in four) of the definitions will stress relative language *proficiency*, or the ability to perform particular functions in two languages. These are what we call "psycholinguistic" definitions of bilingualism. They may differ in detail, some focusing on vocabulary, others on grammar, others on functional skills, but they all refer, ultimately, to a psycholinguistic capability. On the other hand, a minority of definitions (the remaining one in four) will characterize bilingualism in terms of *social participation* in more than one speech community. For these people, the definition rests on degree of participation and group membership. We refer to this as a "sociolinguistic" definition. The importance of drawing a clear distinction between psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic definitions cannot be overemphasized. Confusion has resulted, both in research and in policy, because of a blurring of the boundaries.

In research, for example, some of the early studies on the relationship of bilingualism to intelligence were conducted on immigrant children in the 1920s and 1930s (see Hakuta, 1986, for a review of these studies). The definition employed in these studies was typically sociolinguistic, identifying children with foreign names who were from immigrant backgrounds as bilinguals. There were other studies published in reputable journals which compared bilingual and monolingual children in which the bilingual children were those who did not have Anglo last names, while monolingual children were those who did have Anglo last names. Yet another study "refined" this approach one step further by obtaining both the father's name and the mother's maiden name. If the father and the mother both had foreign last names, the children were considered true bilinguals. If one of the parents had an Anglo name, they were considered partial bilinguals, and so forth. These studies generally showed a negative correlation between bilingualism and IQ test scores.

On the other hand, a psycholinguistic definition has been used in more

recent research on the same topic, beginning with Peal and Lambert's (1962) pathbreaking study that identified subjects on the basis of balanced language proficiency. These studies yielded very different results, showing a positive correlation between measures of intellectual performance and bilingualism. The point is that the apparent contradictions in the research in this area have to do with the varying definitions of bilingualism.

In education policy, the failure to draw a distinction between psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic definitions has also resulted in confusion. In American public schools, many LEP students are in bilingual education programs. While one might logically assume that a bilingual education program would consist of bilingual students, such is not the case. Bilingual programs generally do not contain bilingual students, in either sense of the word. In fact, if students are bilingual, meaning that they speak both languages proficiently, they would not be in bilingual education because such programs are defined in terms of low English proficiency. If students are labeled to possess a low level of English proficiency, then and only then are they qualified to be in a bilingual education program. Over the course of residence in this program the students will become bilingual, but once this occurs, they are "exited" from the program, usually a sign that they have "made it."

This dissonant situation results from the fact that the goal of bilingual education is a transitional one rather than one of maintenance. The primary argument for the use of the native language is related to psycholinguistic efficiency, i.e., that the native language serves as a foundation upon which English development can occur. Even in programs that maintain bilingualism, the primary interest is in the development of psycholinguistic bilingualism, rather than active participation in a multitude of speech communities. This general "avoidance" of issues sociolinguistic in nature is understandable in light of the highly political nature of language policy in the United States (Crawford, 1992).

### Policy

Bilingual education in the United States is frequently discussed in terms of two time periods, pre-World War I and post-1968 (marked by Congressional passage of the Bilingual Education Act). Prior to World War I, bilingual education flourished in certain areas of the United States. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries bilingual education was especially prevalent in ethnic communities (particularly those of German

heritage). The late nineteenth century and the movement for the Common School in which immigrant children were to be socialized and assimilated, however, resulted in linguistic xenophobia. Anti-immigrant sentiment was so strong, in fact, that by the early 1920s 34 states had English-only requirements in their schools (McFadden, 1983).

Thus, for a period of approximately 40 years following World War I, academic survival of linguistic minorities in the United States was largely determined by their ability to maneuver through the cruel waters of "sink or swim" programs (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990). It would not be until the 1960s, with the advent of greater awareness for civil rights, that the predicament of non-English-speaking students would begin to receive political and legislative attention (McFadden, 1983).

The stage for bilingual education in federal policy was set primarily by two initiatives, the first of which was the Bilingual Education Act. In 1968 President Johnson signed Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Title VII provided funds for staff and materials development as well as parental involvement for students with limited English skills. There was no requirement for schools to use a non-English language. From its inception, Title VII has been a clearly compensatory policy, specified for students who are both impoverished and "educationally disadvantaged because of their inability to speak English." In addition, the program is a competitive grants program, and as such, serves primarily as a symbolic statement of support by Congress, rather than a mandate.

Furthermore, despite Title VII's seminal role in highlighting the educational needs of language-minority students, its full potential as an engine to drive the development of the nation's linguistic resources has yet to be fulfilled. As noted in the Stanford Working Group's *A Blueprint for the Second Generation* (1993), federal policy is still enmeshed in a remedial philosophy that emphasizes English at the expense of the development of both academic content and the native language of the students.

Apart from Congressional action, civil rights enforcement through the courts has provided the important enforcement mechanism. In 1975, based on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Supreme Court ruled in the *Lau v. Nichols* decision that the San Francisco school district was in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act because of its failure to adequately serve the needs of its Chinese LEP (limited English-proficient) students. The Supreme Court's sole ruling on the rights of language-minority students stated that "there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for

students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education."

*Lau*, however, did not mandate bilingual education, and it failed to prescribe or even define any specific remedies. Interpretation of compliance with *Lau* was left up to the U.S. Department of Education for interpretation. During the Carter administration (1977-1981), remedies were issued that favored transitional bilingual education. However, this interpretation was not universally accepted, came under heavy attack during the Reagan administration (1981-1989), and to this day continues to be an open question (Baker & de Kanter, 1983).

Currently, the most common form of linguistic-minority education in the United States is transitional bilingual education (U. S. Department of Education). Because of a distinct tendency for English to supplant rather than supplement the native language in such programs, transitional bilingual education is usually defined as subtractive rather than additive. Subtractive bilingualism has been associated with lower levels of second language proficiency, scholastic underachievement, and psychosocial disorders, much to the detriment of the academic and psychological well-being of linguistic minorities in the country (Lambert, 1975).

As Spener (1988) explains, rapid mainstreaming of limited-English-proficient students into English-only programs often characterizes the principal goal of transitional programs. In fact, McLaughlin (1984) notes that in many transitional classrooms, "the first language is viewed as a necessary evil and is avoided to the extent that this is possible" (p. 7). This linguistic stance is perpetuated in the philosophy of transitional bilingual education, despite the fact that many knowledgeable researchers recommend native-language instruction of language-minority children. Such an assumption is supported by research demonstrating that lower levels of alienation and higher levels of English achievement are correlated with native-language use in instructional programs (Hernández-Chávez, 1984; McLaughlin, 1984; C. Snow, 1990).

As the *Stanford Working Group* reports:

Two damaging assumptions remain implicit in Federal and State policies: (1) that language-minority students who are economically and educationally "disadvantaged" are incapable of learning to high standards, and (2) that instruction in the native language distracts these students from learning English. (1993, p. 8)

Sadly, there is an undeniable tendency among policymakers and educators to regard students' native languages and cultures as "obstacles to

achievement - as academic deficits - rather than as potential strengths to build upon" (Stanford Working Group, 1993, p. 7). This "deficit" philosophy has permeated educational policy concerning linguistic minorities and jaded the reception of research favoring native-language instruction by bilingual education policymakers (Crawford, 1991; Hakuta, 1986).

### Research

Contrary to the current policy direction, research informs us that the point of departure for policymakers should not be governed by deficit assumptions. If anything, research dictates an additive bilingual model, one which builds upon a student's linguistic foundation rather than replacing it with the second language. Bilingual education policy, however, has a long history of ignoring such research and continues to advocate the implementation of subtractive rather than additive programs.

Research in bilingual education can be divided into studies that emphasize program evaluation and those whose goal is the development of basic knowledge (Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992). Although these research activities can be complementary in nature, there has been a tendency in bilingual education research to focus on program effectiveness, usually defined in terms of which programs lead to the fastest development of English proficiency. This trend is particularly evident when one looks at funding patterns (see Meyer & Fienberg, 1992, p. 7).

Two of the more controversial and politically influential evaluation studies have been the "AIR" (Danoff et al., 1977) study and the Baker and de Kanter (1983) report. Both of these studies concurred in their findings that bilingual programs proved to be no more effective than alternative programs such as submersion or ESL (English as a Second Language). Comparing bilingual programs, however, is problematic in itself because of the tremendous variability which characterizes the methodologies of different bilingual programs. Furthermore, the concept of random assignment is nowhere to be found in most comparative studies (Willig, 1985). In some studies, the comparison group included students who had themselves formerly been in bilingual programs, thus biasing the results in the direction of the comparison group since students who exit from bilingual programs early tend to be the more academically gifted students.

One need not be a hardened cynic to question the political motives behind evaluation studies. Ramírez et al. (1991) conducted a study under contract from the U. S. Department of Education. It compared student performances in three different types of programs. These included two

types of bilingual education programs: one early-exit program (which represents the majority of programs in this country where the goal is to exit the students as quickly as possible), and one late-exit program (which tend to be characterized by maintenance). The third type of program involved in the study was a variety of immersion in which the students received exclusively English instruction.

This study was commissioned at a time when the Department policy was interested in structured immersion programs as an alternative to bilingual education. The main problem was that immersion approaches did not exist in many sites, so a demonstration was needed to show that they could be effective. The results of the study were quite disappointing for advocates of structured immersion, for it failed to detect differences even in English acquisition between the groups. Indeed, it would be a strong piece of counterevidence for a "time-on-task" theory of second language acquisition, since the structured immersion students made no greater progress in English development, despite the fact that they were exposed to twice the amount of English as students in the bilingual programs (Cazden, 1992).

Hakuta and McLaughlin (in press) indicate that it may well be the case that these evaluation studies point to the limits of an approach – the so-called "horse-race studies" – that compares one program type with another. A National Academy of Sciences panel recently conducted a thorough review of the two major national longitudinal studies (Meyer & Fienberg, 1992). Aside from documenting the design flaws in the studies, the panel was critical of the general atheoretical orientation of the research program, essentially arguing that large studies cannot serve as theoretical prostheses. Rather, the panel recommended a model of knowledge development on a smaller scale, with targeted studies that test and refine the basic theoretical premises of bilingual education.

We contend that in politically controversial areas, basic research can serve a particularly useful function to ensure that policy remain grounded. In drawing up its recommendations for the reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act, for example, the Stanford Working Group drew primarily on sources from basic research rather than from the generally flawed and politically charged evaluation studies.

Perhaps one of the more influential veins of basic research in bilingual education policy in the United States has been the work on the relationship between bilingualism and cognition. A substantial number of studies now supports the notion that the development of proficiency in two languages

can influence cognitive development in positive rather than negative ways (see Diaz, 1983). In many respects, this literature is a product of the cognitive revolution of the 1960s, in which empiricist and associationist accounts of the development of language and mind (e.g., Skinner, 1957) were discredited in favor of approaches that recruited innate and often task-specific constraints (e.g., Chomsky, 1968).

A related concept, applied with great effectiveness to the field of bilingual education by Jim Cummins (1981), is the positive relationship between the first and second languages. This notion of *linguistic interdependence* suggests that academic skills can be developed in either language, and that knowledge and skills learned in one language transfer to the other.

Another line of research serving to highlight the positive aspects of bilingualism derives from the investigation of translation skills in young children. This skill is especially interesting because it requires high-level information processing and also has high social status. Systematic investigation of Puerto Rican and Mexican-American bilingual youngsters (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990; Hakuta, 1990) showed virtually errorless performance on many translation tasks, despite the absence of any formal training. Furthermore, even though these students frequently engaged in code-switching behavior with other bilingual peers, they showed no signs of mixing or confusing their two languages. For example, when they ran across difficult words to translate, they stopped and asked the experimenter for the correct translation, rather than "importing" the word into the target translation. Undoubtedly, the continued reinforcement of the merits of bilingualism is an important function for basic research.

### Research Directions

Recently, an electronic dialogue which specifically addressed educational research priorities was held between 700 participants and reported on in the journal *Educational Researcher* (Glass, 1993). One of the primary concerns raised in the dialogue was about the relationship between politics and education. Although it is admittedly impossible to separate education from politics, there is a definite need for educational research efforts to be "less subject to political pressure and ideology" (p. 17). Moreover, many of the participants advocated a halt to the practice of doling out federal research funding in exorbitant lump sums, and called for financial distribution of awards to cover a wider pool of investigator-initiated

projects. Furthermore, many participants argued for the inclusion of practitioners at some point in the research loop rather than relegating them to outsider status.

Ideally, we believe that research should accept the role of fire brigade. Research should attempt to bring a sense of objective knowledge to the field and encourage further discourse, bringing theory and policy together. One important goal which research might take is to contribute to a common world view regarding bilingualism and bilingual children – our basic knowledge base about the field is still limited. Moreover, as Hakuta and McLaughlin (in press) note, researchers must play the role of catalyst in provoking practitioners and policymakers to expand their limited focus on English acquisition (as in the case of Ramírez et al., 1991).

Research should further attempt to enrich the subject population from which its samples are drawn. Conducting research with a diverse population can lead to the enrichment of basic theory. Traditional language research has studied middle-class children in monolingual settings, focusing supposedly on the simplest, “purest” cases. The argument for this approach is that one should try to understand a process in its least contaminated form, i.e., monolingual acquisition, before more “complex” arrangements are addressed. That may be the case, or it may not. It is an empirical question. To use a rough analogy from photography, black-and-white pictures are indeed “simpler” than color pictures, yet color pictures yield far greater amounts of information. One way to gain a better understanding of language and bilingualism may be to add different languages, different social classes, and varying types of bilinguals (such as the Deaf) to the picture in order to yield increasingly rich results. The more dimensions that one adds to the research mix, in many ways, the more it might tell us about both the invariants and variants of language. By enriching the subject base, one expands the opportunities to enrich the epistemological underpinnings of the work.

### Conclusions

When one steps back from this collage of research and policy in bilingualism, one is struck by the continuity of the contrast between “good” and “bad” forms of bilingualism. It appears that when underprivileged, non-mainstream members of society are bilingual, sociolinguistic definitions of bilingualism are applied and negative connotations are invoked, such as separatist political agendas and inferior intelligence. On the other hand, when privileged members of society be-

come bilingual, they are characterized in psycholinguistic terms and well respected for their bilingual capacities. Interestingly, when rigorous analysis of psycholinguistic proficiency is conducted among bilingual subjects who happen to be from less prestigious groups, they turn out to have many of the positive features of bilingualism that tend to be attributed to privileged groups (Hakuta & McLaughlin, in press).

There are undeniable differences which distinguish oral bilinguals and the Deaf. One of the most obvious differences at the psycholinguistic level is that sign language has no written counterpart. However, cases of bilingualism among populations whose native language does not have a literary tradition, such as the Hmong of Southeast Asia, would seem to share some potential similarities (Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). As another example, a large sociolinguistic difference lies in the definition of the speech community, since sign language is usually not shared between parents and offspring.

Despite such differences, oral bilinguals and the Deaf share many analogous problems. Biased studies (in the sense of how the questions are asked) have been a disservice to both groups, finding them to be cognitively inferior to monolinguals and the hearing. Both groups have had to respond to implications of a deficit philosophy that attempts to account for poor performances in a school system which ignores their intellectual talents and attempts to hold them to rigid standards of mainstream society. Interestingly, both oral bilinguals and the Deaf are often faced with a similar dilemma: integration into mainstream society or movement toward a distinct, separate identity.

The two linguistic minorities share practical dilemmas as well, such as the dire need for competent teachers who are deaf and for native speakers of minority languages to participate in bilingual education. Similarly, a lack of uniform interpretations of “total communication” for the deaf (Kannapell, 1989) and bilingual education for the hearing has plagued each group.

On a more optimistic note, an educational innovation that holds great promise for the future empowerment of *all* linguistic minorities is two-way bilingual education (also known as bilingual immersion education). In the traditional two-way bilingual program, English-dominant and non-English-dominant students are purposefully integrated *with the goal of developing bilingual skills and academic excellence for both groups* (M. A. Snow, 1986). As Crawford (1992) attests, language-minority students in two-way bilingual programs are no longer treated as language-disabled, but rather as language-empowered. As peer tutors, they enjoy a position of status

rather than one of belittlement, and therefore stand to experience not only enhanced self-esteem, but improved scholastic attitudes and quite possibly academic performance as well. For example, Uyechi (1991) comments that "the explicit equal treatment of language in a two-way bilingual program is precisely the catalyst needed for disassociating deaf education from special education and associating it, instead, with bilingual education" (pp. 14-15).

It is our conviction that all sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic circumstances in which bilingualism can be found share overlapping features, and it is from this great variety that useful scientific, pedagogical, and policy knowledge can be gained. Ultimately, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners alike must not only recognize, but welcome the added richness of the dimension that bilingualism in deaf people can potentially contribute to language research and its educational applications.

## References

- Baker, K., & de Kanter, A. (Eds.). (1983). *Bilingual education: A reappraisal of federal policy*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Cazden, C. (1992). Language minority education in the United States: Implications of the Ramirez Report. *Educational Practice Report*, 3. Santa Cruz, CA: National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.
- Chomsky, N. (1968). *Language and mind*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Crawford, J. (1991). *Bilingual education: History, politics, theory, and practice*. Trenton, NJ: Crane Publishing.
- (1992). *Hold your tongue: Bilingualism and the politics of "English Only."* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (pp. 3-49). Sacramento: California State Department of Education.
- Danoff, M., Coles, G., McLaughlin, D., & Reynolds, D. (1977, 1978). *Evaluation of the impact of ESEA Title VII Spanish/English bilingual education programs* (Vols. 1-3). Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.
- Diaz, R. M. (1983). Thought and two languages: The impact of bilingualism on cognitive development. *Review of Research in Education*, 10, 23-54.
- Glass, G. (1993, August-September). A conversation about educational research priorities: A message to Riley. *Educational Researcher*, 17-21.
- Hakuta, K. (1986). *Mirror of language: The debate on bilingualism*. New York: Basic Books.
- (1990). Language and cognition in bilingual children. In A. Padilla, C. Valdez, & H. Fairchild (Eds.), *Bilingual education: Issues and strategies* (pp. 47-59). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Hakuta, K., & McLaughlin, B. (in press). Seven tensions that define research in bilingualism and second language acquisition. In D. Berliner & R. Calfee (Eds.), *The handbook of educational psychology*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hernández-Chávez, E. (1984). The inadequacy of English immersion education as an educational approach for language minority students in the United States. In *Studies on immersion education: A collection for United States educators* (pp. 144-183). Sacramento: California State Department of Education.
- Kannapell, B. (1989). Student attitudes toward ASL and English. In C. Lucas (Ed.), *The sociolinguistics of the Deaf community* (pp. 191-210). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Lambert, W. E. (1975). Culture and language as factors in learning and education. In A. Wolfgang (Ed.), *Education of immigrant students* (pp. 55-83). Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Lau v. Nichols*. 414 U.S. 563 (1974).
- McFadden, B. J. (1983). Bilingual education and the law. *Journal of Law and Education*, 12, 1-27.
- McLaughlin, B. (1984). *Second-language acquisition in childhood*. Vol. 1: *Preschool children*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Malakoff, M. E., & Hakuta, K. (1990). History of language minority education in the United States. In A. Padilla, H. Fairchild, & C. Valdez (Eds.), *Bilingual education: Issues and strategies* (pp. 27-43). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- (1991). Translation skill and metalinguistic awareness in bilinguals. In E. Bialystok (Ed.), *Language processing and language awareness in bilingual children* (pp. 141-166). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meyer, M., & Fienberg, S. (Eds.). (1992). *Assessing education studies: The case of bilingual education strategies*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Peal, E., & Lambert, W. E. (1962). The relation of bilingualism to intelligence. *Psychological Monographs*, 76 (27, Whole No. 546).
- Pease-Alvarez, L., & Hakuta, K. (1992). Enriching our views of bilingualism and bilingual education. *Educational Researcher*, 21, 4-19, 24.
- Ramirez, D. J., Yuen, S. D., Ramey, D. R., & Pasta, D. J. (1991). *Longitudinal study of structured-English immersion strategy, early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language-minority children* (Vols. 1-2). San Mateo, CA: Aguirre International.
- Skinner, B. F. (1957). *Verbal behavior*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Snow, C. (1990). Rationales for native language instruction: Evidence from research. In A. Padilla, H. Fairchild, & C. Valdez (Eds.), *Bilingual education: Issues and strategies* (pp. 60-74). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Snow, M. A. (1986). Innovative second language education: Bilingual immersion programs. *Education Report No. 1*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Language Education and Research.
- Spener, D. (1988). Transitional bilingual education and the socialization of immigrants. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58, 133-153.
- Stanford Working Group. (1993). *Federal education programs for limited-English-proficient students: A blueprint for the second generation*. Stanford, CA: School of Education, Stanford University.

- Trueba, H.T., Jacobs, L., & Kirton, E. (1990). *Cultural conflict and adaptation: The case of Hmong children in American society*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Uyechi, L. (1991). *Bimodal bilingual Deaf education*. Unpublished paper, Department of Linguistics, Stanford University.
- Willig, A. (1985). A meta-analysis of selected studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research*, 55, 269-317.